2 SAMUEL

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



David on the throne: the city of David, the ark brought home, God's covenant with David, a king's fall and God's mercy

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Contents

Introduction....1
Overview of 2 Samuel....5
Background of the Book....7
Chapter 1: David Mourns Saul and Jonathan....9
Chapter 2: David King over Judah and War with Saul's House....16
Chapter 3: Abner Turns to David and Is Murdered....23
Chapter 4: The Murder of Ish-bosheth....32
Chapter 5: David King over All Israel and Jerusalem Taken....37
Chapter 6: The Ark Brought Up to Jerusalem....44
Chapter 7: The LORD's Covenant with David....51
Chapter 8: David's Victories and His Officials....61
Chapter 9: David's Kindness to Mephibosheth....67
Chapter 10: War with the Ammonites and Syria....72
Chapter 11: David and Bathsheba....78
Chapter 12: Nathan Confronts David....86
Chapter 13: Amnon, Tamar and Absalom's Revenge....96
Chapter 14: Absalom Brought Home....105
Chapter 15: Absalom's Conspiracy and David's Flight....113
Chapter 16: Ziba, Shimei and Ahithophel's Counsel....122
Chapter 17: Hushai Defeats Ahithophel's Counsel....129
Chapter 18: The Death of Absalom....136
Chapter 19: David Returns to Jerusalem....145
Chapter 20: The Revolt of Sheba....154
Chapter 21: The Gibeonites Avenged and the Philistine Giants....161
Chapter 22: David's Song of Deliverance....169
Chapter 23: David's Last Words and His Mighty Men....178
Chapter 24: David's Census and the Threshing Floor of Araunah....186
Conclusion....194
Bibliography....196

Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of 2 Samuel. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

At every one of my lowest points, God picked me up and brought me out. I am not proud of how low I went. David's sin and repentance sit at the center of this book, and that gives me hope. God restores people who come back to Him honestly.

Second Samuel is the story of David as king. It begins with David weeping over Saul and Jonathan, and it ends with David buying a threshing floor in Jerusalem and building an altar to stop a plague. In between, David becomes king over Judah and then over all Israel, takes Jerusalem, brings the ark of God into the city, and receives one of the greatest promises in the Bible: that his throne will be established forever. Then, at the height of his power, he falls into adultery and murder, and the rest of the book shows the bitter harvest of that sin in his own family. Second Samuel is honest about David. It shows us his faith and his failure, his repentance and God's mercy. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on 2 Samuel. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in 2 Samuel. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book, and this book picks up the day after 1 Samuel ends. Saul has died in battle on Mount Gilboa, and David is in Ziklag. Everything in 2 Samuel rests on what came before it: Israel's demand for a king like the nations (1 Samuel 8), Saul's disobedience and rejection (1 Samuel 13 and 15), God's choice of

David and his anointing by Samuel (1 Samuel 16), and the long years David spent running from Saul while refusing to harm the LORD's anointed (1 Samuel 24 and 26). It also reaches back to God's promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and to the rules God gave for Israel's king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). And it reaches forward. The promise God makes to David in chapter 7 runs through the rest of the Bible, all the way to Jesus Christ, the Son of David. If we read 2 Samuel without that context, we will see only the story of an ancient king. Read in context, it is the story of the king God chose, and of the greater King God promised would come from him.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Second Samuel is history, and this study takes it at its word: David was a real king who really reigned in Hebron and Jerusalem, and God really did make a covenant with him that his house and throne would last forever. The New Testament reads it the same way. Paul preached that God raised up David as king and that from his seed God brought Israel a Savior, Jesus (Acts 13:22-23), and the angel Gabriel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "Lord GOD," as in David's prayer in chapter 7, it stands for both words together, Adonai YHWH. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Second Samuel has 24 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: twenty-four weeks, or about six months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.

- Two halves of about twelve weeks each: chapters 1 to 12 (David's rise, the covenant, and his sin and repentance) and chapters 13 to 24 (the trouble in David's house and the closing records of his reign). Many groups take a break between the two.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of 2 Samuel are hard to read. There is a great deal of violence: civil war, murder in the gate and in a bedroom (3:27; 4:5-12), and the harsh ways of ancient war (8:2). God strikes Uzzah dead for touching the ark (6:6-7). David commits adultery with Bathsheba and has her husband killed (chapter 11), and their baby dies (12:14-23). David's son Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar (chapter 13), Absalom murders Amnon and rebels against his father, and David's family is torn apart by the sword (chapters 13 to 20). Saul's descendants are put to death to end a famine (chapter 21), and a plague follows David's census (chapter 24). I do not skip these passages, and I try to explain them honestly and modestly, the way Scripture tells them. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may have been through adultery or betrayal in their marriage, sexual abuse, the death of a child, or violence in their family. Chapters 11 to 13 especially may touch fresh wounds. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of 2 Samuel. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of 2 Samuel

Second Samuel is the tenth book of the Bible. It follows 1 Samuel and comes before 1 Kings, among the historical books of the Old Testament, which run from Joshua through Esther. In the Hebrew Bible, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book, counted among the Former Prophets, the books that tell Israel's history from God's point of view. The book was divided in two when it was translated into Greek, because it was too long for one scroll. It is named for Samuel the prophet, who anointed both Saul and David, even though Samuel died before this part of the story begins (1 Samuel 25:1).

In Israel's history, 2 Samuel covers the forty-year reign of David, about 1010 to 970 B.C. First Samuel told how Israel moved from the judges to the kings: how Samuel judged Israel, how the people asked for a king, how Saul was chosen and then rejected, and how God chose David, a shepherd from Bethlehem, to take Saul's place. Second Samuel tells how David became king, first over Judah at Hebron and then over all Israel, how he made Jerusalem his capital, how he brought the ark of God there, and how God made a covenant with him. Then it tells how David sinned with Bathsheba and against Uriah, and how the consequences spread through his family and his kingdom. First Kings picks up the story at the end of David's life, when Solomon becomes king.

The theme of 2 Samuel is God's faithfulness to His chosen king. God keeps His promise to make David king, He gives him rest from his enemies, and He promises him a house, a kingdom and a throne that will last forever. When David sins, God does not cast him off as He did Saul. He confronts him, forgives him when he repents, and disciplines him, and His promise stands. The key verse is God's word to David through Nathan:

2 Samuel 7:16 (SLB)

"And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever."

Alongside that theme runs a second one. Sin has consequences, even for a forgiven man. The first half of the book shows David's rise and blessing. The second half shows the sword that would not depart from his house (12:10). Second Samuel shows us that God's grace is real and His discipline is real, and that we need both.

Second Samuel has 24 chapters and 695 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: David King over Judah (chapters 1 to 4)

- Chapter 1: David Mourns Saul and Jonathan
- Chapter 2: David King over Judah and War with Saul's House
- Chapter 3: Abner Turns to David and Is Murdered
- Chapter 4: The Murder of Ish-bosheth

Part Two: David King over All Israel (chapters 5 to 10)

- Chapter 5: David King over All Israel and Jerusalem Taken

- Chapter 6: The Ark Brought Up to Jerusalem
- Chapter 7: The LORD's Covenant with David
- Chapter 8: David's Victories and His Officials
- Chapter 9: David's Kindness to Mephibosheth
- Chapter 10: War with the Ammonites and Syria

Part Three: David's Sin and Repentance (chapters 11 and 12)

- Chapter 11: David and Bathsheba
- Chapter 12: Nathan Confronts David

Part Four: Trouble in David's House (chapters 13 to 20)

- Chapter 13: Amnon, Tamar and Absalom's Revenge
- Chapter 14: Absalom Brought Home
- Chapter 15: Absalom's Conspiracy and David's Flight
- Chapter 16: Ziba, Shimei and Ahithophel's Counsel
- Chapter 17: Hushai Defeats Ahithophel's Counsel
- Chapter 18: The Death of Absalom
- Chapter 19: David Returns to Jerusalem
- Chapter 20: The Revolt of Sheba

Part Five: Closing Records of David's Reign (chapters 21 to 24)

- Chapter 21: The Gibeonites Avenged and the Philistine Giants
- Chapter 22: David's Song of Deliverance
- Chapter 23: David's Last Words and His Mighty Men
- Chapter 24: David's Census and the Threshing Floor of Araunah

Where this book points to Christ: the clearest pointer is the covenant of chapter 7. God promised David a son whose throne would be established forever, and said, "I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me" (7:14). Hebrews applies those words to Jesus (Hebrews 1:5), and the angel Gabriel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father," and that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). The New Testament opens by calling Jesus "son of David" (Matthew 1:1), and Jesus calls Himself "the root and the offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16). I believe that Jesus, risen and seated now at the Father's right hand, will one day sit on the throne of David and reign over a restored Israel and the whole earth, as the prophets promised. David himself is a picture of Christ in some ways: the shepherd king from Bethlehem, chosen by God, rejected for a time, who waited for God to give him the throne. But David is also a warning. His sin shows that even the best king of Israel could not be the King we need. That King is Jesus, the Son of David who never sinned.

Background of the Book

Author: The book does not name its author. Samuel died before these events (1 Samuel 25:1), so he did not write 2 Samuel. First Chronicles 29:29 says the acts of David were written "in the words of Samuel the seer, and in the words of Nathan the prophet, and in the words of Gad the seer." Jewish tradition holds that Samuel wrote the early part of the combined book and that Nathan and Gad, prophets who served David, added the later records. Second Samuel was most likely put together from those prophetic records, with others like the book of Jashar (1:18) used as sources. Many modern critical scholars believe Samuel was edited much later, in the time of the exile, as part of a longer history running from Deuteronomy through Kings. I take the book at its word: it rests on the records of prophets who knew David, and its details read like the work of eyewitnesses.

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, and especially the generations after David. Second Samuel told them why David's family sat on the throne, what God had promised that family, and why even David's house suffered when the king sinned.

Setting: The book opens at Ziklag, a Philistine town in the south where David had been living. David then rules from Hebron in the hill country of Judah, and Saul's son Ish-bosheth from Mahanaim east of the Jordan. From chapter 5 on, the center of the story is Jerusalem, the city of David on Mount Zion. David's wars reach from the Philistine coast to Moab and Edom, to Ammon east of the Jordan, and north to the Aramean kingdoms of Damascus and Zobah.

When it was written: Probably not long after David's death, likely in the time of Solomon or soon after, about 970 to 930 B.C. The book speaks of things that remained "until this day" (for example 4:3 and 6:8), and it does not mention the division of the kingdom about 930 B.C. Some scholars date it later.

When the events happened: David reigned about 1010 to 970 B.C. He was thirty when he became king and reigned forty years: seven and a half in Hebron over Judah, and thirty-three in Jerusalem over all Israel (5:4-5). That places the taking of Jerusalem about 1003 B.C. The book does not always tell events in strict time order. Chapters 21 to 24 in particular gather records from different times in David's reign.

David the man: David was the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah, and a great-grandson of Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:17). He was a shepherd, a musician and a warrior. Samuel anointed him as a boy, and he killed Goliath, served in Saul's court, became Jonathan's closest friend, and spent years running from Saul's jealousy. Many of the Psalms come from him. God called him "a man according to My heart" (Acts 13:22), not because he was sinless, but because he loved God, trusted Him, and came back to Him in repentance when he sinned.

The Davidic covenant: In chapter 7 God made an unconditional promise to David: a house (a dynasty), a kingdom and a throne established forever. This promise is the foundation for every later hope of the Messiah, the Anointed One from David's line. It was partly fulfilled in Solomon, and it is fulfilled completely in Jesus Christ. I deal with it in detail in chapter 7.

Purpose: To show how God kept His word to make David king and gave Israel rest from her enemies; to record God's covenant with David, which points to Christ; and to show honestly that sin, even in a man after God's own heart, brings real consequences, while God's mercy is greater than our sin for those who repent.

Chapter 1: David Mourns Saul and Jonathan

Scripture

1:1-16 And it was after the death of Saul, and David had returned from striking Amalek, and David remained in Ziklag two days. And it was on the third day, and look, a man ***was*** coming from the camp, from ***being*** with Saul, and his garments ***were*** torn and earth ***was*** on his head. And it was, when he came to David, and he fell to the ground and bowed down. And David said to him, "From where are you coming?" And he said to him, "From the camp of Israel I have escaped." And David said to him, "What was the matter? Tell me, please." And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen, and they have died; and also Saul and Jonathan his son have died." And David said to the young man who ***was*** telling him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son have died?" And the young man who ***was*** telling him said, "By chance I happened ***to be*** on the mountain of Gilboa, and look, Saul ***was*** leaning on his spear, and look, the chariotry and the masters of the horses had overtaken him. And he turned behind him and saw me, and he called to me, and I said, 'Here I ***am***.' And he said to me, 'Who ***are*** you?' And I said to him, 'I ***am*** an Amalekite.' And he said to me, 'Stand over me, please, and kill me, for agony has seized me, for all my life ***is*** still in me.' And I stood over him and killed him, for I knew that he would not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which ***was*** on his head and the armlet which ***was*** on his arm, and I have brought them to my lord here." And David took hold of his garments and tore them, and also all the men who ***were*** with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until the evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. And David said to the young man who ***was*** telling him, "From where ***are*** you?" And he said, "I ***am*** the son of a man, a sojourner, an Amalekite." And David said to him, "How were you not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the anointed of the LORD?" And David called one of the young men and said, "Draw near; fall on him." And he struck him down, and he died. And David said to him, "Your blood ***be*** on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I myself have killed the anointed of the LORD.'"

1:17-27 And David lamented this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son. And he said to teach the sons of Judah "***The*** Bow"; look, ***it is*** written in the book of Jashar: "The beauty, O Israel, ***is*** slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Do not tell ***it*** in Gath; do not bear the news in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. O mountains of Gilboa, ***let there be*** no dew and no rain on you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty. Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not separated; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you ***in*** scarlet with luxuries, who put ornaments of gold on your clothing. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan ***is*** slain on your high places. It is distressing to me for you, my brother Jonathan; you were very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, more than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war have perished!"

Chapter 1 Preview

Saul is dead. First Samuel ended with the king and three of his sons dying on Mount Gilboa in a battle with the Philistines. David does not know it yet. He is back in Ziklag, the Philistine town where he has been living, after rescuing his families from an Amalekite raid. On the third day a young man runs into town with torn clothes and dirt on his head. He tells David that Saul and Jonathan are dead, and he claims that he himself finished Saul off. He has brought Saul's crown and armband to prove it. He expects a reward. He gets a death sentence instead.

Then David does something that tells us a great deal about his heart. He does not celebrate the death of the man who hunted him for years. He weeps, and he writes a song of mourning for Saul and for his dear friend Jonathan, with the refrain "How the mighty have fallen!" This chapter shows us how a godly man treats an enemy who has fallen, and how he grieves a friend he loved.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-2 *And it was after the death of Saul, and David had returned from striking Amalek, and David remained in Ziklag two days. And it was on the third day, and look, a man **was** coming from the camp, from **being** with Saul, and his garments **were** torn and earth **was** on his head. And it was, when he came to David, and he fell to the ground and bowed down.*

"After the death of Saul" ties this book to the end of 1 Samuel. In Hebrew, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book, and this verse picks up right where 1 Samuel 31 left off. While Saul was dying on Gilboa, David was far to the south "striking Amalek," getting back the wives, children and goods the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag (1 Samuel 30). The two events happened at about the same time.

"On the third day" a man arrived "from the camp, from being with Saul." His torn garments and the earth on his head were the signs of mourning and bad news in Israel. He fell to the ground before David and bowed down. He already knew who would be king next, and he wanted to be on the right side of him.

1:3-4 *And David said to him, "From where are you coming?" And he said to him, "From the camp of Israel I have escaped." And David said to him, "What was the matter? Tell me, please." And he said, "The people have fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen, and they have died; and also Saul and Jonathan his son have died."*

David asked where he had come from. "From the camp of Israel I have escaped." David pressed him, "What was the matter? Tell me, please." The answer came in three blows. The people had fled. Many had fallen. "And also Saul and Jonathan his son have died."

Think about how much that news held for David. Saul had tried to kill him again and again. Jonathan was his closest friend, the man who had made a covenant with him and protected him at the risk of his own life (1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:16-17). In one sentence David lost his enemy and his best friend, and the road to the throne God had promised him opened up.

1:5-10 *And David said to the young man who **was** telling him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son have died?" And the young man who **was** telling him said, "By chance I happened **to be** on the mountain of Gilboa, and look, Saul **was** leaning on his spear, and look, the chariotry and the masters of the horses had overtaken him. And he turned behind him and saw me, and he called to me, and I said, 'Here I **am**.' And he said to me, 'Who **are** you?' And I said to him, 'I **am** an Amalekite.' And he said to me, 'Stand over me, please, and kill me, for agony has seized me, for all my life **is** still in me.' And I stood over him and killed him, for I knew that he would not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which **was** on his head and the armlet which **was** on his arm, and I have brought them to my lord here."*

David wanted to know how the young man knew. The man's story sounds detailed. He says he "happened" to be on Mount Gilboa and saw Saul "leaning on his spear" with chariots closing in. Saul called him over, asked who he was, and heard, "I am an Amalekite." Then, he says, Saul asked to be killed, "and I stood over him and killed him." He brought "the crown which was on his head and the armlet which was on his arm" to David.

Was he telling the truth? First Samuel 31:3-5 tells us that Saul was badly wounded by archers, asked his armor-bearer to kill him, and when the armor-bearer refused, "Saul took the sword, and he fell on it." The inspired writer gives us the true account there. Most Bible teachers believe the Amalekite came across Saul's body after he died, took the crown and armband, and made up the rest to win David's favor. Some think Saul may not have died at once and the man finished him, but the plainest reading is that he lied. Either way, his own words condemned him.

There is irony here. Saul lost his kingdom because he would not carry out the LORD's judgment on Amalek (1 Samuel 15:18-23). Now an Amalekite claims to have killed him and carries off his crown.

1:11-12 *And David took hold of his garments and tore them, and also all the men who **were** with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until the evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

David's response was not what the Amalekite expected. David "took hold of his garments and tore them," and all his men did the same. They "mourned and wept and fasted until the evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel."

Notice who they mourned for. Not only Saul and Jonathan, but the whole nation. Israel had been beaten by the Philistines, and the people of God were scattered and shamed. David did not see this as his lucky day. He saw it as a disaster for God's people. A man who loves God's people grieves when they suffer, even if the suffering clears the way for him.

1:13-16 *And David said to the young man who **was** telling him, "From where **are** you?" And he said, "I **am** the son of a man, a sojourner, an Amalekite." And David said to him, "How were you not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the anointed of the LORD?" And David called one of the young men and said, "Draw near; fall on him." And he struck him down, and he died. And David said to him, "Your blood **be** on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I myself have killed the anointed of the LORD.'"*

Now David asked a second question: "From where are you?" The man answered that he was "the son of a man, a sojourner, an Amalekite." A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel. That meant he knew Israel's ways. He knew who the king was and what it meant that he was anointed.

"How were you not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the anointed of the LORD?" To be anointed meant to have oil poured on your head as a sign that God had chosen you for a task, here the task of king. Twice David had Saul at his mercy, and twice he refused to touch him for this very reason (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9-11). David believed the life of the LORD's anointed was in God's hands, not man's.

David had one of his young men put the Amalekite to death. "Your blood be on your head, for your mouth has testified against you." In other words, you are responsible for your own death, and your own testimony is the evidence. Whether he lied or not, he claimed to have killed the king, and he was judged by his own words.

Was David too harsh? We should remember that David was about to become king. If he rewarded a man for killing the king, he would be telling the whole nation that killing a king was the way to get ahead. David made it plain from day one that he did not take the throne by murder. He would wait for God to give it.

1:17-18 *And David lamented this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son. And he said to teach the sons of Judah "**The** Bow"; look, **it is** written in the book of Jashar:*

"And David lamented this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son." A lament is a song or poem of grief. David was a gifted musician and poet (1 Samuel 16:18), and many of the Psalms come from him. This is one of his most moving.

He gave word "to teach the sons of Judah" this song. The title "The Bow" probably comes from the mention of Jonathan's bow in verse 22, or it may be the name of a tune. It was also "written in the book of Jashar." Jashar means upright. This was an old book of songs and poems about Israel's heroes, also quoted in Joshua 10:13. We no longer have it. It was not part of Scripture, but the writer used it the way a historian uses a good source.

1:19-20 *"The beauty, O Israel, **is** slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Do not tell **it** in Gath; do not bear the news in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.*

"The beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places!" The "beauty" or glory of Israel was its king and his son. They fell on the heights of Gilboa. Then comes the refrain that runs through the whole song: "How the mighty have fallen!"

"Do not tell it in Gath; do not bear the news in the streets of Ashkelon." Gath and Ashkelon were two of the five main Philistine cities. David knew that the Philistines would throw a victory party, and that their women would sing over Israel's dead, the way Israel's women once sang over David's victories (1 Samuel 18:6-7). The "uncircumcised" were people outside God's covenant with Abraham, whose sign was circumcision (Genesis 17:10-11). David did not want God's enemies mocking God's people.

1:21-22 *O mountains of Gilboa, **let there be** no dew and no rain on you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty.*

David spoke to the mountains of Gilboa as if they were people and called for no dew or rain on them. It is poetry, a way of saying that the place where such a thing happened should be mourned forever. "The shield of the mighty was defiled" there, "not anointed with oil." Soldiers rubbed oil on leather shields to keep them in good shape. Saul's shield lay in the dirt, uncared for, like the king who carried it.

Then David praised their courage. "The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty." They fought hard. Whatever Saul's failures, he and his son did not die as cowards.

1:23-24 *Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not separated; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you **in** scarlet with luxuries, who put ornaments of gold on your clothing.*

"Saul and Jonathan, the beloved and the pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not separated." This is a gracious line. David says nothing about Saul's jealousy, his rages, or the spear he threw. He remembers what was good. Jonathan had stayed loyal to his father even while he loved David, and he died at his father's side.

"They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions." Then David called the "daughters of Israel" to weep over Saul, who had brought the nation wealth, clothing them "in scarlet with luxuries." Saul had made Israel stronger and richer than it was under the judges, and David gave him credit for it.

Here is a lesson for us. When someone who hurt us dies, or falls, we can choose how we speak of them. David chose honor. He did not pretend Saul was perfect, but he did not use the moment to settle scores. Love "does not count the evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5).

1:25-27 *How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan **is** slain on your high places. It is distressing to me for you, my brother Jonathan; you were very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, more than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war have perished!"*

The refrain comes again, "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!" and now David turns to Jonathan alone. "It is distressing to me for you, my brother Jonathan; you were very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, more than the love of women."

Some people today try to read something sexual into this verse. That is reading our own ideas into the text, the very thing the Introduction warned about. In David's world, men spoke openly of deep love for a friend. Jonathan's love was "wonderful" because it was selfless. He was the heir to the throne, yet he gave David his robe, his sword and his bow, and he told David, "you, you will reign over Israel, and I, I will be second to you" (1 Samuel 23:17). A woman's love for a husband is a gift, but Jonathan's love for David asked for nothing and gave up a kingdom. That is the kind of love David means.

The song ends where it began: "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war have perished!" The "weapons of war" are the warriors themselves, now gone.

Jonathan's love is a small picture of a greater love. Jesus said, "Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jonathan gave up a throne for his friend. Jesus left the throne of heaven and gave His life for us.

Chapter 1 Summary

Three days after David returned to Ziklag from defeating the Amalekites, a young Amalekite came from the battle on Mount Gilboa. He told David that Israel had fled and that Saul and Jonathan were dead, and he claimed that he himself had killed Saul at the king's request. He brought Saul's crown and armband. David and his men tore their clothes, wept and fasted for Saul, Jonathan and the people of Israel. David asked the man how he dared to destroy the LORD's anointed and had him put to death on the testimony of his own mouth. Then David composed a lament for Saul and Jonathan, recorded in the book of Jashar, mourning their fall, honoring their courage, and speaking of Jonathan's wonderful love, with the refrain "How the mighty have fallen!"

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. Where was David, and what had he just done, when the news of Saul's death came? (1:1-2)

2. What did the Amalekite claim he had done, and what did he bring to David? (1:6-10)

3. How does his story compare with what 1 Samuel 31:3-5 says happened?

4. How did David and his men respond to the news, and who did they mourn for? (1:11-12)

5. Why did David have the Amalekite put to death? (1:14-16; 1 Samuel 26:9-11)

6. What good things did David say about Saul in his lament, and what did he leave out? (1:21-24)

7. What made Jonathan's love for David "wonderful"? (1:26; 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 23:17)

8. David would not take the throne by violence, even though God had promised it to him. Why does it matter how we receive what God has promised?

9. Is there someone who hurt you whose failures you are tempted to talk about? What would it look like to speak of them the way David spoke of Saul?

10. Who has been a Jonathan to you, a friend who loved you without asking anything back? How has Jesus shown you an even greater love (John 15:13)?

Chapter 2: David King over Judah and War with Saul's House

Scripture

2:1-11 And it was after this, and David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up into one of the cities of Judah?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." And David said, "Where shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron." And David went up there, and also his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And his men who ***were*** with him David brought up, each man and his household, and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. And the men of Judah came, and they anointed David there as king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "The men of Jabesh-gilead ***are those*** who buried Saul." And David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "Blessed ***are*** you by the LORD, because you have done this steadfast love with your lord, with Saul, and have buried him. And now, may the LORD do steadfast love and faithfulness with you; and I also will do this good with you, because you have done this thing. And now, let your hands be strong, and be sons of valor; for your lord Saul has died, and also the house of Judah has anointed me as king over them." And Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army which ***belonged*** to Saul, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over ***to*** Mahanaim. And he made him king over Gilead and over the Ashurites and over Jezreel and over Ephraim and over Benjamin and over Israel, all of it. Ish-bosheth the son of Saul ***was*** forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. Only the house of Judah was after David. And the number of the days which David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

2:12-32 And Abner the son of Ner went out, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out, and they met them at the pool of Gibeon together. And they sat down, these at the pool on this ***side*** and these at the pool on that ***side***. And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise, please, and let them play before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." And they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and for Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. And they took hold, each man of the head of his neighbor, and his sword ***was*** in the side of his neighbor, and they fell together. And one called that place Helkath-hazzurim, which ***is*** in Gibeon. And the battle was very severe on that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated before the servants of David. And the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel. And Asahel ***was*** swift on his feet, like one of the gazelles which ***are*** in the field. And Asahel pursued after Abner, and he did not turn aside to go to the right or to the left from after Abner. And Abner turned behind him and said, "***Is*** this you, Asahel?" And he said, "***It is*** I." And Abner said to him, "Turn yourself aside to your right or to your left, and seize for yourself one of the young men, and take for yourself his spoil." And Asahel was not willing to turn aside from after him. And Abner again said to Asahel, "Turn yourself aside from after me. Why should I strike you to the ground? And how would I lift up my face to Joab your brother?" And he refused to turn aside, and Abner struck him with the back end of the spear in the belly, and the spear came out from behind him; and he fell there and died in his place. And it was, everyone who came to the place where Asahel had fallen there and died, they stood still. And Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner. And the sun

set, and they came to the hill of Ammah, which ***is*** before Giah on the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the sons of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became one band, and they stood on the top of one hill. And Abner called out to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter at the end? And how long will you not tell the people to turn back from after their brothers?" And Joab said, "***As*** God lives, if you had not spoken, then surely from the morning the people would have gone up, each from after his brother." And Joab blew the trumpet, and all the people stood still, and they no longer pursued after Israel, and they no longer continued to fight. And Abner and his men went through the Arabah all that night, and they crossed the Jordan, and went through all the Bithron, and came ***to*** Mahanaim. And Joab returned from after Abner, and he gathered all the people, and of the servants of David nineteen men and Asahel were missing. And the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin, even of the men of Abner, three hundred and sixty men; they died. And they lifted up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which ***was in*** Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all the night, and it became light for them at Hebron.

Chapter 2 Preview

With Saul gone, David does not rush to grab the throne. He asks the LORD first, and the LORD sends him to Hebron, the old city of Abraham in the hill country of Judah. There the men of his own tribe anoint him king over Judah. David's first act as king is to bless the men of Jabesh-gilead for the kindness they showed Saul in burying him.

But not everyone accepts David. Abner, the commander of Saul's army, sets up Saul's son Ish-bosheth as king over the rest of Israel. The nation is split. The chapter ends with the first battle of a civil war, starting with a deadly contest at the pool of Gibeon and ending with the death of young Asahel, Joab's brother. That death will set off a chain of revenge that runs through the next chapter.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1 *And it was after this, and David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up into one of the cities of Judah?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." And David said, "Where shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron."*

"David inquired of the LORD." His question was simple: "Shall I go up into one of the cities of Judah?" This is the right first step. The throne had been promised to David for years (1 Samuel 16:13), and now the door was open. Many men would have marched straight to Saul's capital. David asked God. He likely inquired through Abiathar the priest and the ephod, a priestly garment used to seek God's answer (1 Samuel 23:9-12; 30:7-8).

God answered, "Go up," and David asked again, "Where shall I go up?" God named the city: "To Hebron." Hebron was the most important city of Judah, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were buried (Genesis 23:19; 49:29-31). David did not want only permission. He wanted direction. That is a good pattern for us. Before a big step, ask God not only whether, but where and how.

2:2-3 *And David went up there, and also his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And his men who **were** with him David brought up, each man and his household, and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.*

David went up with "his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite," and his men with their households. These were the men who had followed him through the hard years in the wilderness. Now they settled in the towns around Hebron.

We should be honest that David had more than one wife. The Law did not forbid a man to have more than one wife, but God had warned that the king "shall not multiply wives for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17), and God's plan from the beginning was one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6). Scripture records David's many marriages without approving them, and the rest of the book shows the trouble they brought.

2:4-7 *And the men of Judah came, and they anointed David there as king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, "The men of Jabesh-gilead **are those** who buried Saul." And David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "Blessed **are** you by the LORD, because you have done this steadfast love with your lord, with Saul, and have buried him. And now, may the LORD do steadfast love and faithfulness with you; and I also will do this good with you, because you have done this thing. And now, let your hands be strong, and be sons of valor; for your lord Saul has died, and also the house of Judah has anointed me as king over them."*

"And the men of Judah came, and they anointed David there as king over the house of Judah." This was David's second anointing. Samuel had anointed him years before among his brothers at Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:13). Now his own tribe made it public. A third anointing, over all Israel, will come in chapter 5. God's promise was coming true one step at a time.

Someone told David that "the men of Jabesh-gilead are those who buried Saul." Saul had rescued that town early in his reign (1 Samuel 11). When the Philistines hung the bodies of Saul and his sons on the wall of Beth-shean, the brave men of Jabesh walked all night, took the bodies down and buried them (1 Samuel 31:11-13).

David sent them a blessing: "Blessed are you by the LORD, because you have done this steadfast love with your lord, with Saul." The Hebrew word for steadfast love is hesed. It means loyal, faithful love that keeps its commitments. David honored their loyalty to Saul and asked the LORD to show them "steadfast love and faithfulness" in return. Then he promised his own kindness too.

There was wisdom here as well as kindness. Jabesh-gilead was east of the Jordan, in the area loyal to Saul. David was telling them that he did not see Saul's friends as his enemies. "Your lord Saul has died, and also the house of Judah has anointed me as king over them." He was inviting them, gently, to accept him too.

2:8-11 *And Abner the son of Ner, commander of the army which **belonged** to Saul, had taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over **to** Mahanaim. And he made him king over Gilead and over the Ashurites and over Jezreel and over Ephraim and over Benjamin and over Israel, all of it. Ish-bosheth the son of Saul **was** forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. Only the house of Judah was after David. And the number of the days which David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.*

But Abner had other plans. Abner "the son of Ner" was Saul's cousin and the commander of his army (1 Samuel 14:50). He took "Ish-bosheth the son of Saul" and made him king at Mahanaim, east of the Jordan, safely away from the Philistines who now held much of the land west of the river.

Ish-bosheth means man of shame. In 1 Chronicles 8:33 he is called Eshbaal, man of Baal. Baal was the main god of the Canaanites, but the word also means lord or master, and some Israelites used it of the LORD in early times. Many believe the writer changed baal to bosheth, shame, because later Israel could not stand to speak the name of the false god. The same thing happens with Mephibosheth (4:4), called Merib-baal in 1 Chronicles 8:34.

Ish-bosheth "was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years." David reigned in Hebron "seven years and six months." How do these fit? Most likely Abner needed several years to win back the northern land from the Philistines before Ish-bosheth's rule really took hold, or there was a gap after his death before all Israel came to David. Scripture does not explain it, and both answers fit. Either way, the real power was Abner. Ish-bosheth was a king in name.

2:12-17 *And Abner the son of Ner went out, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out, and they met them at the pool of Gibeon together. And they sat down, these at the pool on this **side** and these at the pool on that **side**. And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise, please, and let them play before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." And they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and for Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. And they took hold, each man of the head of his neighbor, and his sword **was** in the side of his neighbor, and they fell together. And one called that place Helkath-hazzurim, which **is** in Gibeon. And the battle was very severe on that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated before the servants of David.*

Now the two sides met. Abner and Ish-bosheth's servants went from Mahanaim to Gibeon, a town in Benjamin about six miles northwest of Jerusalem. "Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David" came out to meet them. Joab was David's nephew, the son of David's sister Zeruiah (1 Chronicles 2:16), and he became the commander of David's army.

The two armies sat on opposite sides of "the pool of Gibeon." Archaeologists have found a large pool cut into the rock at Gibeon, though whether it is the very pool named here is not certain. Abner proposed that the young men "play before us." It sounds like a game, but it was a contest of champions to the death. Twelve men from each side faced each other, and "they took hold, each man of the head of his neighbor, and his sword was in the side of his neighbor, and they fell

together." All twenty-four died. The place was named "Helkath-hazzurim," which means field of sharp edges or field of blades.

The contest settled nothing, and a full battle broke out. "The battle was very severe on that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated before the servants of David." This is what civil war looks like. Brothers in the same covenant killing each other for sport, then for real.

2:18-23 *And the three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab and Abishai and Asahel. And Asahel **was** swift on his feet, like one of the gazelles which **are** in the field. And Asahel pursued after Abner, and he did not turn aside to go to the right or to the left from after Abner. And Abner turned behind him and said, "**Is** this you, Asahel?" And he said, "**It is** I." And Abner said to him, "Turn yourself aside to your right or to your left, and seize for yourself one of the young men, and take for yourself his spoil." And Asahel was not willing to turn aside from after him. And Abner again said to Asahel, "Turn yourself aside from after me. Why should I strike you to the ground? And how would I lift up my face to Joab your brother?" And he refused to turn aside, and Abner struck him with the back end of the spear in the belly, and the spear came out from behind him; and he fell there and died in his place. And it was, everyone who came to the place where Asahel had fallen there and died, they stood still.*

Three brothers are named: "Joab and Abishai and Asahel," the sons of Zeruiah. Asahel, the youngest, "was swift on his feet, like one of the gazelles which are in the field." He set his eyes on the biggest prize of all, Abner himself, and he would not turn aside.

Abner did not want to kill him. Twice he warned him off. "Turn yourself aside to your right or to your left, and seize for yourself one of the young men, and take for yourself his spoil." In other words, go after someone your own size and take his armor as your trophy. Then more plainly: "Why should I strike you to the ground? And how would I lift up my face to Joab your brother?" Abner knew that killing Asahel would start a blood feud with Joab.

"And he refused to turn aside." Abner struck him "with the back end of the spear in the belly." The butt of a spear was often sharpened or capped with metal so it could be stuck in the ground, and with a running man rushing onto it the blow went through him. Everyone who came to the place where Asahel fell "stood still."

Asahel was brave, but his courage outran his wisdom. Young zeal without listening can be deadly. Proverbs warns that a man who will not hear counsel walks into trouble. Asahel was warned twice and would not listen.

2:24-28 *And Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner. And the sun set, and they came to the hill of Ammah, which **is** before Giah on the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the sons of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became one band, and they stood on the top of one hill. And Abner called out to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter at the end? And how long will you not tell the people to turn back from after their brothers?" And Joab said, "**As** God lives, if you had not spoken, then surely from the morning the people would have gone up, each from after his brother." And Joab blew the trumpet, and all the people stood still, and they no longer pursued after Israel, and they no longer continued to fight.*

Joab and Abishai kept up the chase until sunset, to "the hill of Ammah." The men of Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, rallied behind Abner on a hilltop. Then Abner called out a question that should have been asked before the first sword was drawn: "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter at the end? And how long will you not tell the people to turn back from after their brothers?"

It was a fair point, though Abner was the one who started the fight. Joab answered with an oath, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, then surely from the morning the people would have gone up, each from after his brother." Joab's words are a little hard to follow. He may mean that if Abner had not proposed the contest that morning, there would have been no battle at all. Or he may mean that if Abner had not called for peace now, the chase would have gone on until morning. Either way, Joab "blew the trumpet," the signal to stop, and the fighting ended for that day.

The key word here is brothers. Abner reminded Joab that these were not Philistines. They were Israelites. Civil war among God's people is always bitter at the end. The same is true in a church or a family. When believers turn on each other, nobody really wins.

2:29-32 *And Abner and his men went through the Arabah all that night, and they crossed the Jordan, and went through all the Bithron, and came **to** Mahanaim. And Joab returned from after Abner, and he gathered all the people, and of the servants of David nineteen men and Asahel were missing. And the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin, even of the men of Abner, three hundred and sixty men; they died. And they lifted up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which **was in** Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all the night, and it became light for them at Hebron.*

Abner and his men marched all night through the Arabah, the deep valley of the Jordan, crossed the river and came back to Mahanaim. Joab counted his losses: "nineteen men and Asahel." Abner's side lost "three hundred and sixty men." David's men had won a clear victory.

They carried Asahel to Bethlehem and buried him "in the tomb of his father." Bethlehem was David's hometown and the family home of Zeruiah's sons. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at dawn.

Joab did not forget his brother. Asahel's death was in battle, after a fair warning, but Joab would treat it as murder. In chapter 3 we will see what that grudge cost.

Chapter 2 Summary

After Saul's death David asked the LORD whether to go up to Judah, and the LORD sent him to Hebron. David moved there with his wives, his men and their households, and the men of Judah anointed him king over the house of Judah. David blessed the men of Jabesh-gilead for their steadfast love in burying Saul. Meanwhile Abner, the commander of Saul's army, made Saul's son Ish-bosheth king over the rest of Israel at Mahanaim. Ish-bosheth reigned two years, and David reigned in Hebron seven and a half years. At the pool of Gibeon Abner's men and Joab's men met in a deadly contest of twelve against twelve, and then in a battle that David's men won. Asahel, Joab's swift younger brother, chased Abner and would not turn back, and Abner killed him. At sunset Abner called for an end to the fighting between brothers, and Joab stopped the pursuit. Abner lost 360 men, and David lost twenty, including Asahel, who was buried in Bethlehem.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What did David do first after Saul died, and what answer did he receive? (2:1)

2. Who anointed David king, and over whom? (2:4)

3. How did David honor the men of Jabesh-gilead, and why? (2:4-7; 1 Samuel 31:11-13)

4. Who made Ish-bosheth king, and where? (2:8-9)

5. What happened in the contest at the pool of Gibeon? (2:14-16)

6. How many times did Abner warn Asahel, and what did he say? (2:21-22)

7. What question did Abner call out to Joab at the end of the day? (2:26)

8. David asked God not only whether to go but where to go. How can you seek God's direction before a big decision?

9. Asahel was brave but would not listen to warning. Where might zeal without wisdom lead you into trouble?

10. Abner asked, "Shall the sword devour forever?" Is there a conflict with a brother or sister in Christ that you need to end?

Chapter 3: Abner Turns to David and Is Murdered

Scripture

3:1-21 And the war was long between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David ***was*** going on and ***growing*** stronger, and the house of Saul ***was*** going on and ***growing*** weaker. And sons were born to David in Hebron. And his firstborn was Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite; and his second ***was*** Chileab, by Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third ***was*** Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; and the fourth ***was*** Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth ***was*** Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth ***was*** Ithream, by Eglah the wife of David. These were born to David in Hebron. And it was, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, and Abner was strengthening himself in the house of Saul. And Saul ***had*** a concubine, and her name ***was*** Rizpah the daughter of Aiah. And he said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to the concubine of my father?" And Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth, and he said, "***Am*** I a dog's head which ***belongs*** to Judah? This day I do steadfast love with the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and I have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge against me the iniquity of the woman this day? So may God do to Abner, and so may He add to him, for just as the LORD swore to David, so I will do for him: to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." And he was not able to answer Abner a word again, because he feared him. And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "Whose ***is*** the land?" saying, "Make your covenant with me, and look, my hand ***will be*** with you to bring all Israel around to you." And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. Only one thing I ask of you, saying, 'You will not see my face unless you first bring Michal the daughter of Saul when you come to see my face.'" And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, saying, "Give ***me*** my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of ***the*** Philistines." And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from ***her*** husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her, going and weeping behind her, as far as Bahurim. And Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned. And the word of Abner was with the elders of Israel, saying, "Both yesterday and the day before you were seeking David as king over you. And now act, for the LORD has spoken to David, saying, 'By the hand of David My servant ***I will*** save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.'" And Abner also spoke in the ears of Benjamin; and Abner also went to speak in the ears of David at Hebron all that was good in the eyes of Israel and in the eyes of all the house of Benjamin. And Abner came to David ***at*** Hebron, and twenty men ***were*** with him. And David made a feast for Abner and for the men who ***were*** with him. And Abner said to David, "Let me arise and go and gather all Israel to my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and you will reign over all that your soul desires." And David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

3:22-39 And look, the servants of David and Joab came from the raid, and they brought much plunder with them. And Abner ***was*** not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. And Joab and all the army which ***was*** with him came, and they told Joab, saying, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he has gone in peace." And Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why

is this, ***that*** you have sent him away, and he has fully gone? You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you ***are*** doing." And Joab went out from David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. And David did not know. And Abner returned ***to*** Hebron, and Joab turned him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him quietly, and he struck him there ***in*** the belly, and he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. And David heard afterward, and he said, "I and my kingdom ***are*** innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it whirl on the head of Joab and on all the house of his father; and let there not be cut off from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, and one with a skin disease, and one who takes hold of the spindle, and one who falls by the sword, and one lacking bread." And Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed Asahel their brother at Gibeon in the battle. And David said to Joab and to all the people who ***were*** with him, "Tear your garments and gird yourselves ***with*** sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David ***was*** walking after the bier. 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. And the king lamented over Abner and said, "Should Abner die like the death of a fool? Your hands ***were*** not bound, and your feet were not brought near to bronze fetters; as one falls before sons of injustice, you have fallen." And all the people again wept over him. And all the people came to make David eat bread while ***it was*** still day; and David swore, saying, "So may God do to me, and so may He add, if before the sun sets I taste bread or anything at all." And all the people took notice, and it was good in their eyes, just as all that the king did was good in the eyes of all the people. And all the people and all Israel knew on that day that it was not from the king to kill Abner the son of Ner. And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a leader and a great ***man*** has fallen this day in Israel? And I ***am*** weak this day, and anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, ***are too*** hard for me. May the LORD repay the doer of the evil according to his evil."

Chapter 3 Preview

The war between the house of Saul and the house of David drags on, and David grows stronger while Saul's house grows weaker. The writer pauses to list six sons born to David in Hebron, several of whom will bring him great grief later in the book. Then a quarrel breaks out in Saul's house. Ish-bosheth accuses Abner of taking Saul's concubine, and Abner, furious, decides to hand the whole kingdom over to David.

Abner keeps his word. He returns Michal to David, talks the elders of Israel into accepting David as king, and comes to Hebron to make peace. David sends him away in peace. But Joab has not forgotten his brother Asahel. He calls Abner back, takes him aside in the gate, and kills him. David is horrified. He curses Joab, mourns Abner publicly, and fasts, and the whole nation sees that David had no part in the murder. The chapter ends with David admitting that the sons of Zeruiah are too hard for him.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1 *And the war was long between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David **was** going on and **growing** stronger, and the house of Saul **was** going on and **growing** weaker.*

"The war was long between the house of Saul and the house of David." The battle at Gibeon was only the beginning. The fighting went on for years. But the direction was clear: "David was going on and growing stronger, and the house of Saul was going on and growing weaker."

God's promises do not always come true overnight. David had been anointed as a young man, and he still had to wait, and now fight, before the whole kingdom was his. Yet God was at work the whole time, one day at a time. If you are waiting on God, take heart. Slow is not the same as stopped.

3:2-5 *And sons were born to David in Hebron. And his firstborn was Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite; and his second **was** Chileab, by Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third **was** Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; and the fourth **was** Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth **was** Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth **was** Ithream, by Eglah the wife of David. These were born to David in Hebron.*

The writer lists six sons born to David in Hebron, each to a different mother. "His firstborn was Amnon, by Ahinoam the Jezreelite." The second was Chileab, by Abigail. The third was "Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur." Geshur was a small kingdom northeast of the Sea of Galilee. This marriage was likely a political alliance, the kind kings made to secure their borders. The fourth was Adonijah, the fifth Shephatiah, and the sixth Ithream.

Why list them here? Because these names will come back. Amnon will commit a terrible sin against his half-sister (chapter 13). Absalom will murder Amnon and then try to take his father's throne (chapters 13 to 18). Adonijah will try to seize the throne at the end of David's life (1 Kings 1). Chileab is never mentioned again and may have died young. The list of sons is a quiet warning. David's growing house was also a divided house, with many mothers, many rivals and many claims to the throne.

3:6-11 *And it was, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, and Abner was strengthening himself in the house of Saul. And Saul **had** a concubine, and her name **was** Rizpah the daughter of Aiah. And he said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to the concubine of my father?" And Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth, and he said, "**Am** I a dog's head which **belongs** to Judah? This day I do steadfast love with the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and I have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge against me the iniquity of the woman this day? So may God do to Abner, and so may He add to him, for just as the LORD swore to David, so I will do for him: to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." And he was not able to answer Abner a word again, because he feared him.*

Abner "was strengthening himself in the house of Saul." He was the real power behind Ish-bosheth's throne. Then Ish-bosheth accused him: "Why have you gone in to the concubine of my

father?" A concubine was a wife of lower rank, often without the full rights of a wife. Her name was Rizpah, and we will meet her again in chapter 21.

In the ancient world, taking a dead king's wife or concubine was more than a private sin. It was a claim to his throne. That is why Absalom will do it publicly in 16:21-22, and why Solomon will treat Adonijah's request for Abishag, the young woman who had cared for David in his old age, as a bid for the kingdom (1 Kings 2:22). Ish-bosheth heard Abner's act as a threat. Scripture does not tell us if the charge was true, but Abner did not deny it.

Abner exploded: "Am I a dog's head which belongs to Judah?" That is, do you treat me like a worthless dog, a traitor on David's side? He reminded Ish-bosheth that he alone had kept him on the throne. Then he swore an oath: "just as the LORD swore to David, so I will do for him: to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba." Dan was in the far north and Beersheba in the far south, so the phrase means the whole land.

Notice what Abner admits. He knew all along that the LORD had sworn the kingdom to David. He had been fighting against what he knew was God's will. Now he changed sides, not because he repented, but because he was angry. God can use even a proud man's temper to bring about His purposes.

Ish-bosheth "was not able to answer Abner a word again, because he feared him." A king who is afraid of his own general is no king at all.

3:12-16 *And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "Whose **is** the land?" saying, "Make your covenant with me, and look, my hand **will be** with you to bring all Israel around to you." And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. Only one thing I ask of you, saying, 'You will not see my face unless you first bring Michal the daughter of Saul when you come to see my face.'" And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, saying, "Give **me** my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for a hundred foreskins of **the** Philistines." And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from **her** husband, from Paltiel the son of Laish. And her husband went with her, going and weeping behind her, as far as Bahurim. And Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned.*

Abner sent messengers to David: "Whose is the land?" and "Make your covenant with me, and look, my hand will be with you to bring all Israel around to you." A covenant is a binding agreement, sealed by an oath. Abner offered to deliver the kingdom.

David agreed, with one condition. Abner must first bring "Michal the daughter of Saul." Michal was David's first wife. Saul had given her to David for "a hundred foreskins of the Philistines" (1 Samuel 18:25-27), and then, when David fled, Saul gave her to another man, Paltiel, also called Palti (1 Samuel 25:44). David's demand was partly about his rights as her husband. It was also political. A daughter of Saul at David's side would help the northern tribes accept him as Saul's rightful heir.

David sent his request officially to Ish-bosheth, and Ish-bosheth took her from Paltiel. Then comes one of the saddest lines in the book: "her husband went with her, going and weeping behind her, as far as Bahurim." Abner said, "Go, return," and he went home alone.

We are not told what Michal felt. We are told that Paltiel loved her. This is a hard scene. The Law did not allow a man to take back a wife who had been married to another (Deuteronomy 24:1-4), though David might have argued that his marriage was never ended, since Saul had taken her away unlawfully. Either way, people were hurt. Michal was treated like a piece in a political game, first by her father and now by her husband. When people use people, someone always pays.

3:17-19 *And the word of Abner was with the elders of Israel, saying, "Both yesterday and the day before you were seeking David as king over you. And now act, for the LORD has spoken to David, saying, 'By the hand of David My servant **I will** save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.'" And Abner also spoke in the ears of Benjamin; and Abner also went to speak in the ears of David at Hebron all that was good in the eyes of Israel and in the eyes of all the house of Benjamin.*

Abner went to work. He spoke to "the elders of Israel," the leaders of the tribes. "Both yesterday and the day before you were seeking David as king over you." Many in the north had wanted David for a long time. Abner now quoted God's promise: "By the hand of David My servant I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies."

We do not have that exact promise recorded elsewhere, but it fits all God had said about David (1 Samuel 16:1, 12-13; 25:28-30). Abner, who had fought God's plan, now preached it. He also spoke privately to Benjamin, Saul's own tribe, which would be the hardest to win. Then he went to Hebron to tell David that Israel was ready.

3:20-21 *And Abner came to David **at** Hebron, and twenty men **were** with him. And David made a feast for Abner and for the men who **were** with him. And Abner said to David, "Let me arise and go and gather all Israel to my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and you will reign over all that your soul desires." And David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.*

Abner came to Hebron with twenty men, and David made a feast for them. A shared meal sealed friendship and peace. Abner promised to "gather all Israel to my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and you will reign over all that your soul desires."

"And David sent Abner away, and he went in peace." The writer says it three times in a few verses (3:21, 22, 23). He wants us to be sure of it. David had made peace with Abner and given his word for Abner's safety.

3:22-25 *And look, the servants of David and Joab came from the raid, and they brought much plunder with them. And Abner **was** not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. And Joab and all the army which **was** with him came, and they told Joab, saying, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has sent him away, and he has gone in peace." And Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why this, **that** you have sent him away, and he has fully gone? You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you, and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you **are** doing."*

Right at that moment, Joab came back "from the raid" with plunder. He heard that Abner had been there and had left "in peace." Joab stormed in to the king: "What have you done?" He accused Abner of coming "to deceive you, and to know your going out and your coming in." In other words, Abner was a spy.

Was Joab worried about David's safety? Partly, perhaps. But the next verses show what was really driving him. Abner had killed his brother. And Abner, if he brought all Israel to David, might well take Joab's place as commander. Revenge and ambition can easily dress themselves up as loyalty.

3:26-27 *And Joab went out from David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. And David did not know. And Abner returned **to** Hebron, and Joab turned him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him quietly, and he struck him there **in** the belly, and he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.*

Without telling David, Joab "sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah." Abner had no reason to suspect anything. Joab "turned him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him quietly, and he struck him there in the belly, and he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother."

This was murder. Asahel had died in battle, after two warnings. Abner was now under the king's peace. Joab killed him in the gate of Hebron, and Hebron was one of the cities of refuge, where a man who killed someone was to be safe until he had a fair trial (Joshua 20:7; 21:13). Joab struck him in the belly, the same place Abner had struck Asahel. It was cold, planned revenge.

The Law gave "the avenger of blood," a close relative, the right to avenge a murder (Numbers 35:19). But Asahel's death was not murder, and Joab ignored the trial the Law required. He took vengeance into his own hands. Paul tells us we must not avenge ourselves, but leave room for God's wrath, for "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Romans 12:19). Vengeance belongs to God.

3:28-30 *And David heard afterward, and he said, "I and my kingdom **are** innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. Let it whirl on the head of Joab and on all the house of his father; and let there not be cut off from the house of Joab one who has a discharge, and one with a skin disease, and one who takes hold of the spindle, and one who falls by the sword, and one lacking bread." And Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed Asahel their brother at Gibeon in the battle.*

"David heard afterward," and he spoke at once: "I and my kingdom are innocent before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner." David publicly cleared himself of any part in it.

Then he pronounced a curse on Joab and his family: that there would always be among them "one who has a discharge, and one with a skin disease, and one who takes hold of the spindle, and one who falls by the sword, and one lacking bread." A discharge and skin disease made a man unclean. Holding the spindle, a tool for spinning thread, was women's work, so it may mean a man too weak to fight. David asked God to bring Joab's guilt back on his own house.

Verse 30 adds that "Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed Asahel their brother at Gibeon in the battle." Note the words "in the battle." The writer makes the point plain. Abner had killed Asahel in war, not in murder.

3:31-35 *And David said to Joab and to all the people who **were** with him, "Tear your garments and gird yourselves **with** sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David **was** walking after the bier. 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. And the king lamented over Abner and said, "Should Abner die like the death of a fool? Your hands **were** not bound, and your feet were not brought near to bronze fetters; as one falls before sons of injustice, you have fallen." And all the people again wept over him. And all the people came to make David eat bread while **it was** still day; and David swore, saying, "So may God do to me, and so may He add, if before the sun sets I taste bread or anything at all."*

David ordered Joab himself and all the people to "tear your garments and gird yourselves with sackcloth and mourn before Abner." Sackcloth was rough cloth made of goat's hair, worn in grief. The king himself walked behind the bier, the frame on which the body was carried. At the grave "the king lifted up his voice and wept."

Then David sang a short lament: "Should Abner die like the death of a fool? Your hands were not bound, and your feet were not brought near to bronze fetters; as one falls before sons of injustice, you have fallen." Abner was not a prisoner who had been fairly tried. He was a free man, struck down by treachery.

David refused to eat until sunset. The people had come to urge him to eat, and he swore he would not taste "bread or anything at all" before the sun went down. His grief was public and real.

3:36-37 *And all the people took notice, and it was good in their eyes, just as all that the king did was good in the eyes of all the people. And all the people and all Israel knew on that day that it was not from the king to kill Abner the son of Ner.*

"And all the people took notice, and it was good in their eyes, just as all that the king did was good in the eyes of all the people." David's honest grief won the people's trust. "All the people and all Israel knew on that day that it was not from the king to kill Abner the son of Ner."

This mattered a great deal. If the northern tribes had believed David lured Abner to Hebron to kill him, they would never have trusted him. God protected David's name, and the kingdom stayed on its path to unity.

3:38-39 *And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a leader and a great **man** has fallen this day in Israel? And I **am** weak this day, and anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, **are too** hard for me. May the LORD repay the doer of the evil according to his evil."*

David spoke honestly to his servants: "Do you not know that a leader and a great man has fallen this day in Israel?" Abner had been an enemy, but he was a great man, and David honored him.

Then David admitted his own weakness: "I am weak this day, and anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too hard for me." Joab was too powerful, too useful, and too popular with the army for David to punish. So David left him in God's hands: "May the LORD repay the doer of the evil according to his evil."

Was David right to leave Joab unpunished? Many think David was too soft here, and that his failure to deal with Joab let Joab go on to kill again (20:8-10). On his deathbed David told Solomon to deal with Joab for the blood of Abner and Amasa (1 Kings 2:5-6). Leaders who will not deal with sin in those close to them often pay for it later. Still, David was right that God would repay. And He did.

Chapter 3 Summary

The war between Saul's house and David's house went on for a long time, with David growing stronger. Six sons were born to David in Hebron, including Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. When Ish-bosheth accused Abner of taking Saul's concubine Rizpah, Abner swore to hand the kingdom to David, as the LORD had sworn. David agreed to a covenant on the condition that Michal be returned, and she was taken from her weeping husband Paltiel. Abner persuaded the elders of Israel and Benjamin to accept David and came to Hebron, where David feasted with him and sent him away in peace. Joab, returning from a raid, accused Abner of spying, called him back without David's knowledge, and murdered him in the gate to avenge Asahel. David declared himself innocent, cursed Joab's house, made the people mourn, walked behind the bier, wept at the grave and fasted. The people saw that David had no part in Abner's death. David honored Abner as a great man, confessed that the sons of Zeruiah were too hard for him, and left their judgment to the LORD.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. How does verse 1 describe the long war between the two houses? (3:1)

2. Which of David's sons born in Hebron will play a large part later in the book? (3:2-5)

3. What made Abner decide to bring the kingdom over to David, and what did he admit about God's promise? (3:7-10)

4. What condition did David set for making a covenant with Abner, and who was hurt by it? (3:13-16)

5. Why did Joab kill Abner, and what made it murder rather than lawful vengeance? (3:22-30; Joshua 20:7)

6. How did David show the people that he had no part in Abner's death? (3:28-37)

7. What did David mean when he said the sons of Zeruiah were "too hard" for him? (3:39; 1 Kings 2:5-6)

8. Abner knew God's will and fought against it until his pride was hurt. Is there an area where you know what God wants but have resisted it?

9. Joab's revenge looked like loyalty. How can we tell when our motives are not what we claim they are?

10. Is there someone you are tempted to "pay back"? What does Romans 12:19 ask you to do with that hurt?

Chapter 4: The Murder of Ish-bosheth

Scripture

4:1-12 And the son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, and his hands dropped, and all Israel was terrified. And two men, commanders of marauding bands, were ***with*** the son of Saul; the name of the one ***was*** Baanah, and the name of the second ***was*** Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the sons of Benjamin; for Beeroth also is reckoned to Benjamin. And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and they have been sojourners there until this day. And Jonathan the son of Saul ***had*** a son stricken in ***the*** feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse lifted him up and fled. And it was, as she hurried to flee, and he fell and became lame. And his name ***was*** Mephibosheth. And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and they came in the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, and he ***was*** lying ***down for*** the noonday rest. And they came there into the middle of the house, taking wheat, and they struck him in the belly; and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. And they came into the house, and he ***was*** lying on his bed in his bedchamber; and they struck him and killed him and removed his head; and they took his head and went ***by*** the way of the Arabah all the night. And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David ***at*** Hebron, and they said to the king, "Look, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; and the LORD has given to my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and on his seed." And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and he said to them, "***As*** the LORD lives, who has ransomed my soul from all trouble, when the one who told me, saying, 'Look, Saul has died,' and he was like a bearer of good news in his own eyes, I took hold of him and killed him in Ziklag, that ***was*** my giving to him ***for his*** good news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed! And now, shall I not require his blood from your hand and remove you from the earth?" And David commanded the young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and their feet and hanged ***them*** by the pool in Hebron. And the head of Ish-bosheth they took, and they buried ***it*** in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.

Chapter 4 Preview

With Abner dead, Ish-bosheth loses heart and all Israel is afraid. Two of his own captains, the brothers Rechab and Baanah, see their chance. They slip into his house in the heat of the day while he is resting, kill him on his bed, cut off his head, and carry it all night to David at Hebron. They expect a reward for getting rid of David's enemy.

David answers them the same way he answered the Amalekite in chapter 1. He will not take the throne by murder, and he will not reward those who shed innocent blood. He has the two men executed and gives Ish-bosheth's head an honorable burial. In the middle of this grim chapter the writer also introduces a little boy, Jonathan's lame son Mephibosheth, who will matter a great deal in chapter 9. This is one of the darker chapters in the book, and it calls for care in reading.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1 *And the son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, and his hands dropped, and all Israel was terrified.*

"The son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, and his hands dropped, and all Israel was terrified." To have your hands drop is to lose all strength and courage. Ish-bosheth had been propped up by Abner, and now his prop was gone. The whole northern kingdom was shaken.

Notice that the writer does not even use Ish-bosheth's name here. He is simply "the son of Saul." He had never been much more than that. When a leader's power rests on another man instead of on God, it falls when that man falls.

4:2-3 *And two men, commanders of marauding bands, were **with** the son of Saul; the name of the one **was** Baanah, and the name of the second **was** Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, of the sons of Benjamin; for Beeroth also is reckoned to Benjamin. And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and they have been sojourners there until this day.*

Two men step forward: "Baanah" and "Rechab, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite." They were "commanders of marauding bands," leaders of raiding parties in Ish-bosheth's army. They were from Benjamin, Saul's own tribe. Beeroth was one of the four towns of the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17), and it had been counted as part of Benjamin.

The note that "the Beerothites fled to Gittaim" may explain why these men were living among Benjamin. Some think the original people of Beeroth fled when Saul attacked the Gibeonites (21:1-2), and Israelites of Benjamin settled in their town. Scripture does not say for certain. What matters is that these were Saul's own men, from Saul's own tribe. Ish-bosheth was betrayed from inside his own house.

4:4 *And Jonathan the son of Saul **had** a son stricken in **the** feet. He was five years old when the report of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse lifted him up and fled. And it was, as she hurried to flee, and he fell and became lame. And his name **was** Mephibosheth.*

Before the writer tells us what Rechab and Baanah did, he stops to introduce someone else. "Jonathan the son of Saul had a son stricken in the feet." When the news of Saul and Jonathan's death came from Jezreel, the boy was "five years old." His nurse grabbed him and ran, "and it was, as she hurried to flee, and he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

Why put this here? I believe it is to show that with Ish-bosheth gone, the heir from Jonathan's line, the line that stood closest to the throne, was a child who could not walk. No one in Saul's house could now stand against David. It also sets the stage for chapter 9, where David will keep his covenant with Jonathan by showing kindness to this boy. In a chapter full of treachery, God quietly plants a seed of mercy.

4:5-7 *And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and they came in the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, and he **was** lying **down for** the noonday rest. And they came there into the middle of the house, taking wheat, and they struck him in the belly; and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. And they came into the house, and he **was** lying on his bed in his bedchamber; and they struck him and killed him and removed his head; and they took his head and went **by** the way of the Arabah all the night.*

The two brothers "went, and they came in the heat of the day to the house of Ish-bosheth, and he was lying down for the noonday rest." In the heat of the Middle East, people rested during the hottest part of the day. The house would be quiet.

They came in "taking wheat," perhaps pretending to collect grain for their troops, which gave them a reason to be in the house. They found him "lying on his bed in his bedchamber; and they struck him and killed him and removed his head." Then they traveled "the way of the Arabah all the night," down the Jordan valley, to reach David.

This was a cowardly crime. Ish-bosheth was not in battle. He was asleep in his own bed, and the men who killed him were his own officers. The writer tells it plainly and quickly, without lingering on it, and so will I. The point is not the violence. The point is the treachery, and what David will do about it.

4:8 *And they brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David **at** Hebron, and they said to the king, "Look, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; and the LORD has given to my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and on his seed."*

They "brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron." Their words sound almost religious: "Look, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; and the LORD has given to my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and on his seed."

They put God's name on their murder. They called it the LORD's vengeance. People still do this. They do wrong and say God was behind it. But God never needs our sin to keep His promises. God had promised David the throne, and He would give it in His way and His time. He did not need assassins to help Him.

Notice too that they said Ish-bosheth "sought your life." That was really true of Saul, not of his son. They were twisting the facts to make their crime look like justice.

4:9-11 *And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and he said to them, "**As** the LORD lives, who has ransomed my soul from all trouble, when the one who told me, saying, 'Look, Saul has died,' and he was like a bearer of good news in his own eyes, I took hold of him and killed him in Ziklag, that **was** my giving to him **for his** good news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed! And now, shall I not require his blood from your hand and remove you from the earth?"*

David answered with an oath: "As the LORD lives, who has ransomed my soul from all trouble." To ransom means to set free by paying a price. David was saying, the LORD has always rescued me. I have never needed men like you to save me, and I do not need you now.

He reminded them of the Amalekite in Ziklag, the man who came thinking he was "a bearer of good news in his own eyes." David "took hold of him and killed him." If David punished a man who only claimed to have killed Saul, a king who had hunted him, how much more would he punish these men? "How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed!"

David called Ish-bosheth "a righteous man." He did not mean Ish-bosheth was a perfect man. He meant he was innocent of any crime that deserved death. He had done nothing to earn being murdered in his sleep. "And now, shall I not require his blood from your hand and remove you from the earth?"

God's law had said from the days of Noah that whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed (Genesis 9:6). The Law of Moses said no ransom could be taken for the life of a murderer (Numbers 35:31). David was not acting in revenge. He was acting as a king must act when innocent blood is shed.

4:12 *And David commanded the young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and their feet and hanged **them** by the pool in Hebron. And the head of Ish-bosheth they took, and they buried **it** in the tomb of Abner in Hebron.*

David gave the order, "and they killed them and cut off their hands and their feet and hanged them by the pool in Hebron." This is hard to read. In that time, cutting off the hands and feet of an executed criminal and hanging the body in a public place was a way of showing the whole nation what the crime had been and what it cost. The hands that had done the killing and the feet that had run with the head were put on display. It was a public warning. The Law allowed a body to be hung, but it had to be taken down and buried the same day (Deuteronomy 21:22-23), and we should assume David followed it.

This is a record of justice in an ancient kingdom. It is not a pattern for us. In the New Testament, God has given government the duty of punishing evil (Romans 13:4), but He calls each of us to love our enemies and leave vengeance to Him.

"And the head of Ish-bosheth they took, and they buried it in the tomb of Abner in Hebron." David gave Saul's son an honorable burial beside the general who had served him. Once again David honored the house of Saul even while God was moving the kingdom to him.

What do we learn from this chapter? The way to God's blessing is never through sin. David waited for the throne for years. He could have taken it by force many times. He refused, and he refused to let others take it for him by force. When God's promise finally came true in chapter 5, no one could say David had bloody hands in getting it. The same is true for us. God does not need us to cut corners or hurt people to keep His promises. He needs us to trust Him and wait for Him.

Chapter 4 Summary

When Ish-bosheth heard that Abner was dead, he lost heart and all Israel was afraid. Two of his raiding captains, Rechab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon of Beeroth in Benjamin, came to his house

at noon while he rested, killed him on his bed, cut off his head, and traveled all night to bring it to David at Hebron. The writer also tells us that Jonathan had a son, Mephibosheth, who became lame at five years old when his nurse dropped him as she fled. Rechab and Baanah told David that the LORD had avenged him on Saul's house. David swore by the LORD who had ransomed him from all trouble, reminded them that he had killed the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul, and declared that they must die for murdering a righteous man in his own bed. He had them executed and publicly displayed at the pool of Hebron, and he buried Ish-bosheth's head in Abner's tomb.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. How did Ish-bosheth and Israel react when they heard Abner was dead? (4:1)

2. Who were Rechab and Baanah, and how were they connected to Saul's house? (4:2-3)

3. What do we learn about Mephibosheth, and why might the writer mention him here? (4:4)

4. How did Rechab and Baanah describe what they had done when they brought the head to David? (4:8)

5. What did David say the LORD had done for him, and why did that matter in his answer? (4:9)

6. Why did David call Ish-bosheth "a righteous man"? (4:11)

7. How was David's response to Rechab and Baanah like his response to the Amalekite in chapter 1? (4:10; 1:14-16)

8. Rechab and Baanah used God's name to cover their sin. Have you ever seen someone, or been tempted yourself, to claim God was behind something wrong in order to excuse it?

9. David refused to take a shortcut to what God had promised. What shortcuts are you tempted to take?

10. In a dark chapter, God introduced a lame boy who would later receive kindness. Where have you seen God's mercy at work in a hard season of your life?

Chapter 5: David King over All Israel and Jerusalem Taken

Scripture

5:1-16 And all the tribes of Israel came to David ***at*** Hebron, and they spoke, saying, "Look, we ***are*** your bone and your flesh. Both yesterday and the day before, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will become ruler over Israel.'" And all the elders of Israel came to the king ***at*** Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David as king over Israel. David ***was*** thirty years old when he became king; he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah. And the king and his men went ***to*** Jerusalem against the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land; and he spoke to David, saying, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will turn you away," saying, "David will not come in here." And David captured the stronghold of Zion; it ***is*** the city of David. And David said on that day, "Whoever strikes a Jebusite, let him reach by the water shaft the lame and the blind, who are hated by the soul of David." Therefore they say, "***The*** blind and ***the*** lame will not come into the house." And David dwelt in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built all around, from the Millo and inward. And David went on, going on and becoming great, and the LORD God of armies ***was*** with him. And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and craftsmen of wood and craftsmen of wall stone; and they built a house for David. And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel. And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David. And these ***are*** the names of those born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua and Shobab and Nathan and Solomon, and Ibhar and Elishua and Nepheg and Japhia, and Elishama and Eliada and Eliphelet.

5:17-25 And the Philistines heard that they had anointed David as king over Israel, and all the Philistines went up to seek David; and David heard and went down to the stronghold. And the Philistines came and were spread out in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand." And David came to Baal-perazim, and David struck them down there, and he said, "The LORD has burst through my enemies before me, like a bursting out of waters." Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And they abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off. And the Philistines went up yet again and were spread out in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the LORD, and He said, "You shall not go up; go around behind them, and come at them from in front of ***the*** balsam trees. And let it be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall act decisively, for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines." And David did so, just as the LORD had commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines from Geba until you come ***to*** Gezer.

Chapter 5 Preview

At last the long wait is over. All the tribes of Israel come to David at Hebron and ask him to be their king. They remind him of what the LORD said: he would shepherd God's people. David makes a covenant with them, and they anoint him king over all Israel. He is thirty years old, and he will reign forty years.

David's first act as king of the whole nation is to take Jerusalem from the Jebusites, who boast that even the blind and the lame could keep him out. He takes the stronghold of Zion and makes it the city of David, the capital of Israel from then on. The king of Tyre builds him a palace, his family grows, and David knows that the LORD has set him on the throne for the sake of His people. When the Philistines come up to attack, David asks the LORD what to do, twice, and twice the LORD gives him victory.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-2 *And all the tribes of Israel came to David **at** Hebron, and they spoke, saying, "Look, we **are** your bone and your flesh. Both yesterday and the day before, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will become ruler over Israel.'"*

"All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron." With Abner and Ish-bosheth gone, the northern tribes had no leader. They came to David with three reasons for making him king.

First, family. "Look, we are your bone and your flesh." They were all one people, descendants of Jacob. The civil war had been a war between brothers.

Second, his record. "When Saul was king over us, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel." David had led Israel's armies in battle even under Saul (1 Samuel 18:5, 13-16). They knew him.

Third, and most important, God's call. The LORD had said to him, "You will shepherd My people Israel, and you will become ruler over Israel." A shepherd leads, feeds and protects his flock. David had been a shepherd boy, and now God made him the shepherd of a nation. This picture runs through the whole Bible. God Himself is the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23:1; 80:1), and Jesus calls Himself "the good shepherd" who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). The best king of Israel was a shepherd, and the King of kings is the Good Shepherd.

5:3 *And all the elders of Israel came to the king **at** Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David as king over Israel.*

"All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD." This covenant was an agreement between the king and the people, made in God's presence. The king promised to rule justly under God, and the people promised to follow him. Israel's king was never meant to be above God's law (Deuteronomy 17:18-20).

"And they anointed David as king over Israel." This is the third time David was anointed. First privately by Samuel in Bethlehem, then over Judah at Hebron, and now over all Israel. What God promised years before had come true. God is never late, even when we think He is slow.

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

"David was thirty years old when he became king; he reigned forty years." Thirty was the age when a man was considered ready for full service (compare Numbers 4:3). Joseph was thirty when he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 41:46), and Jesus was "about thirty years" old when He began His ministry (Luke 3:23).

David reigned "seven years and six months" in Hebron over Judah and "thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah" in Jerusalem. Most conservative scholars date David's reign about 1010 to 970 B.C. That would place his anointing over all Israel and the taking of Jerusalem about 1003 B.C. Jerusalem has been the center of the story of God's people ever since.

5:6-8 *And the king and his men went **to** Jerusalem against the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land; and he spoke to David, saying, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will turn you away," saying, "David will not come in here." And David captured the stronghold of Zion; it **is** the city of David. And David said on that day, "Whoever strikes a Jebusite, let him reach by the water shaft the lame and the blind, who are hated by the soul of David." Therefore they say, "**The** blind and **the** lame will not come into the house."*

Now David needed a capital. Hebron was in Judah, far to the south. If he ruled from there, the northern tribes might feel like outsiders. He chose a city on the border between Judah and Benjamin that belonged to neither tribe, because Israel had never taken it. That city was Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was held by "the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land," one of the peoples of Canaan. Judah and Benjamin had never been able to drive them out (Joshua 15:63; Judges 1:21). The city sat on a ridge with deep valleys on three sides, and it was so strong that the Jebusites mocked David: "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will turn you away." In other words, our city is so safe that our blind and lame could defend it.

They were wrong. "David captured the stronghold of Zion; it is the city of David." Zion was the name of the fortified hill. Later the name grew to mean the temple mount, then all of Jerusalem, and finally God's people and God's heavenly city (Psalm 2:6; Hebrews 12:22).

How did David take it? Verse 8 says, "Whoever strikes a Jebusite, let him reach by the water shaft." The city drew its water from a spring outside the wall through a tunnel. Many believe David's men climbed up that water shaft and got inside. First Chronicles 11:6 adds that Joab went up first and became commander of the army. Archaeologists have found water tunnels from the spring into the old city, but which one David's men used, if any, is still debated.

David also spoke of "the lame and the blind, who are hated by the soul of David." This was David turning the Jebusites' insult back on them. They had called their defenders the blind and the lame, so David used the same words for them. It was not a statement about disabled people. In chapter 9 David will welcome lame Mephibosheth to his own table. The saying "the blind and the lame will not come into the house" seems to have become a proverb that came from this day. Its exact meaning is not clear, and good teachers explain it in different ways.

5:9-10 *And David dwelt in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built all around, from the Millo and inward. And David went on, going on and becoming great, and the LORD God of armies **was** with him.*

"David dwelt in the stronghold and called it the city of David." He built it up "from the Millo and inward." The Millo was likely a filled-in terrace or a set of supporting walls on the hillside that made room for more buildings. The word comes from a Hebrew root meaning to fill.

"And David went on, going on and becoming great, and the LORD God of armies was with him." This is the secret of David's rise. It was not his skill or his army. It was God's presence. The title "the LORD of armies" (often the LORD of hosts in older Bibles) means that God commands all the armies of heaven and earth. With that God on his side, David could not fail as long as he walked with Him.

5:11-12 *And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and craftsmen of wood and craftsmen of wall stone; and they built a house for David. And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel.*

"Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and craftsmen." Tyre was a rich port city on the coast north of Israel, in what is now Lebanon. It was famous for trade and for cedar wood from the mountains of Lebanon. Hiram built David a palace. This was a sign that the nations now saw Israel as a real kingdom. Hiram would later help Solomon build the temple (1 Kings 5).

The writer may be telling this event by subject rather than in strict time order. Hiram was still king in Solomon's day, so some think he sent the builders later in David's reign. The writer groups these blessings together to show what God was doing.

"And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, and that He had exalted his kingdom for the sake of His people Israel." That is the right way for a leader to think. God did not make David king for David's sake. He did it "for the sake of His people." Any position God gives us, at work, at church, or at home, is given so we can serve others, not ourselves.

5:13-16 *And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David. And these **are** the names of those born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua and Shobab and Nathan and Solomon, and Ibhar and Elishua and Nepheg and Japhia, and Elishama and Eliada and Eliphelet.*

"David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem." Again Scripture tells us plainly what David did, without approving it. The Law had warned that the king "shall not multiply wives for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:17). David's growing harem would bring jealousy, rivalry and sin into his family, and Solomon would follow his father's pattern to his ruin (1 Kings 11:1-4).

Eleven sons born in Jerusalem are named. Two stand out. "Nathan and Solomon." Solomon would follow David on the throne, and through him the royal line came down to Joseph, the legal father of Jesus (Matthew 1:6-16). Through Nathan came the line of Mary, the mother of Jesus, according to many Bible teachers who read the genealogy in Luke that way (Luke 3:31). God was already preparing the family line of the Messiah, the Anointed One He had promised.

5:17-19 *And the Philistines heard that they had anointed David as king over Israel, and all the Philistines went up to seek David; and David heard and went down to the stronghold. And the Philistines came and were spread out in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You give them into my hand?" And the LORD said to David, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand."*

"The Philistines heard that they had anointed David as king over Israel." As long as Israel was divided, the Philistines were content. A united Israel under David was a threat. "All the Philistines went up to seek David." David "went down to the stronghold," likely a fortress he knew from his years in the wilderness.

The Philistines "were spread out in the valley of Rephaim," southwest of Jerusalem. Then David did what he had always done in his best moments. "David inquired of the LORD." He asked, "Shall I go up against the Philistines?" He did not assume that being king meant he no longer needed to ask. "Will You give them into my hand?" The LORD answered, "Go up, for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand."

5:20-21 *And David came to Baal-perazim, and David struck them down there, and he said, "The LORD has burst through my enemies before me, like a bursting out of waters." Therefore he called the name of that place Baal-perazim. And they abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.*

David attacked and won. He said, "The LORD has burst through my enemies before me, like a bursting out of waters." Picture a flood breaking through a dam. So David named the place "Baal-perazim," meaning master of breakthroughs, or lord of bursting out. David gave the credit to the LORD.

"And they abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off." The Philistines had brought their gods into battle, hoping for help. Their gods could not even save themselves. First Chronicles 14:12 adds that David ordered them burned, as the Law commanded

(Deuteronomy 7:5). Years earlier, the Philistines had carried off the ark of God (1 Samuel 4:11). Now Israel carried off the idols of the Philistines.

5:22-25 *And the Philistines went up yet again and were spread out in the valley of Rephaim. And David inquired of the LORD, and He said, "You shall not go up; go around behind them, and come at them from in front of **the** balsam trees. And let it be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall act decisively, for then the LORD has gone out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines." And David did so, just as the LORD had commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines from Geba until you come **to** Gezer.*

"The Philistines went up yet again." Another attack, in the same valley. Many leaders would have used the same plan that worked last time. But "David inquired of the LORD" again. This time God gave a different plan. "You shall not go up; go around behind them, and come at them from in front of the balsam trees."

Then God gave a signal. "When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then you shall act decisively, for then the LORD has gone out before you." The sound in the treetops was the sound of the LORD's army moving ahead of David. David's job was to wait for it, then move.

"And David did so, just as the LORD had commanded him." The Philistines were struck down "from Geba until you come to Gezer," driven all the way back toward their own land.

There is a simple lesson here. Yesterday's victory does not mean we stop asking God today. The same enemy, in the same valley, called for a new word from God. David did not lean on his experience. He leaned on the LORD. We should ask God for guidance every time, not only the first time.

Chapter 5 Summary

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, reminding him that they were his own flesh, that he had led them in battle, and that the LORD had said he would shepherd His people. David made a covenant with the elders before the LORD, and they anointed him king over all Israel. He was thirty years old and reigned forty years, seven and a half in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. David took the stronghold of Zion from the Jebusites, who had mocked him, and named it the city of David. He grew greater, for the LORD God of armies was with him. Hiram of Tyre built him a house, and David knew that the LORD had established his kingdom for the sake of His people. More wives and children were born to him in Jerusalem, including Nathan and Solomon. When the Philistines came against him, David inquired of the LORD and defeated them at Baal-perazim, carrying off their idols. When they came again, he inquired again, and the LORD told him to circle behind them and wait for the sound of marching in the balsam trees. David obeyed and struck them down from Geba to Gezer.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. What three reasons did the tribes give for making David king? (5:1-2)

2. How old was David when he became king, and how long did he reign in Hebron and in Jerusalem? (5:4-5)

3. What did the Jebusites say to David, and what happened? (5:6-7)

4. What does the writer say was the reason David kept growing greater? (5:10)

5. What did David understand about why God had made him king? (5:12)

6. Which two sons born in Jerusalem are important to the family line of Jesus? (5:14; Matthew 1:6; Luke 3:31)

7. How did the LORD's answer differ the second time the Philistines attacked, and what does that teach us? (5:19, 23-24)

8. God called David to shepherd His people. Who has God put in your care to lead, feed or protect?

9. David knew God exalted him "for the sake of His people." How can you use the place God has given you to serve others?

10. Is there an area of your life where you are leaning on what worked before instead of asking God for guidance today?

Chapter 6: The Ark Brought Up to Jerusalem

Scripture

6:1-11 And David again gathered every chosen ***man*** in Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went, and all the people who ***were*** with him, from Baalah of Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, over which ***the*** name is called, the name of the LORD of armies, who sits ***on*** the cherubim. And they made the ark of God ride on a new cart, and they carried it from the house of Abinadab, which ***was*** on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, ***were*** leading the new cart. And they carried it from the house of Abinadab, which ***was*** on the hill, with the ark of God; and Ahio ***was*** walking before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel ***were*** playing before the LORD with all ***kinds of instruments of*** fir wood, and with lyres and with harps and with tambourines and with rattles and with cymbals. And they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah stretched out ***his hand*** to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen had stumbled. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for the error, and he died there beside the ark of God. And David was angry because the LORD had broken out ***with*** a breaking out against Uzzah; and he called that place Perez-uzzah until this day. And David feared the LORD on that day, and he said, "How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?" And David was not willing to turn aside the ark of the LORD to himself, to the city of David; and David turned it aside ***to*** the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained ***in*** the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.

6:12-23 And it was told to King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that ***belongs*** to him, for the sake of the ark of God." And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom ***to*** the city of David with rejoicing. And it was, when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had stepped six steps, and he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David ***was*** dancing with all ***his*** strength before the LORD, and David ***was*** girded ***with*** an ephod of linen. And David and all the house of Israel ***were*** bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of a trumpet. And it was, ***as*** the ark of the LORD came ***into*** the city of David, and Michal the daughter of Saul looked down through the window, and she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart. And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place in the midst of the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered up burnt offerings before the LORD, and peace offerings. And David finished offering up the burnt offering and the peace offerings, and he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of armies. And he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, from man even to woman, to each one cake of bread and one date cake and one raisin cake. And all the people went, each to his house. And David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and she said, "How the king of Israel has honored himself this day, who has uncovered himself this day in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants, as one of the worthless ***men*** shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "***It was*** before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his household, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; and I will play before the LORD. And I will demean myself still more than this, and I will be lowly in my own eyes; and with the

maidservants of whom you have spoken, with them I will be honored." And to Michal the daughter of Saul there was no child until the day of her death.

Chapter 6 Preview

David has a capital. Now he wants God at the center of it. He gathers thirty thousand chosen men and goes to bring the ark of God up to Jerusalem. The ark has sat in a private house for many years, mostly forgotten since the days of Saul. The procession is joyful, with music and dancing. But the ark is riding on a new cart, not carried the way God commanded. When the oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out to steady it, and God strikes him dead. The celebration stops. David is angry, then afraid, and he leaves the ark at the house of Obed-edom.

Three months later David hears that God has blessed Obed-edom's whole house. He tries again, this time God's way, and the ark comes into Jerusalem with sacrifices, shouting and David dancing with all his might before the LORD. His wife Michal watches from a window and despises him. The chapter shows us two things side by side: the holiness of God, which must never be treated lightly, and the joy of worship, which must never be held back out of pride.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *And David again gathered every chosen **man** in Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went, and all the people who **were** with him, from Baalah of Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, over which **the** name is called, the name of the LORD of armies, who sits **on** the cherubim.*

"David again gathered every chosen man in Israel, thirty thousand." This was a national event. David wanted the whole nation to share in bringing God's presence to the new capital.

They went to "Baalah of Judah," another name for Kiriath-jearim (Joshua 15:9; 1 Chronicles 13:6), about eight or nine miles west of Jerusalem. The ark had been there for many years, since the Philistines sent it back (1 Samuel 6:21 to 7:2). Saul had shown little interest in it (1 Chronicles 13:3).

What was the ark? The ark of the covenant was a wooden chest covered with gold, about three and three quarter feet long and two and a quarter feet wide and high (Exodus 25:10-22). It held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. Its lid was called the mercy seat, and two golden cherubim, a kind of angel, stood on it with their wings spread over it. It was the most holy object in Israel. God said He would meet with His people above the mercy seat, between the cherubim.

That is why the writer describes it with such weight: "the ark of God, over which the name is called, the name of the LORD of armies, who sits on the cherubim." The ark was the place of God's throne on earth. It was not a lucky charm. It stood for the presence of the holy God among His people.

6:3-5 *And they made the ark of God ride on a new cart, and they carried it from the house of Abinadab, which **was** on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, **were** leading the new cart. And they carried it from the house of Abinadab, which **was** on the hill, with the ark of God; and Ahio **was** walking before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel **were** playing before the LORD with all **kinds of instruments of** fir wood, and with lyres and with harps and with tambourines and with rattles and with cymbals.*

"They made the ark of God ride on a new cart." A new cart sounds respectful. It was the best they had. But it was not what God had said. The Law commanded that the ark be carried on poles on the shoulders of the Levites from the family of Kohath (Exodus 25:14; Numbers 4:15; 7:9). Even they were not to touch the holy things, "and die" (Numbers 4:15). The Philistines had once sent the ark back on a new cart (1 Samuel 6:7-8). David and his men copied the Philistines instead of reading God's Word.

"Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were leading the new cart." These men had grown up with the ark in their house. Familiarity may have made them careless.

"And David and all the house of Israel were playing before the LORD" with every kind of instrument: harps, lyres, tambourines, rattles and cymbals. Their hearts were full of joy. Their worship was loud and sincere. But sincere is not the same as obedient.

6:6-7 *And they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah stretched out **his hand** to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen had stumbled. And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for the error, and he died there beside the ark of God.*

"They came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah stretched out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen had stumbled." A threshing floor was a flat, hard area where grain was beaten out. The oxen stumbled, the cart lurched, and Uzzah reached out to keep the ark from falling.

"And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for the error, and he died there beside the ark of God."

This is one of the hardest verses in the book. Uzzah seems to have meant well. Why would God strike him dead? I want to answer honestly and carefully.

First, God had spoken plainly. The Law said that no one, not even the Levites who carried it, was to touch the holy things, or they would die (Numbers 4:15). This was not a hidden rule. It had been in the Law for over four hundred years. Israel had already seen what happened when men treated the ark lightly at Beth-shemesh (1 Samuel 6:19-20).

Second, the whole trip was wrong from the start. The ark should never have been on a cart. If it had been carried on the shoulders of the Levites, there would have been no oxen to stumble. David later admitted this: "the LORD our God broke out against us, for we did not seek Him according to the ordinance" (1 Chronicles 15:13).

Third, Uzzah's act showed a view of God that was too small. He treated the ark as though it needed his protection, as though the holy God could not keep His own throne from falling. The ark did not need Uzzah's hand. What God asked for was obedience to His Word.

Fourth, God was teaching all Israel at the start of a new era. The ark was coming to the capital, and God's people needed to learn from the first day that He is holy and must be worshiped His way. God did the same when the tabernacle was first set up, with Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3), and when the church was young, with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). At each new beginning, God showed His holiness in a way no one would forget.

Do we know anything about Uzzah's eternal state? No. Scripture does not tell us, and we should not guess. God judged an act, in public, to teach a nation. That is all we are told.

What does this mean for us? God has not changed. He is still holy. "Our God is also a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). But we can now come near to Him in a way Uzzah never could, because Jesus Christ opened the way by His blood (Hebrews 10:19-22). The answer to God's holiness is not to stay far away. It is to come near on the terms He has given, through His Son.

6:8-9 *And David was angry because the LORD had broken out **with** a breaking out against Uzzah; and he called that place Perez-uzzah until this day. And David feared the LORD on that day, and he said, "How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?"*

"David was angry because the LORD had broken out with a breaking out against Uzzah." The same word was used in 5:20, when the LORD broke out against the Philistines at Baal-perazim. Now He had broken out against His own people. David called the place "Perez-uzzah," meaning the breaking out against Uzzah.

David's anger is honest. He had meant well. He was hurt and confused. Then the anger turned to fear: "David feared the LORD on that day," and he asked, "How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?" That was a good question. How can a holy God dwell among sinful people? The whole Bible answers that question, and the final answer is the cross.

It is not wrong to bring our confusion and even our anger to God, as David did. But we must not stop there. David's anger led to fear, and that fear led him back to God's Word to learn how to do it right.

6:10-11 *And David was not willing to turn aside the ark of the LORD to himself, to the city of David; and David turned it aside **to** the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. And the ark of the LORD remained **in** the house of Obed-edom the Gittite three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household.*

"David was not willing to turn aside the ark of the LORD to himself." Instead he took it to "the house of Obed-edom the Gittite." A Gittite was usually a man from Gath, a Philistine city, though some think he was a Levite from the Levite town of Gath-rimmon (Joshua 21:24-25). Obed-edom is later listed among the Levites who served at the ark (1 Chronicles 15:18, 24).

"And the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his household." The same ark that brought death to Uzzah brought blessing to Obed-edom. The difference was not in the ark. It was in how God's presence was received. God is the same holy God to everyone, but His presence is blessing to those who honor Him.

6:12-15 *And it was told to King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that **belongs** to him, for the sake of the ark of God." And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom **to** the city of David with rejoicing. And it was, when the bearers of the ark of the LORD had stepped six steps, and he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. And David **was** dancing with all **his** strength before the LORD, and David **was** girded **with** an ephod of linen. And David and all the house of Israel **were** bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of a trumpet.*

When David heard that "the LORD has blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, for the sake of the ark of God," he went and brought it up "with rejoicing." This time he did it God's way. "The bearers of the ark" carried it. First Chronicles 15 tells us David had studied the Law, called the Levites, and had them carry it "on their shoulder with the poles" (1 Chronicles 15:15).

After they had gone "six steps," David "sacrificed an ox and a fatling." These sacrifices thanked God and sought His favor as the ark began to move. David was taking no chances with God's holiness.

"And David was dancing with all his strength before the LORD." He was wearing "an ephod of linen," a simple linen garment worn by priests and those serving before the LORD (1 Samuel 2:18). He had laid aside his royal robes. "And David and all the house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of a trumpet."

Look at the balance in this chapter. God's holiness did not kill David's joy. It shaped it. David still danced, still shouted, still made music. But now he did it in obedience. Reverence and joy are not enemies. They belong together. True worship is both.

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

"Michal the daughter of Saul looked down through the window, and she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart."

Notice the name. Not Michal the wife of David, but "Michal the daughter of Saul." The writer is telling us something. She saw things as her father did. Saul had never cared much for the ark, and he cared a great deal about his own dignity. Michal looked down on David from above, both from the window and in her heart. She was watching from a distance instead of joining in.

6:17-19 *And they brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place in the midst of the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered up burnt offerings before the LORD, and peace offerings. And David finished offering up the burnt offering and the peace offerings, and he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of armies. And he distributed to all the people, to all the multitude of Israel, from man even to woman, to each one cake of bread and one date cake and one raisin cake. And all the people went, each to his house.*

"They brought in the ark of the LORD and set it in its place in the midst of the tent which David had pitched for it." The old tabernacle of Moses was at Gibeon at this time (1 Chronicles 16:39; 2 Chronicles 1:3-4). David made a new tent in Jerusalem for the ark until a temple could be built.

"David offered up burnt offerings before the LORD, and peace offerings." A burnt offering was burned whole on the altar as an act of full surrender and worship. A peace offering was shared. Part was burned to God, and the rest was eaten by the worshipers in fellowship with Him (Leviticus 3; 7:11-15). It celebrated peace with God.

Then David "blessed the people in the name of the LORD of armies" and gave every person, "from man even to woman," bread, a date cake and a raisin cake. Everyone went home with something to celebrate with. This was a feast for the whole nation.

6:20-23 *And David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and she said, "How the king of Israel has honored himself this day, who has uncovered himself this day in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants, as one of the worthless **men** shamelessly uncovers himself!" And David said to Michal, "**It was** before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his household, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel; and I will play before the LORD. And I will demean myself still more than this, and I will be lowly in my own eyes; and with the maidservants of whom you have spoken, with them I will be honored." And to Michal the daughter of Saul there was no child until the day of her death.*

"David returned to bless his household." He came home full of joy to share the blessing with his family. Michal met him at the door with scorn. "How the king of Israel has honored himself this day, who has uncovered himself this day in the eyes of the maidservants of his servants." She accused him of acting like a fool and showing himself in public like "one of the worthless men." The linen ephod was a short garment, and in his dancing David may have shown more than a king's robes would have. But Michal's real problem was not his clothing. It was that the king had made himself lowly.

David's answer was firm. "It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his household." He reminded her that God had chosen him over Saul. "And I will play before the LORD." Then he said, "I will demean myself still more than this, and I will be lowly in my own eyes." David cared more about God's honor than his own. And he said the maidservants she sneered at would honor him for it.

"And to Michal the daughter of Saul there was no child until the day of her death." Scripture does not say whether this was a judgment from God, or whether David no longer lived with her as his

wife, or both. Either way, it meant that no child of Saul's line through Michal would ever sit on David's throne.

Here is the question for us. When we see others worship God with joy, are we like Michal, watching from the window with a critical heart? Or are we willing to look foolish to the world for the sake of the Lord? Jesus humbled Himself far more than David did. He left heaven's glory and became a servant, even to death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8). We should never be too proud to worship Him.

Chapter 6 Summary

David gathered thirty thousand men to bring the ark of God from the house of Abinadab at Baalah of Judah. They carried it on a new cart, with Uzzah and Ahio leading it and all Israel celebrating with music. At the threshing floor of Nacon the oxen stumbled, Uzzah took hold of the ark, and God struck him dead for his error. David was angry and afraid, and he left the ark in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, where the LORD blessed his household for three months. Then David brought the ark up to the city of David with joy, this time carried by its bearers, with sacrifices after six steps, and David dancing with all his strength in a linen ephod. The ark was placed in the tent David had pitched, and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, blessed the people and gave food to all. Michal, the daughter of Saul, despised David for dancing and mocked him for uncovering himself. David answered that he danced before the LORD who chose him over her father and that he would be even more lowly. Michal had no child to the day of her death.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. What was the ark of God, and why does the writer describe it with the words "who sits on the cherubim"? (6:2; Exodus 25:10-22)

2. How did David first try to move the ark, and how had God commanded it to be carried? (6:3; Numbers 4:15; 7:9)

3. What happened to Uzzah, and what reasons does Scripture give us for it? (6:6-7; 1 Chronicles 15:13)

4. How did David respond to Uzzah's death? (6:8-10)

5. What happened at the house of Obed-edom? (6:11-12)

6. What did David do differently the second time? (6:13-15; 1 Chronicles 15:15)

7. Why did Michal despise David, and how did he answer her? (6:16, 20-22)

8. Uzzah's story shows that sincere is not the same as obedient. Are there ways you worship or serve God your way instead of His way?

9. David's fear of the LORD did not stop his joy. How do reverence and joy fit together in your own worship?

10. Have you ever watched others worship from "the window" with a critical heart? What would it look like to humble yourself before the Lord as David did?

Chapter 7: The LORD's Covenant with David

Scripture

7:1-17 And it was, when the king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest all around from all his enemies, and the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I ***am*** dwelling in a house of cedar, and the ark of God ***is*** dwelling in the midst of the curtain." And Nathan said to the king, "All that ***is*** in your heart, go, do, for the LORD ***is*** with you." And it was in that night, and the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go, and say to My servant, to David, 'Thus says the LORD: Are you the one who will build for Me a house for My dwelling? For I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt even to this day, and I have been going about in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all ***places*** where I have gone about among all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built for Me a house of cedar?"' And now, thus you shall say to My servant, to David, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: I took you from the pasture, from after the flock, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones who ***are*** on the earth. And I will appoint a place for My people, for Israel, and I will plant it, and it will dwell in its place and not be disturbed again; and the sons of injustice will not again afflict it as at the first, and from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. And the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, and I will raise up your seed after you, who will come out from your inward parts, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with a rod of men and with strokes of the sons of mankind; and My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I removed ***it*** from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever.'" According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.

7:18-29 And King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who ***am*** I, O Lord GOD, and what ***is*** my house, that You have brought me this far? And this was yet small in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, and You have also spoken concerning the house of Your servant for a long time to come; and this ***is*** the law of mankind, O Lord GOD. And what more shall David speak to You? And You, You know Your servant, O Lord GOD. For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness, to make Your servant know ***it***. Therefore You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God except You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who ***is*** like Your people, like Israel, one nation on the earth, whom God went to ransom for Himself as a people, and to make for Himself a name, and to do for you the greatness and awesome ***deeds*** for Your land, before Your people whom You ransomed for Yourself from Egypt, ***from*** nations and their gods? And You established for Yourself Your people Israel ***to be*** Yours as a people forever; and You, O LORD, have become God to them. And now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house,

establish forever, and do just as You have spoken. And let Your name be great forever, saying, 'The LORD of armies ***is*** God over Israel'; and the house of Your servant David will be established before You. For You, O LORD of armies, God of Israel, have uncovered the ear of Your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' Therefore Your servant has found his heart to pray this prayer to You. And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have spoken this good to Your servant. And now, be pleased, and bless the house of Your servant, to be forever before You; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with Your blessing the house of Your servant will be blessed forever."

Chapter 7 Preview

This is the most important chapter in 2 Samuel, and one of the most important in the whole Old Testament. David is settled in his palace, and his enemies are at rest. He looks at his house of cedar and then at the tent where the ark of God sits, and he wants to build the LORD a house, a temple. The prophet Nathan tells him to go ahead. But that night the LORD sends Nathan back with a different message. David will not build God a house. God will build David a house.

The house God promises is not made of stone. It is a family line, a dynasty. God promises David a son who will build the temple, a kingdom that will be established, and a throne that will last forever. This promise is called the Davidic covenant. Every later prophet builds on it, and the New Testament opens by calling Jesus "son of David" (Matthew 1:1). The chapter ends with David's humble prayer of thanks: "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" As we study it, we will see how this promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and how it will be fulfilled when He reigns on the throne of David.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-3 *And it was, when the king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest all around from all his enemies, and the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I **am** dwelling in a house of cedar, and the ark of God **is** dwelling in the midst of the curtain." And Nathan said to the king, "All that **is** in your heart, go, do, for the LORD **is** with you."*

"The king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest all around from all his enemies." This chapter likely comes after some of the wars in chapter 8, since the writer often groups events by subject. The point is that David was at peace. Rest from enemies was what God had promised Israel in the land (Deuteronomy 12:10-11), and God had said that when He gave them rest, He would choose a place for His name to dwell.

David saw the contrast. "See now, I am dwelling in a house of cedar, and the ark of God is dwelling in the midst of the curtain." Cedar was the finest wood. David lived in comfort, and the ark of God sat in a tent. That bothered him. His desire came from a good heart. He wanted God honored above himself.

"Nathan the prophet" appears here for the first time. A prophet was a man God called to speak His words to the people and to the king. Nathan answered right away, "All that is in your heart, go, do, for the LORD is with you." It sounded like good advice. David was a godly man with a good idea.

But Nathan spoke before he had heard from God. Even good men can give their own opinion when they should wait on the LORD.

7:4-7 *And it was in that night, and the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying, "Go, and say to My servant, to David, 'Thus says the LORD: Are you the one who will build for Me a house for My dwelling? For I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt even to this day, and I have been going about in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all* ***places*** *where I have gone about among all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built for Me a house of cedar?"'*

"And it was in that night, and the word of the LORD came to Nathan." God corrected His prophet before morning. And notice how God refers to David: "My servant." God was not angry with David. He honored his desire. But He had a different plan.

"Are you the one who will build for Me a house for My dwelling?" God then reminded David that He had never asked for a house. "I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought up the sons of Israel from Egypt even to this day, and I have been going about in a tent and in a tabernacle." The tabernacle was the portable tent of worship God had commanded Moses to build. God had moved with His people wherever they went. In all those years He never asked any of Israel's leaders, "Why have you not built for Me a house of cedar?"

God was teaching David something important. God does not need us to build Him anything. Solomon himself would later say that heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain God, much less a house built by men (1 Kings 8:27). Before God would receive a house from David, He wanted David to understand that everything good comes from God to us, not from us to God.

First Chronicles 22:8 gives another reason David could not build the temple: "you have shed much blood on the earth before Me." David was a man of war. The temple would be built by a man of peace. The name Solomon is related to the Hebrew word shalom, peace.

7:8-9 *And now, thus you shall say to My servant, to David, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: I took you from the pasture, from after the flock, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you went, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones who* ***are*** *on the earth.*

Now God turned to what He had done for David. "I took you from the pasture, from after the flock, to be ruler over My people, over Israel." David had been the youngest son of Jesse, out with the sheep, so overlooked that his own father did not bring him in when Samuel came (1 Samuel 16:11). God took him from there.

"I have been with you wherever you went, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you." Every victory David had won was God's doing. Then came the first promise: "I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones who are on the earth." This echoes what God promised Abraham: "make your name great" (Genesis 12:2). The covenant with David builds on the

covenant with Abraham. Three thousand years later, David's name is still known around the world. God kept His word.

7:10-11 *And I will appoint a place for My people, for Israel, and I will plant it, and it will dwell in its place and not be disturbed again; and the sons of injustice will not again afflict it as at the first, and from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies. And the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you.*

Next God promised His people a secure home. "I will appoint a place for My people, for Israel, and I will plant it, and it will dwell in its place and not be disturbed again; and the sons of injustice will not again afflict it as at the first." To plant a people is to settle them so they put down roots and stay.

Was this promise fulfilled in David's day? Partly. Israel had peace under David and Solomon. But later Israel was carried into exile, first by Assyria and then by Babylon, and in A.D. 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by Rome. The words "not be disturbed again" look beyond any time in Israel's history so far. The prophets saw the same thing. God promised that He would plant Israel in their land, "and they will not be plucked up again from upon their land" (Amos 9:15). I believe this points to the day when Christ returns and Israel dwells safely in the land under the rule of the Son of David (Ezekiel 37:24-25).

Then comes the turning point of the chapter: "And the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make a house for you." David wanted to build God a house. God says, No, I will build you a house. The Hebrew word for house, bayit, can mean a building, a household, or a dynasty, a family line of kings. God was playing on the word. David would not build a house of cedar for God. God would build a house of kings for David.

7:12-13 *When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, and I will raise up your seed after you, who will come out from your inward parts, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, and I will raise up your seed after you, who will come out from your inward parts, and I will establish his kingdom." The word seed means offspring, a descendant. To come from "your inward parts" means from David's own body. This would be David's own son.

"He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." The first fulfillment is Solomon. He was born to David after this, became king after David died, and built the temple in Jerusalem. Solomon himself said so at the temple's dedication (1 Kings 8:20).

But look at the word "forever." Solomon's kingdom did not last forever. After his death the kingdom split in two (1 Kings 12). His temple was burned by Babylon in 586 B.C. The last king of David's line to sit on the throne in Jerusalem was Zedekiah, and he was taken in chains to Babylon (2 Kings 25:7). For centuries after that, no son of David reigned. Did God's promise fail?

No. The promise was bigger than Solomon. It reached all the way to a Son of David who would reign forever. The prophets kept pointing to Him. Isaiah said there would be no end to His

kingdom, "on the throne of David and over His kingdom, to establish it and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness from now and until forever" (Isaiah 9:7). Jeremiah said, "I will raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king" (Jeremiah 23:5).

7:14-15 *I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with a rod of men and with strokes of the sons of mankind; and My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I removed* ***it*** *from Saul, whom I removed from before you.*

"I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me." This is a remarkable promise. In the ancient world, a king might be called the son of his god. God took that idea and made it a promise of a real relationship. God would treat the son of David as His own son, with a father's love and a father's discipline.

"When he commits iniquity, I will correct him with a rod of men and with strokes of the sons of mankind." For Solomon and the kings after him, this meant God would discipline them when they sinned, through human enemies and hardship. And He did. The books of Kings are full of it.

"And My steadfast love will not depart from him, as I removed it from Saul." Here is the heart of the covenant. Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love. God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to another family. He promised never to do that to David's family. Kings in David's line would be disciplined, but the line itself would never be cast off. This covenant is unconditional. It rests on God's promise, not on the kings' faithfulness. The kings' sin could bring God's rod, but it could not cancel His word.

Psalm 89 says the same thing. God said, "I will not profane My covenant, and what has gone out from My lips I will not change" (Psalm 89:34).

Now, how does verse 14 point to Christ? The writer of Hebrews quotes it. To show that Jesus is greater than the angels, he asks to which of the angels God ever said, "I will be to Him a Father, and He will be to Me a Son" (Hebrews 1:5). Hebrews applies this verse directly to Jesus. In Solomon it was true as an adopted relationship. In Jesus it is true in the fullest sense. He is the eternal Son of God, who also became the son of David by birth (Romans 1:3).

What about the words "when he commits iniquity"? Jesus never sinned (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22). That part of the promise applied to Solomon and the other kings, not to Christ. A prophecy can have a near fulfillment and a far one, and not every detail of the near one belongs to the far one. Some teachers add that Jesus did bear the rod and the strokes, not for His own sin, but for ours, when He was struck in our place (Isaiah 53:5). That is a beautiful thought, but the plain sense of the verse is about the sins of David's sons.

7:16-17 *And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever.'" According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David.*

"And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever." Three things are promised forever: a house (a dynasty), a kingdom (a realm to rule), and a throne (the right to reign). God repeats "forever" three times in verses 13 to 16.

Here is how this promise is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary, he said of her Son, "the Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father, and He will reign over the house of Jacob to the ages, and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). Gabriel was quoting 2 Samuel 7. The throne, the house, the kingdom, the forever: all of it was given to Jesus. Matthew begins his Gospel with the words "Jesus Christ, son of David" (Matthew 1:1). The crowds shouted "Hosanna to the Son of David!" when He rode into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:9). On the day of Pentecost Peter said that David, "being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn to him with an oath that out of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit upon his throne," spoke of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:30-31). Jesus rose from the dead, and He lives forever. That is how David's throne can be established forever. Its King cannot die again.

So the promise has been partly fulfilled. Jesus is the Son of David. He rose from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33-36; Psalm 110:1). But has He yet taken the throne of David, reigning "over the house of Jacob" as Gabriel said? Here Bible teachers differ.

I believe, with the dispensational premillennial reading of Scripture, that the throne of David is a real throne, over a real Israel, in a real Jerusalem, and that Jesus will sit on it when He returns. Today He sits on His Father's throne in heaven (Revelation 3:21). When He comes again in glory, "He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matthew 25:31), and He will reign over the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6), with Israel restored and gathered in her land. The prophets saw this. Hosea said that in the last days Israel would "seek the LORD their God and David their king" (Hosea 3:5). Ezekiel said, "My servant David will be king over them, and there shall be one shepherd for all of them" (Ezekiel 37:24), a promise of the Messiah from David's line. The disciples asked the risen Jesus, "Lord, are You at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). He did not tell them the idea was wrong. He told them the timing belonged to the Father. And Paul assures us that God has not cast off His people Israel, "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God will keep every word He spoke to David, exactly and completely.

Other Bible teachers, often called amillennial, believe Christ is reigning on David's throne now from heaven, and that the promise is being fulfilled spiritually in the church and will be completed in the new heavens and new earth, with no future earthly thousand-year reign. Those who hold that view love the Lord and take this promise seriously too. But I believe the plain reading of the promise, and of the prophets who build on it, points to a future reign of Christ on earth from Jerusalem, and I believe Gabriel's words to Mary will be fulfilled as plainly as his words about her Son's birth were.

"According to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David." Nathan, who had spoken too quickly the day before, now spoke exactly what God told him. A good prophet, and a good teacher, is willing to admit he was wrong and then say exactly what God said.

7:18-19 *And King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said, "Who **am** I, O Lord GOD, and what **is** my house, that You have brought me this far? And this was yet small in Your eyes, O Lord GOD, and You have also spoken concerning the house of Your servant for a long time to come; and this **is** the law of mankind, O Lord GOD.*

"King David went in and sat before the LORD." He likely went into the tent where the ark was. He sat, perhaps on the ground, in a posture of quiet and humble worship. And he prayed.

"Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?" When the SLB prints "Lord GOD," it stands for two Hebrew words: Adonai, which means Lord or Master, and God's personal name YHWH. David was saying, You are my Master, and You are the LORD, the covenant God of Israel.

David did not begin by thanking God for what he deserved. His first words were "Who am I?" He was amazed at grace. God had already brought him from the sheepfold to the throne. "And this was yet small in Your eyes." As if all that were not enough, God had now spoken about David's house "for a long time to come."

Then David added, "and this is the law of mankind, O Lord GOD." This phrase is hard to translate, and good teachers take it in different ways. Some think David was saying, Is this the way You usually deal with men? In other words, this kind of grace is beyond anything human. Others take it to mean that this promise is a charter or instruction for all mankind, since the blessing of David's Son would reach the whole world. Both readings fit the Bible's larger story. Either way, David knew he had been given something far bigger than himself.

7:20-21 *And what more shall David speak to You? And You, You know Your servant, O Lord GOD. For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness, to make Your servant know **it**.*

"And what more shall David speak to You? And You, You know Your servant, O Lord GOD." David ran out of words. What do you say when God has given you everything? He did not need to explain himself. God already knew his heart, his weaknesses and his gratitude.

"For the sake of Your word, and according to Your own heart, You have done all this greatness." David knew why God had blessed him. It was not because David was great. It was because of God's word, His promise, and God's own heart. Grace comes from who God is, not from who we are. That is true for every believer. God saves us "according to His own purpose and grace" (2 Timothy 1:9), not according to our works.

7:22-24 *Therefore You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God except You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who **is** like Your people, like Israel, one nation on the earth, whom God went to ransom for Himself as a people, and to make for Himself a name, and to do for you the greatness and awesome **deeds** for Your land, before Your people whom You ransomed for Yourself from Egypt, **from** nations and their gods? And You established for Yourself Your people Israel **to be** Yours as a people forever; and You, O LORD, have become God to them.*

David's thanks turned to praise. "Therefore You are great, O Lord GOD; for there is none like You, and there is no God except You." The more we see of God's grace, the greater He looks to us.

Then David praised God for Israel. "Who is like Your people, like Israel, one nation on the earth, whom God went to ransom for Himself as a people?" God had redeemed Israel from Egypt, driving out nations and their gods before them. David saw his own blessing as part of God's larger work with His people.

"And You established for Yourself Your people Israel to be Yours as a people forever; and You, O LORD, have become God to them." Note again the word "forever." David believed God's choice of Israel was permanent. So did Paul, centuries later (Romans 11:1-2, 29). God's promise to David and God's promise to Israel stand or fall together, and both stand.

7:25-27 *And now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish forever, and do just as You have spoken. And let Your name be great forever, saying, 'The LORD of armies **is** God over Israel'; and the house of Your servant David will be established before You. For You, O LORD of armies, God of Israel, have uncovered the ear of Your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' Therefore Your servant has found his heart to pray this prayer to You.*

Now David asked God to do what He said. "And now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish forever, and do just as You have spoken."

Is that strange? Why ask God to do what He has already promised? Because that is what faith does. Prayer is not trying to talk God into something. It is taking hold of what God has promised and asking Him to do it. David's prayer was built on God's word. Our best prayers are too.

David's deepest desire was for God's glory: "And let Your name be great forever." He wanted people to say, "The LORD of armies is God over Israel." The great name God promised David (7:9) mattered less to David than God's own name.

"Therefore Your servant has found his heart to pray this prayer to You." David would never have dared to ask for a forever dynasty. But God had promised it first, so David found the courage to pray for it. God's promises give us boldness to pray.

7:28-29 *And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth, and You have spoken this good to Your servant. And now, be pleased, and bless the house of Your servant, to be forever before You; for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with Your blessing the house of Your servant will be blessed forever."*

"And now, O Lord GOD, You are God, and Your words are truth." Everything rests on this. If God's words are truth, then His promise is as good as done. David closed his prayer by asking God to bless his house "to be forever before You," and he ended with confidence: "for You, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with Your blessing the house of Your servant will be blessed forever."

David's house has been blessed forever, in the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Everyone who believes in Him becomes part of the blessing God promised David. Paul preached that the resurrection of Jesus was God giving "the holy things of David, the sure things" (Acts 13:34). The promise is sure because the King is alive.

Chapter 7 Summary

When David was at rest in his house of cedar, he told Nathan the prophet he wanted to build a house for the ark of God, and Nathan told him to go ahead. That night the LORD sent Nathan back to tell David that God had never asked for a house and that David was not the one to build it. God reminded David that He had taken him from the sheep to be ruler over Israel, and He promised him a great name, a secure place for Israel, and rest from his enemies. Then God declared that He would make a house for David. He would raise up David's own son, who would build a house for God's name, and God would establish the throne of his kingdom forever. God would be a father to him and he would be a son to God. When he sinned God would discipline him, but God's steadfast love would never depart from him as it had from Saul. David's house, kingdom and throne would be established forever. David went in, sat before the LORD, and prayed in humble amazement, praising God as great and without equal, thanking Him for redeeming Israel to be His people forever, and asking Him to do as He had spoken, so that His name would be great and David's house blessed forever. This covenant is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of God, who will reign on David's throne forever.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What did David want to do, and why? (7:1-2)

2. What did Nathan say at first, and what did the LORD tell Nathan that night? (7:3-7)

3. What had God already done for David, and what did He promise to make for him? (7:8-11)

4. What does the word "house" mean in verse 11 compared with verse 5?

5. Which parts of God's promise were fulfilled in Solomon, and which reach beyond Solomon? (7:12-16; 1 Kings 8:20)

6. How do Luke 1:32-33 and Hebrews 1:5 show that this promise is fulfilled in Jesus?

7. What did David say about himself and about God in his prayer? (7:18-22, 28)

8. David asked God to do what God had already promised (7:25). How can you build your prayers on God's promises?

9. David wanted to do something for God, but God wanted to do something for David first. Are you trying to give God something before you have received what He offers you in Christ?

10. David asked, "Who am I?" When you think of how far God has brought you, what is your answer?

Chapter 8: David's Victories and His Officials

Scripture

8:1-18 And it was after this, and David struck the Philistines and subdued them; and David took Metheg-ammah from the hand of the Philistines. And he struck Moab, and he measured them with the line, making them lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive. And Moab became servants to David, bearers of tribute. And David struck Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his hand at the river Euphrates. And David captured from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen and twenty thousand men on foot; and David hamstrung all the chariotry, and he left of it one hundred chariots. And Syria ***of*** Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, and David struck down among Syria twenty-two thousand men. And David put garrisons in Syria ***of*** Damascus, and Syria became servants to David, bearers of tribute. And the LORD saved David wherever he went. And David took the shields of gold which were on the servants of Hadadezer and brought them ***to*** Jerusalem. And from Betah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took very much bronze. And Toi king of Hamath heard that David had struck all the army of Hadadezer, and Toi sent Joram his son to King David to ask him of ***his*** welfare and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and struck him; for Hadadezer was a man of wars ***with*** Toi. And in his hand were articles of silver and articles of gold and articles of bronze. Also these King David consecrated to the LORD, with the silver and the gold which he had consecrated from all the nations which he had subdued: from Syria and from Moab and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines and from Amalek, and from the plunder of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. And David made a name ***for himself*** when he returned from striking Syria in the Valley of Salt, eighteen thousand. And he put garrisons in Edom; in all Edom he put garrisons, and all Edom became servants to David. And the LORD saved David wherever he went. And David reigned over all Israel; and David was doing justice and righteousness for all his people. And Joab the son of Zeruiah ***was*** over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud ***was*** recorder, and Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar ***were*** priests, and Seraiah ***was*** scribe, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Kerethites and the Pelethites; and the sons of David were priests.

Chapter 8 Preview

In chapter 7 God promised David rest from all his enemies and a great name. Chapter 8 shows God keeping that promise. In a quick summary, the writer lists David's wars on every side: the Philistines to the west, Moab to the east, the Aramean kingdoms of Zobah and Damascus to the north, and Edom to the south. Twice the writer tells us why David won: "the LORD saved David wherever he went."

David does not keep the gold and bronze for himself. He dedicates it to the LORD, and it will later be used to build the temple. The chapter ends with a list of David's officials and a short line that sums up his reign at its best: David reigned over all Israel, "doing justice and righteousness for all his people." This is the high point of David's kingdom. The chapters after this will show how quickly it can be shaken.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1 *And it was after this, and David struck the Philistines and subdued them; and David took Metheg-ammah from the hand of the Philistines.*

"After this" is a general link, not a strict time marker. The writer is gathering David's victories into one report. Some of these wars likely happened before chapter 7.

First came the Philistines, Israel's old enemy in the west. "David struck the Philistines and subdued them." For more than a century the Philistines had oppressed Israel. Samson fought them, Saul died fighting them. David finally broke their power. He took "Metheg-ammah," which means bridle of the mother city. First Chronicles 18:1 says David took "Gath and its daughter towns," so many believe this is a way of saying he took control of Gath, the leading Philistine city. The very town Goliath came from now answered to David.

8:2 *And he struck Moab, and he measured them with the line, making them lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive. And Moab became servants to David, bearers of tribute.*

"And he struck Moab." Moab lay east of the Dead Sea. This is surprising, because David had a family tie to Moab. His great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabite (Ruth 4:13-17), and David had once left his parents in the care of the king of Moab (1 Samuel 22:3-4). Something must have changed. Scripture does not tell us what. Some ancient Jewish writers guessed that the king of Moab had killed David's parents, but that is only a guess.

Then comes a hard verse. David "measured them with the line, making them lie down on the ground; and he measured two lines to put to death, and one full line to keep alive." The captured soldiers of Moab were made to lie in rows, and two out of every three were put to death. This was a harsh practice of war in that day, and the Bible records it without excusing or praising it. It tells us what happened. We should not read it as a pattern for anything we do.

It may also be a fulfillment of Balaam's prophecy that a scepter from Israel would "shatter the corners of Moab" (Numbers 24:17). Moab became "servants to David, bearers of tribute," that is, they paid David a regular tax as a conquered people.

8:3-4 *And David struck Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his hand at the river Euphrates. And David captured from him one thousand seven hundred horsemen and twenty thousand men on foot; and David hamstrung all the chariotry, and he left of it one hundred chariots.*

Next David turned north. "David struck Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah." Zobah was a strong Aramean kingdom north of Damascus. Aram is the region we call Syria today. Hadadezer was on his way "to restore his hand at the river Euphrates," that is, to set up his power in the far north. Some think it was David who was going to set up his power there. The Hebrew could be read either way. Either way, God had promised Abraham the land as far as "the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18), and under David Israel's influence reached toward it for the first time.

David captured "one thousand seven hundred horsemen and twenty thousand men on foot." First Chronicles 18:4 gives "a thousand chariots and seven thousand horsemen." The numbers differ. The most common explanation is that one copy suffered an error in copying numbers over the centuries, since Hebrew numbers were easy to confuse. The main events are the same.

"David hamstrung all the chariotry," which means he cut the leg tendons of the chariot horses so they could not be used in war, keeping only enough for "one hundred chariots." Why? The Law told Israel's king not to "multiply horses for himself" (Deuteronomy 17:16). Israel was to trust in the LORD, not in a powerful chariot army. David wrote, "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). Solomon later ignored this and built up huge stables of horses (1 Kings 10:26-29).

8:5-8 *And Syria **of** Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, and David struck down among Syria twenty-two thousand men. And David put garrisons in Syria **of** Damascus, and Syria became servants to David, bearers of tribute. And the LORD saved David wherever he went. And David took the shields of gold which were on the servants of Hadadezer and brought them **to** Jerusalem. And from Betah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took very much bronze.*

"Syria of Damascus came to help Hadadezer." The Arameans of Damascus came to save their ally, and David "struck down among Syria twenty-two thousand men." Then he put garrisons, groups of soldiers, in Damascus, and "Syria became servants to David, bearers of tribute."

Then comes the key line: "And the LORD saved David wherever he went." The victories were God's. This is God doing what He promised in 7:9, cutting off David's enemies before him.

David brought back "the shields of gold" from Hadadezer's servants and took "very much bronze" from his cities. First Chronicles 18:8 adds that Solomon later used this bronze for the great bronze basin, the pillars and the bronze articles of the temple. David could not build the temple, but he gathered what would be needed for it.

8:9-10 *And Toi king of Hamath heard that David had struck all the army of Hadadezer, and Toi sent Joram his son to King David to ask him of **his** welfare and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and struck him; for Hadadezer was a man of wars **with** Toi. And in his hand were articles of silver and articles of gold and articles of bronze.*

"Toi king of Hamath" heard about Hadadezer's defeat. Hamath was a kingdom even farther north, on the Orontes River. Hadadezer had been "a man of wars with Toi," a constant enemy. So Toi sent his son Joram to David "to ask him of his welfare and to bless him," with gifts of silver, gold and bronze. In plain terms, Toi made a treaty of friendship with the new power in the region. David's name was becoming great, just as God said.

8:11-12 *Also these King David consecrated to the LORD, with the silver and the gold which he had consecrated from all the nations which he had subdued: from Syria and from Moab and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines and from Amalek, and from the plunder of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah.*

"Also these King David consecrated to the LORD." To consecrate is to set apart for God. David did not fill his own treasury with the spoils of war. He gave the silver and gold to the LORD, along with what he had taken "from Syria and from Moab and from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines and from Amalek."

This is a good model for us. When God gives us success, we should give Him the glory and give back to Him from what He gave. David recognized that it all came from God in the first place. He later said, "everything is from You, and from Your hand we have given to You" (1 Chronicles 29:14).

8:13-14 *And David made a name **for himself** when he returned from striking Syria in the Valley of Salt, eighteen thousand. And he put garrisons in Edom; in all Edom he put garrisons, and all Edom became servants to David. And the LORD saved David wherever he went.*

"David made a name for himself when he returned from striking Syria" in the Valley of Salt, killing "eighteen thousand." The Valley of Salt was near the Dead Sea, in the region of Edom. That is why many copies and translations read Edom here instead of Syria. In Hebrew the two names, Aram (Syria) and Edom, look very much alike. First Chronicles 18:12 says Abishai struck down Edom there, and the title of Psalm 60 says Joab struck Edom there. All three accounts fit if David was king over the campaign, Abishai and Joab were his commanders, and the numbers counted different parts of the battle.

"And he put garrisons in Edom; in all Edom he put garrisons." Edom, the nation descended from Esau, became servants to David. This fulfilled what God told Rebekah before Jacob and Esau were born, that the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:23).

Again: "And the LORD saved David wherever he went." The writer says it twice in this chapter (8:6, 14) so that we will not miss it.

8:15 *And David reigned over all Israel; and David was doing justice and righteousness for all his people.*

"And David reigned over all Israel; and David was doing justice and righteousness for all his people." This is what a king is supposed to be. Justice means giving each person what is right. Righteousness means doing what agrees with God's standard. David ruled fairly, and the people knew it.

This line also points ahead. God said of the coming Branch of David, "He will do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). David at his best is a small picture of the perfect King to come. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne" (Psalm 89:14). Jesus will rule with a justice that never fails.

8:16-18 *And Joab the son of Zeruiah **was** over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud **was** recorder, and Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar **were** priests, and Seraiah **was** scribe, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Kerethites and the Pelethites; and the sons of David were priests.*

The chapter ends with a list of David's cabinet. "Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army." For all his faults, Joab stayed in command. "Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder." The recorder kept the official records and may have served as a kind of royal spokesman.

"Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests." Zadok became high priest under Solomon, and his family served as priests for centuries. Abiathar was the priest who escaped Saul's massacre at Nob and joined David (1 Samuel 22:20). Here his son Ahimelech, named after his grandfather, is serving alongside Zadok. "Seraiah was scribe," the royal secretary.

"Benaiah the son of Jehoiada" commanded "the Kerethites and the Pelethites." These were foreign soldiers, likely from Crete and from the Philistine coast, who served as David's personal bodyguard. Benaiah would later become commander of the army under Solomon.

"And the sons of David were priests." This line is puzzling, since only the descendants of Aaron could serve as priests at the altar. First Chronicles 18:17 says the sons of David were "the first at the side of the king," that is, chief officials. Many believe the Hebrew word here, kohen, which normally means priest, was used in this case for a royal officer or adviser. Others think David's sons held some honorary role in worship. Scripture does not explain further, and I do not believe it means they offered sacrifices at the altar.

A government needs good people in the right places. David did not try to do everything himself. He set up leaders over the army, the records, worship, writing and his own protection. The church also needs many members using different gifts (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

Chapter 8 Summary

God gave David victory on every side. David subdued the Philistines and took Metheg-ammah. He struck Moab, putting two thirds of the captives to death, and Moab paid him tribute. He defeated Hadadezer king of Zobah, captured his horsemen and foot soldiers, and hamstrung the chariot horses except for a hundred chariots. When the Arameans of Damascus came to help, David struck them down and put garrisons in Damascus. He brought gold shields and bronze to Jerusalem. Toi king of Hamath sent his son with gifts to bless David. David consecrated to the LORD all the silver and gold he took from the nations. He made a name for himself in the Valley of Salt and put garrisons throughout Edom. The LORD saved David wherever he went. David reigned over all Israel with justice and righteousness, with Joab over the army, Jehoshaphat as recorder, Zadok and Ahimelech as priests, Seraiah as scribe, Benaiah over the Kerethites and Pelethites, and his sons as chief officials.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Which nations did David defeat in this chapter, and in what directions did they lie from Israel? (8:1-14)

2. What phrase does the writer repeat twice to explain David's victories? (8:6, 14)

3. Why did David hamstring the chariot horses? (8:4; Deuteronomy 17:16; Psalm 20:7)

4. What did David do with the silver, gold and bronze he captured? (8:7-8, 11-12)

5. How does this chapter show God keeping the promises He made in 7:9-11?

6. How does verse 15 describe David's reign, and how does it point to Christ? (8:15; Jeremiah 23:5)

7. Who were David's main officials, and what did each one do? (8:16-18)

8. David trusted the LORD instead of horses and chariots. What horses and chariots are you tempted to trust instead of God?

9. David consecrated his spoils to the LORD. How do you give back to God from the success He has given you?

10. David did not lead alone but set people in their places. What gift has God given you to serve His people?

Chapter 9: David's Kindness to Mephibosheth

Scripture

9:1-13 And David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may do steadfast love with him for the sake of Jonathan?" And the house of Saul ***had*** a servant, and his name ***was*** Ziba; and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "***Are*** you Ziba?" And he said, "Your servant." And the king said, "***Is there*** not still anyone of the house of Saul, that I may do the steadfast love of God with him?" And Ziba said to the king, "***There is*** still a son of Jonathan, stricken in ***the*** feet." And the king said to him, "Where ***is*** he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Look, he ***is in*** the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar." And King David sent and took him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul came to David, and he fell on his face and bowed down. And David said, "Mephibosheth." And he said, "Look, your servant." And David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will certainly do steadfast love with you for the sake of Jonathan your father, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father; and you, you will eat bread at my table continually." And he bowed down and said, "What ***is*** your servant, that you have turned to the dead dog who ***is*** like me?" And the king called Ziba the servant of Saul and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his household I have given to the son of your master. And you shall work the land for him, you and your sons and your servants, and you shall bring ***in***, and it will be bread for the son of your master, and he will eat it. And Mephibosheth the son of your master will eat bread continually at my table." And Ziba ***had*** fifteen sons and twenty servants. And Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." And Mephibosheth ***was*** eating at my table like one of the sons of the king. And Mephibosheth ***had*** a young son, and his name ***was*** Mica. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba ***were*** servants to Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth ***was*** dwelling in Jerusalem, for he ***was*** eating continually at the table of the king; and he ***was*** lame ***in*** both his feet.

Chapter 9 Preview

David's kingdom is secure. His enemies are beaten. Now, at the height of his power, he remembers a promise. Years before, Jonathan had asked David to show steadfast love to his family forever (1 Samuel 20:14-17). So David asks, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul?" A servant named Ziba tells him there is a son of Jonathan, lame in both feet, living far away in a place called Lo-debar.

David sends for him. Mephibosheth comes in fear, falls on his face, and calls himself a dead dog. In that day a new king often killed the family of the old one. Instead David gives him back all of Saul's land, assigns Ziba and his sons to farm it for him, and gives Mephibosheth a seat at the king's table for the rest of his life, like one of the king's own sons. This short chapter is one of the most beautiful pictures of grace in the Old Testament.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1 *And David said, "Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may do steadfast love with him for the sake of Jonathan?"*

"Is there still anyone who is left of the house of Saul, that I may do steadfast love with him for the sake of Jonathan?" David's question did not come out of nowhere. Jonathan had made David promise: "you shall not cut off your steadfast love from my house forever" (1 Samuel 20:15). David swore to it.

Many years had passed. David was now king, with no one to make him keep his word. Most kings would have forgotten. David remembered. Steadfast love, hesed, is love that keeps its promises even when there is nothing to gain. Notice also that David went looking. He did not wait for someone from Saul's house to come begging. Grace takes the first step.

9:2-4 *And the house of Saul **had** a servant, and his name **was** Ziba; and they called him to David. And the king said to him, "**Are** you Ziba?" And he said, "Your servant." And the king said, "**Is there** not still anyone of the house of Saul, that I may do the steadfast love of God with him?" And Ziba said to the king, "**There is** still a son of Jonathan, stricken in **the** feet." And the king said to him, "Where **is** he?" And Ziba said to the king, "Look, he **is in** the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar."*

Ziba was "a servant" of Saul's house, likely the manager of Saul's estate. David asked him again, "Is there not still anyone of the house of Saul, that I may do the steadfast love of God with him?"

"The steadfast love of God." David wanted to show Mephibosheth the kind of love God shows. It is love that is undeserved, generous and faithful. David had received that kind of love from God, and he wanted to pass it on.

Ziba answered, "There is still a son of Jonathan, stricken in the feet." Ziba mentioned the boy's lameness first. Perhaps he was saying, he is no threat to you, or perhaps, he is not worth your trouble. David did not ask about his condition. He asked, "Where is he?"

He was "in the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar." Lo-debar was east of the Jordan, in Gilead, not far from Mahanaim where Ish-bosheth had ruled. The name may mean no pasture, or a place of nothing. Machir was a wealthy man who would later help David himself when he fled from Absalom (17:27-29). Mephibosheth was living in hiding, far from the court, in a borrowed house.

9:5-6 *And King David sent and took him from the house of Machir the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar. And Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul came to David, and he fell on his face and bowed down. And David said, "Mephibosheth." And he said, "Look, your servant."*

"King David sent and took him." Imagine the scene in Machir's house when the king's messengers arrived. Mephibosheth must have been terrified. He was the grandson of the king who had tried to kill David. In the ancient world, a new king often wiped out the family of the last

one to remove any rival. Mephibosheth had every reason to think he was being brought to his death.

He came before David, "and he fell on his face and bowed down." For a man lame in both feet, even getting down on the ground would have been hard. Then David spoke his name: "Mephibosheth." Not a title, not his family name, but his own name. And Mephibosheth answered, "Look, your servant."

9:7 *And David said to him, "Do not be afraid, for I will certainly do steadfast love with you for the sake of Jonathan your father, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father; and you, you will eat bread at my table continually."*

David's first words to him were, "Do not be afraid." Then came three gifts.

First, kindness: "I will certainly do steadfast love with you for the sake of Jonathan your father." Mephibosheth had done nothing to earn this. It was for his father's sake, because of a covenant made before he could remember.

Second, an inheritance: "I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father." Saul's family lands at Gibeah had likely been taken over by the crown or by others after Saul died. David gave them all back.

Third, a place at the table: "and you, you will eat bread at my table continually." To eat at the king's table was a great honor. It meant protection, provision and a place in the king's household. Mephibosheth would never be hungry again, and he would never have to hide again.

9:8 *And he bowed down and said, "What **is** your servant, that you have turned to the dead dog who **is** like me?"*

Mephibosheth could hardly believe it. "What is your servant, that you have turned to the dead dog who is like me?" A dog in that culture was not a pet. Dogs were scavengers, unclean and despised. A dead dog was the lowest thing there was. Mephibosheth saw himself as worthless, lame, the heir of a fallen house, with nothing to offer.

And he was right that he had nothing to offer. That is what makes grace grace. Grace is not given to people who deserve it. It is given to people who do not.

Here the story becomes a picture of what God has done for us. We were like Mephibosheth. We were born into a fallen family, the family of Adam. We were lame, unable to walk in God's ways on our own. We lived far from the King, in a land of nothing. We may even have feared Him. But the King sought us out. He called us by name. He said, "Do not be afraid." And He did it, not for our sake, but for the sake of another, because of a covenant. God shows us kindness for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). And He gives us an inheritance and a seat at His table forever.

The New Testament does not name Mephibosheth as a picture of Christ's grace, so I hold the details lightly. But the pattern of grace here is the same pattern the Gospel shows us.

9:9-11 *And the king called Ziba the servant of Saul and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his household I have given to the son of your master. And you shall work the land for him, you and your sons and your servants, and you shall bring **in**, and it will be bread for the son of your master, and he will eat it. And Mephibosheth the son of your master will eat bread continually at my table." And Ziba **had** fifteen sons and twenty servants. And Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." And Mephibosheth **was** eating at my table like one of the sons of the king.*

David called Ziba and made it official. "All that belonged to Saul and to all his household I have given to the son of your master." Ziba, with his "fifteen sons and twenty servants," was to farm the land and bring in the harvest so that Mephibosheth's household would have food. Mephibosheth himself would "eat bread continually at my table."

Ziba answered, "According to all that my lord the king commands his servant, so your servant will do." Ziba had a large household, and now he worked land that belonged to someone else. Keep an eye on Ziba. In chapter 16 he will come to David with a story about Mephibosheth, and in chapter 19 we will have to decide whether to believe him.

Then the writer adds a striking line: "And Mephibosheth was eating at my table like one of the sons of the king." The words "my table" seem to slip into David's own voice, as if the writer is quoting the king. And note the phrase "like one of the sons of the king." Mephibosheth was not treated as a guest or a charity case. He was treated as family. That is what God does for those who come to Him through Christ. He does not make us servants only. He makes us sons and daughters (Galatians 4:4-7).

9:12-13 *And Mephibosheth **had** a young son, and his name **was** Mica. And all who dwelt in the house of Ziba **were** servants to Mephibosheth. And Mephibosheth **was** dwelling in Jerusalem, for he **was** eating continually at the table of the king; and he **was** lame **in** both his feet.*

"And Mephibosheth had a young son, and his name was Mica." The line of Jonathan would go on. First Chronicles 8:34-40 traces Mica's descendants for many generations. David's kindness reached not only Mephibosheth but his children after him.

"All who dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants to Mephibosheth." The man who had lived in a borrowed house now had a household serving him.

The chapter ends with two facts side by side: "for he was eating continually at the table of the king; and he was lame in both his feet." Mephibosheth was still lame. Grace did not change his feet. But at the king's table, when he sat down, his lameness was hidden under the table. He was honored, not for what he could do, but because the king loved him.

That is a picture of the Christian life. We are still weak. We still stumble. But we sit at the King's table because of His love, not because of our strength. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

Chapter 9 Summary

With his kingdom secure, David asked whether anyone was left of Saul's house to whom he could show steadfast love for Jonathan's sake. Ziba, a servant of Saul's house, told him of Jonathan's son, lame in his feet, living in the house of Machir in Lo-debar. David sent for him. Mephibosheth came and fell on his face before the king. David told him not to be afraid, promised to show him steadfast love for Jonathan's sake, restored to him all the land of Saul, and gave him a place at the king's table continually. Mephibosheth called himself a dead dog, amazed at such kindness. David ordered Ziba, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, to farm the land for Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. He had a young son named Mica, and he lived in Jerusalem, eating always at the king's table, though he was lame in both feet.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. What did David ask, and why did he want to show kindness to Saul's house? (9:1; 1 Samuel 20:14-17)

2. What did Ziba tell David about Jonathan's son, and where was he living? (9:3-4)

3. Why might Mephibosheth have been afraid when David sent for him? (9:5-7)

4. What three things did David give Mephibosheth? (9:7)

5. How did Mephibosheth describe himself, and what does that show about how he saw himself? (9:8)

6. What does it mean that Mephibosheth ate at the king's table "like one of the sons of the king"? (9:11)

7. How is David's kindness to Mephibosheth for Jonathan's sake like God's kindness to us for Christ's sake? (Romans 5:8; Galatians 4:4-7)

8. David kept a promise long after anyone could make him. Is there a promise you need to keep?

9. Mephibosheth called himself a dead dog. How does God's grace answer the way you sometimes see yourself?

10. Is there someone, perhaps from a family or group you once had trouble with, to whom you could show "the steadfast love of God"?

Chapter 10: War with the Ammonites and Syria

Scripture

10:1-8 And it was after this, and the king of the sons of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. And David said, "I will do steadfast love with Hanun the son of Nahash, just as his father did steadfast love with me." And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants concerning his father. And the servants of David came ***into*** the land of the sons of Ammon. And the leaders of the sons of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, "Is David honoring your father in your eyes because he has sent comforters to you? Has not David sent his servants to you in order to search out the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?" And Hanun took the servants of David and shaved off half of their beard and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their buttocks, and sent them away. And they told David, and he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly humiliated. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beard grows back, and return." And the sons of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David; and the sons of Ammon sent and hired Syria ***of*** Beth-rehob and Syria ***of*** Zobah, twenty thousand foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah ***with*** one thousand men, and the men of Tob, twelve thousand men. And David heard, and he sent Joab and all the army, the mighty men. And the sons of Ammon went out and drew up ***for*** battle at the entrance of the gate; and Syria ***of*** Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah ***were*** by themselves in the field.

10:9-19 And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him, in front and behind; and he chose from all the chosen ***men*** of Israel, and he drew ***them*** up to meet Syria. And the rest of the people he put into the hand of Abishai his brother, and he drew ***them*** up to meet the sons of Ammon. And he said, "If Syria is stronger than I, then you shall be salvation for me; and if the sons of Ammon are stronger than you, then I will come to save you. Be strong, and let us show ourselves strong for our people and for the cities of our God; and the LORD will do what ***is*** good in His eyes." And Joab drew near, and the people who ***were*** with him, for battle against Syria, and they fled from before him. And the sons of Ammon saw that Syria had fled, and they fled from before Abishai and went ***into*** the city. And Joab returned from against the sons of Ammon and came ***to*** Jerusalem. And Syria saw that it was defeated before Israel, and they gathered themselves together. And Hadadezer sent and brought out Syria that ***was*** beyond the River; and they came ***to*** Helam, and Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer ***was*** before them. And it was told to David, and he gathered all Israel and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. And Syria drew up to meet David, and they fought with him. And Syria fled from before Israel, and David killed of Syria seven hundred chariot ***crews*** and forty thousand horsemen; and he struck down Shobach the commander of its army, and he died there. And all the kings, the servants of Hadadezer, saw that they were defeated before Israel, and they made peace with Israel and served them. And Syria was afraid to save the sons of Ammon again.

Chapter 10 Preview

In chapter 9 David showed kindness and it was received with grateful tears. In chapter 10 he shows kindness and it is thrown back in his face. The king of the Ammonites dies, and David sends men to comfort his son Hanun. Hanun's advisers convince him that David's men are spies.

So Hanun shames them, shaving off half their beards and cutting their robes short, and sends them home.

Knowing David will respond, the Ammonites hire a large army of Arameans from the north. Joab finds himself caught between two armies, one in front and one behind. He splits his forces with his brother Abishai, encourages them to be strong and leave the outcome to the LORD, and wins. When the Arameans regroup with even more troops, David himself leads Israel across the Jordan and defeats them. This chapter also sets the stage for chapter 11, because the war with Ammon is still going on when David stays home from battle in the spring.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-2 *And it was after this, and the king of the sons of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place. And David said, "I will do steadfast love with Hanun the son of Nahash, just as his father did steadfast love with me." And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants concerning his father. And the servants of David came* ***into*** *the land of the sons of Ammon.*

"The king of the sons of Ammon died, and Hanun his son reigned in his place." The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan, north of Moab, with their capital at Rabbah (modern Amman, in Jordan). Hanun's father was Nahash. Early in Saul's reign Nahash had threatened to gouge out the right eye of every man of Jabesh-gilead (1 Samuel 11:1-2). He was Saul's enemy, and that may be why he was friendly to David.

David said, "I will do steadfast love with Hanun the son of Nahash, just as his father did steadfast love with me." We are not told what kindness Nahash showed David. Perhaps he helped David during his years running from Saul. Whatever it was, David remembered it. Once again, David's word is hesed, loyal love. He sent servants "to comfort him by the hand of his servants concerning his father." It was a kind act, the kind of thing a good neighbor does when a family loses a father.

10:3 *And the leaders of the sons of Ammon said to Hanun their lord, "Is David honoring your father in your eyes because he has sent comforters to you? Has not David sent his servants to you in order to search out the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?"*

But Hanun's leaders did not see it that way. "Is David honoring your father in your eyes because he has sent comforters to you? Has not David sent his servants to you in order to search out the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it?"

Their suspicion is understandable. David had just conquered Moab, Edom and Syria. A neighbor might well wonder if Ammon was next. But they were wrong, and their wrong advice would cost them their kingdom. Hanun listened to suspicious counselors instead of judging David by what he actually did.

Bad advice is dangerous for anyone in charge. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, would later lose most of his kingdom by listening to the wrong advisers (1 Kings 12:8-16). We should be careful about whose voices we listen to, especially when they tell us to assume the worst about others.

10:4-5 *And Hanun took the servants of David and shaved off half of their beard and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their buttocks, and sent them away. And they told David, and he sent to meet them, for the men were greatly humiliated. And the king said, "Remain at Jericho until your beard grows back, and return."*

"Hanun took the servants of David and shaved off half of their beard and cut off their garments in the middle as far as their buttocks, and sent them away."

In that culture, a man's beard was a sign of his dignity and manhood. To shave off half of it was a deep insult. Cutting their robes short left them exposed in public. This was not only an insult to the men. It was an insult to David, who sent them, and to Israel. Insulting a king's messengers was the same as insulting the king himself. Jesus said the same thing about His own messengers: whoever rejects them rejects Him (Luke 10:16).

David's response to his men was kind. "He sent to meet them, for the men were greatly humiliated." He did not make them walk into Jerusalem in shame. "Remain at Jericho until your beard grows back, and return." Jericho was the first town they would reach after crossing the Jordan. David gave them time to heal before they came home. A good leader protects the dignity of his people.

10:6-8 *And the sons of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David; and the sons of Ammon sent and hired Syria **of** Beth-rehob and Syria **of** Zobah, twenty thousand foot soldiers, and the king of Maacah **with** one thousand men, and the men of Tob, twelve thousand men. And David heard, and he sent Joab and all the army, the mighty men. And the sons of Ammon went out and drew up **for** battle at the entrance of the gate; and Syria **of** Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah **were** by themselves in the field.*

"The sons of Ammon saw that they had made themselves odious to David." Odious means hateful, like a bad smell. They knew they had gone too far. Instead of apologizing, they prepared for war. They "hired Syria of Beth-rehob and Syria of Zobah, twenty thousand foot soldiers," along with men from Maacah and Tob. First Chronicles 19:6 says they paid a thousand talents of silver, a huge sum.

This is how sin often grows. Hanun's first wrong was suspicion. His second was the insult. His third was to refuse to make it right, and to spend a fortune to defend his pride instead.

David "sent Joab and all the army, the mighty men." The Ammonites drew up at "the entrance of the gate" of their city, while the hired Arameans stood "by themselves in the field." It was a trap. Joab would face the Ammonites in front of him and the Arameans behind.

10:9-12 *And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him, in front and behind; and he chose from all the chosen **men** of Israel, and he drew **them** up to meet Syria. And the rest of the people he put into the hand of Abishai his brother, and he drew **them** up to meet the sons of Ammon. And he said, "If Syria is stronger than I, then you shall be salvation for me; and if the sons of Ammon are stronger than you, then I will come to save you. Be strong, and let us show ourselves strong for our people and for the cities of our God; and the LORD will do what **is** good in His eyes."*

"Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him, in front and behind." He was surrounded. Joab did what a good general does. He picked the best of Israel's soldiers and led them against the Arameans, the stronger force. He put the rest under "Abishai his brother" to face the Ammonites.

Then he gave a plan of mutual help: "If Syria is stronger than I, then you shall be salvation for me; and if the sons of Ammon are stronger than you, then I will come to save you." Two brothers, back to back, each ready to help the other.

Then came words of faith: "Be strong, and let us show ourselves strong for our people and for the cities of our God; and the LORD will do what is good in His eyes."

This is one of Joab's finest moments. He was not a godly man in many ways, but here he spoke wisely. He called the men to do their part with courage, and he left the outcome to God. That is the right balance for us too. We fight hard and work hard, but we trust God with the result. We do our best and say, "the LORD will do what is good in His eyes."

10:13-14 *And Joab drew near, and the people who **were** with him, for battle against Syria, and they fled from before him. And the sons of Ammon saw that Syria had fled, and they fled from before Abishai and went **into** the city. And Joab returned from against the sons of Ammon and came **to** Jerusalem.*

"Joab drew near, and the people who were with him, for battle against Syria, and they fled from before him." The hired soldiers had no stomach for the fight. When the Ammonites saw their allies running, "they fled from before Abishai and went into the city."

Joab returned to Jerusalem. He did not lay siege to Rabbah yet, likely because the season for war was ending. That siege will come in the spring, in 11:1.

10:15-19 *And Syria saw that it was defeated before Israel, and they gathered themselves together. And Hadadezer sent and brought out Syria that **was** beyond the River; and they came **to** Helam, and Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer **was** before them. And it was told to David, and he gathered all Israel and crossed the Jordan and came to Helam. And Syria drew up to meet David, and they fought with him. And Syria fled from before Israel, and David killed of Syria seven hundred chariot **crews** and forty thousand horsemen; and he struck down Shobach the commander of its army, and he died there. And all the kings, the servants of Hadadezer, saw that they were defeated before Israel, and they made peace with Israel and served them. And Syria was afraid to save the sons of Ammon again.*

"Syria saw that it was defeated before Israel, and they gathered themselves together." The Arameans were not finished. Hadadezer, whom David had already beaten (8:3-8), brought out

more troops "that was beyond the River," from the Euphrates region. They gathered at Helam, east of the Jordan, under "Shobach the commander of the army of Hadadezer."

This time David himself "gathered all Israel and crossed the Jordan." The battle was decisive. David killed "seven hundred chariot crews and forty thousand horsemen" and struck down Shobach. First Chronicles 19:18 gives seven thousand charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers. As in chapter 8, the most likely explanation is a copying error in the numbers, or a difference in how the troops were counted.

"All the kings, the servants of Hadadezer, saw that they were defeated before Israel, and they made peace with Israel and served them. And Syria was afraid to save the sons of Ammon again." The northern kingdoms now served David. Ammon stood alone.

This chapter shows God continuing to keep His promise to give David rest from all his enemies (7:11). But it also leaves one war unfinished. The Ammonites are still in their city. And the next chapter opens in the spring, the season when kings went out to war, with David staying home. The greatest danger to David was not the armies of Syria. It was waiting for him on the roof of his own palace.

Chapter 10 Summary

When Nahash king of Ammon died and his son Hanun became king, David sent servants to comfort him, wanting to return the kindness Nahash had shown him. Hanun's leaders told him David's men were spies, so Hanun shaved off half their beards, cut their garments short, and sent them away in shame. David had the men wait at Jericho until their beards grew back. The Ammonites, knowing they had made themselves hateful to David, hired Aramean troops from Beth-rehob, Zobah, Maacah and Tob. Joab, caught between the Ammonites at the city gate and the Arameans in the field, chose the best men to face Syria and put the rest under Abishai to face Ammon, promising mutual help and leaving the outcome to the LORD. The Arameans fled from Joab, and the Ammonites fled into their city. When Hadadezer brought more Arameans from beyond the Euphrates to Helam, David led all Israel across the Jordan and defeated them, killing their commander Shobach. The kings who served Hadadezer made peace with Israel and served them, and Syria would no longer help Ammon.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. Why did David send servants to Hanun? (10:2)

2. What did Hanun's leaders tell him, and what did Hanun do to David's servants? (10:3-4)

3. How did David care for his humiliated servants? (10:5)

4. Instead of apologizing, what did the Ammonites do? (10:6)

5. How did Joab plan to fight when he was surrounded? (10:9-11)

6. What did Joab say about doing their part and about the LORD's part? (10:12)

7. How did the war with Syria end, and what does this chapter set up for chapter 11? (10:17-19; 11:1)

8. Hanun listened to suspicious advisers. Whose voices do you listen to when you are tempted to assume the worst about someone?

9. When you have wronged someone, are you more like Hanun, defending your pride, or are you quick to make it right?

10. Joab said, "the LORD will do what is good in His eyes." What situation do you need to work hard at and then leave in God's hands?

Chapter 11: David and Bathsheba

Scripture

11:1-13 And it was at the return of the year, at the time of the going out of the kings, and David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel; and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. And David ***was*** staying in Jerusalem. And it was at the time of the evening, and David arose from on his bed and walked about on the roof of the house of the king; and he saw from on the roof a woman bathing, and the woman ***was*** very good of appearance. And David sent and inquired about the woman, and he said, "***Is*** this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" And David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her (and she ***was*** purifying herself from her uncleanness); and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David and said, "I ***am*** pregnant." And David sent to Joab, "Send to me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. And Uriah came to him, and David asked about the welfare of Joab and about the welfare of the people and about the welfare of the battle. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out from the house of the king, and a gift of the king went out after him. And Uriah lay down ***at*** the entrance of the house of the king with all the servants of his lord, and he did not go down to his house. And they told David, saying, "Uriah has not gone down to his house." And David said to Uriah, "***Are*** you not coming from a journey? Why have you not gone down to your house?" And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamping on the face of the field; and I, shall I go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? ***As*** you live and ***as*** your soul lives, I will not do this thing!" And David said to Uriah, "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will send you away." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem on that day and the next day. And David called him, and he ate before him and drank, and he made him drunk; and he went out in the evening to lie down on his bed with the servants of his lord, and to his house he did not go down.

11:14-27 And it was in the morning, and David wrote a letter to Joab and sent ***it*** by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah toward the front of the face of the severe battle, and you shall turn back from after him, and he will be struck down and die." And it was, when Joab was keeping watch on the city, and he put Uriah at the place where he knew that men of strength ***were*** there. And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab, and ***some*** of the people fell, of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite also died. And Joab sent and told David all the matters of the battle. And he commanded the messenger, saying, "When you have finished speaking all the matters of the battle to the king, and it will be, if the wrath of the king rises and he says to you, 'Why did you draw near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from on the wall? Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from on the wall, and he died at Thebez? Why did you draw near to the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died.'" And the messenger went, and he came and told David all that Joab had sent him ***for***. And the messenger said to David, "Indeed the men prevailed over us and came out against us ***into*** the field, and we were upon them up to the entrance of the gate. And the archers shot at your servants from on the wall, and ***some*** of the servants of the king died; and your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died." And David said

to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword devours like this and like that. Strengthen your battle against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him." And the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband had died, and she mourned over her husband. And the mourning passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. And the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD.

Chapter 11 Preview

This is the darkest chapter in David's life. It is spring, the season for war, and David sends Joab and the army to fight the Ammonites while he stays home in Jerusalem. One evening, from the roof of his palace, he sees a woman bathing. He learns she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his own soldiers who is away at the war. David sends for her and sleeps with her. Later she sends word: she is pregnant.

One sin leads to another. David brings Uriah home, hoping he will sleep with his wife and the child will seem to be his. Uriah, more loyal than his king, refuses to go home while his fellow soldiers are in the field. So David sends Uriah back to Joab carrying his own death sentence, a letter telling Joab to put him in the hottest part of the battle and pull back. Uriah dies. After Bathsheba's time of mourning, David marries her. It seems he has gotten away with it. But the chapter ends with one line that changes everything: "the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD." I will speak plainly about David's sin, because Scripture does, and I will keep the details modest, because Scripture does too.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1 *And it was at the return of the year, at the time of the going out of the kings, and David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel; and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. And David **was** staying in Jerusalem.*

"It was at the return of the year," that is, in the spring, when the winter rains were over and the roads were dry. This was "the time of the going out of the kings," the season when kings led their armies out to war. "David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel; and they destroyed the sons of Ammon and besieged Rabbah." This picks up the unfinished war from chapter 10.

Then come six words that set up everything that follows: "And David was staying in Jerusalem." The king was supposed to be with his army. In 10:17 he had led them himself. Now he stayed behind. Scripture does not say why. Perhaps he was tired, or he felt he had earned a rest, or he was simply comfortable. But he was not where he should have been.

Idleness and comfort are often where temptation finds us. When we step back from the work God has given us, we leave ourselves open. David had faced lions, bears and Goliath without falling. He fell on a quiet evening at home.

11:2-3 *And it was at the time of the evening, and David arose from on his bed and walked about on the roof of the house of the king; and he saw from on the roof a woman bathing, and the woman* ***was*** *very good of appearance. And David sent and inquired about the woman, and he said, "****Is*** *this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*

"It was at the time of the evening, and David arose from on his bed and walked about on the roof of the house of the king." In that land houses had flat roofs, and people often went up in the cool of the evening. The palace stood on the high ground of the city, so from the roof David could see into courtyards below.

"He saw from on the roof a woman bathing, and the woman was very good of appearance." Seeing was not yet sin. David could have turned away and gone back inside. Instead he kept looking, and then he took the next step: "David sent and inquired about the woman."

Someone told him who she was: "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" That should have stopped him cold. She was married. Her husband Uriah was one of David's own mighty men, his elite warriors (23:39). Her father Eliam was also one of the mighty men, and Eliam was likely the son of Ahithophel, David's own counselor (23:34). David now knew everything he needed to know to walk away. He did not.

Jesus said that "everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). James describes the steps sin takes: "each one is tempted by his own desire, being drawn away and being enticed. Then the desire, having conceived, gives birth to sin" (James 1:14-15). We see every step here. A look, then a longer look, then a question, then an action.

11:4-5 *And David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her (and she* ***was*** *purifying herself from her uncleanness); and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David and said, "I* ***am*** *pregnant."*

"David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her." The verbs are short and plain. David sent. David took. David lay with her. The writer puts the weight of the action on the king.

The note in parentheses, "and she was purifying herself from her uncleanness," explains what her bathing was. The Law required a woman to wash at the end of her monthly time of uncleanness (Leviticus 15:19-28). This tells us two things. Bathsheba was keeping the Law. And she could not already have been pregnant by her husband, so the child that came was David's.

"And she returned to her house." David seems to have thought that was the end of it. It was not. "And the woman conceived; and she sent and told David." Her message was three words: "I am pregnant." These are the only words Bathsheba speaks in the whole chapter.

What about Bathsheba? Was she a willing partner, or was she a victim? Bible teachers disagree. Some point out that she came to him and do not see clear signs that she resisted. Others point out that the king sent messengers to take her, and that in that world a woman summoned by an all-powerful king had little real power to refuse. They note that the text never blames her, and that

when Nathan comes in chapter 12, God's charge falls on David alone, and Nathan's parable pictures her as an innocent lamb taken by a rich man. What the text makes plain is that David is the one responsible. He was the king, with all the power. She was a soldier's wife, alone at home, summoned to the palace. Whatever she felt or did, David's sin was an abuse of the power God had given him to protect his people.

11:6-8 *And David sent to Joab, "Send to me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. And Uriah came to him, and David asked about the welfare of Joab and about the welfare of the people and about the welfare of the battle. And David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." And Uriah went out from the house of the king, and a gift of the king went out after him.*

Adultery was a capital crime under the Law. Both "the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death" (Leviticus 20:10). David had to do something. Instead of confessing, he chose to cover it up.

"Send to me Uriah the Hittite." A Hittite was descended from one of the old peoples of Canaan, but Uriah's name means the LORD is my light. He seems to have been a worshiper of the God of Israel.

When Uriah arrived, David asked about "the welfare of Joab and about the welfare of the people and about the welfare of the battle." It was all pretense. David did not care about the battle reports. Then he got to his real purpose: "Go down to your house and wash your feet." To wash your feet meant to relax at home, and David meant more than that. He wanted Uriah to sleep with his wife, so that everyone would think the baby was Uriah's. He even sent a gift of food after him.

11:9-11 *And Uriah lay down **at** the entrance of the house of the king with all the servants of his lord, and he did not go down to his house. And they told David, saying, "Uriah has not gone down to his house." And David said to Uriah, "**Are** you not coming from a journey? Why have you not gone down to your house?" And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamping on the face of the field; and I, shall I go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? **As** you live and **as** your soul lives, I will not do this thing!"*

But "Uriah lay down at the entrance of the house of the king with all the servants of his lord, and he did not go down to his house." When David asked why, Uriah's answer is one of the most painful things in the Bible, because it shows how far the king had fallen.

"The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in booths, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are encamping on the face of the field; and I, shall I go to my house to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing!"

Booths were temporary shelters. The ark of God was in the field with the army. Uriah would not enjoy home comforts while his fellow soldiers slept on the ground. Soldiers in Israel kept themselves from their wives during a campaign (1 Samuel 21:5). Uriah, the foreigner, was keeping the standard of holy war. David, the king of Israel, had broken every standard there was. Uriah was everything David should have been.

11:12-13 *And David said to Uriah, "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will send you away." And Uriah stayed in Jerusalem on that day and the next day. And David called him, and he ate before him and drank, and he made him drunk; and he went out in the evening to lie down on his bed with the servants of his lord, and to his house he did not go down.*

David tried again. "Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will send you away." Then David invited him to dinner, "and he made him drunk." David thought that if Uriah's judgment was dulled by wine, he would go home. But even drunk, Uriah was more honorable than David sober. "To his house he did not go down."

Think about how low David had sunk. He was now getting a loyal man drunk to cover his own sin. One sin was leading to another. That is how sin works. It is rarely content to stay small. A lie needs another lie to cover it, and a cover-up needs a bigger cover-up.

11:14-15 *And it was in the morning, and David wrote a letter to Joab and sent **it** by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, "Set Uriah toward the front of the face of the severe battle, and you shall turn back from after him, and he will be struck down and die."*

"And it was in the morning, and David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah." This is the coldest act in the chapter. Uriah carried his own death warrant, sealed, back to the front, and he was so loyal that David knew he would not open it.

"Set Uriah toward the front of the face of the severe battle, and you shall turn back from after him, and he will be struck down and die." David planned it so it would look like an accident of war. No one would ask questions.

This is the man who wrote "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). The man after God's own heart. How could he do this? The answer is the same for all of us. No one is beyond falling. "Let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). David's past faithfulness did not protect him. Only staying close to God day by day could have done that.

11:16-17 *And it was, when Joab was keeping watch on the city, and he put Uriah at the place where he knew that men of strength **were** there. And the men of the city went out and fought with Joab, and **some** of the people fell, of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite also died.*

Joab obeyed. He "put Uriah at the place where he knew that men of strength were there." The Ammonites came out from the city and fought, "and some of the people fell, of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite also died."

Notice that others died too. David's plan to kill one man cost the lives of other soldiers. Sin always spreads its damage further than we plan. And Joab now held David's secret. The king had made his general his partner in murder. That may explain why David could never bring himself to deal with Joab later.

11:18-21 *And Joab sent and told David all the matters of the battle. And he commanded the messenger, saying, "When you have finished speaking all the matters of the battle to the king, and it will be, if the wrath of the king rises and he says to you, 'Why did you draw near to the city to fight? Did you not know that they would shoot from on the wall? Who struck down Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? Did not a woman throw an upper millstone on him from on the wall, and he died at Thebez? Why did you draw near to the wall?' then you shall say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died.'"*

Joab sent a messenger with the battle report. He knew David might be angry that the army had gone so close to the city wall, a basic mistake. So he told the messenger what to expect. If the king said, "Why did you draw near to the city to fight?" and brought up the old story of Abimelech, killed by a millstone thrown by a woman from a wall at Thebez (Judges 9:50-54), the messenger was to answer, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died."

Joab knew that one sentence would calm the king. He understood exactly what David wanted. There is something chilling in how well the two men understood each other.

11:22-25 *And the messenger went, and he came and told David all that Joab had sent him **for**. And the messenger said to David, "Indeed the men prevailed over us and came out against us **into** the field, and we were upon them up to the entrance of the gate. And the archers shot at your servants from on the wall, and **some** of the servants of the king died; and your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died." And David said to the messenger, "Thus you shall say to Joab: 'Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword devours like this and like that. Strengthen your battle against the city and overthrow it.' And encourage him."*

The messenger told David that the enemy had come out against them, that they had pushed them back to the gate, and that archers on the wall had killed some of the king's servants, "and your servant Uriah the Hittite has also died."

David's reply was smooth: "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword devours like this and like that." In other words, that's war, people die, don't let it bother you. "Strengthen your battle against the city and overthrow it." David, who had wept over Saul and over Abner, had no tears for Uriah. Sin had hardened his heart.

Notice the phrase "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes." Hold on to it. The last verse of the chapter will answer it.

11:26-27 *And the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband had died, and she mourned over her husband. And the mourning passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. And the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD.*

"The wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband had died, and she mourned over her husband." The writer calls her "the wife of Uriah," not Bathsheba. Even now, she belongs to Uriah in the eyes of the text. Matthew's genealogy will do the same, calling her "the wife of Uriah" (Matthew 1:6).

"And the mourning passed, and David sent and gathered her to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son." The period of mourning was usually about seven days. Then David

married her quickly. To anyone watching, it might have looked kind. The king took in the widow of a fallen soldier. The secret seemed safe.

Then comes the verdict: "And the thing that David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD." David had told Joab, do not let this be evil in your eyes. But it did not matter how it looked in Joab's eyes or in David's. It was evil in the LORD's eyes, and His eyes are the ones that count. "There is no creature hidden before Him, but all things are naked and laid bare to the eyes of Him to whom our account is to be given" (Hebrews 4:13). Moses warned, "know your sin, that it will find you" (Numbers 32:23).

For about a year, David said nothing. Psalm 32 may describe what that silence did to him: "When I kept silent, my bones wore out through my roaring all the day" (Psalm 32:3). God was not finished with David. In the next chapter He sends a prophet. If you are carrying a hidden sin today, know that God sees it, and know that He does not show it to you to crush you. He shows it to you so you will come back to Him.

Chapter 11 Summary

In the spring, when kings went out to war, David sent Joab and the army against the Ammonites but stayed in Jerusalem. One evening he saw from his roof a beautiful woman bathing, learned that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, sent for her and lay with her. She had just been purifying herself after her uncleanness, and she conceived and sent word to David. David brought Uriah home from the battle and told him to go to his house, but Uriah slept at the palace entrance with the servants, refusing to enjoy his home while the ark and the army were in the field. David made him drunk, but still he did not go home. David then sent a letter by Uriah's own hand telling Joab to set him in the hardest fighting and pull back from him. Joab did, and Uriah died along with other servants of David. Joab sent a messenger with the report, and David told him not to let the thing be evil in Joab's eyes. After Bathsheba mourned for her husband, David took her as his wife and she bore him a son. But the thing David had done was evil in the eyes of the LORD.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. Where should David have been in the spring, and where was he? (11:1)

2. What steps did David take from seeing Bathsheba to sinning with her? (11:2-4; James 1:14-15)

3. What did David learn about Bathsheba that should have stopped him? (11:3; 23:34, 39)

4. How did David try to cover up his sin the first and second time, and why did it fail? (11:6-13)

5. How did Uriah's loyalty and integrity contrast with David's actions? (11:11)

6. What did David's letter say, and who else died because of his plan? (11:14-17)

7. What did David tell Joab, and how does the last verse of the chapter answer him? (11:25, 27)

8. David fell when he was idle and comfortable, not when he was in danger. When are you most open to temptation?

9. One sin led to deceit and then to murder. Is there a sin you are trying to cover instead of confess? (Proverbs 28:13)

10. God saw what no one else saw. How does knowing that God sees everything bring you both warning and hope?

Chapter 12: Nathan Confronts David

Scripture

12:1-14 And the LORD sent Nathan to David; and he came to him and said to him, "Two men were in one city, one rich and one poor. The rich ***man*** had very many flocks and herds. And the poor ***man*** had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb which he had bought; and he nourished it, and it grew up with him and with his sons together. From his morsel it would eat, and from his cup it would drink, and in his bosom it would lie, and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, and he spared taking from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare ***a meal*** for the wayfarer who had come to him; and he took the ewe lamb of the poor man and prepared it for the man who had come to him." And the anger of David burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "***As*** the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this ***is*** a son of death! And the ewe lamb he shall repay fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity." And Nathan said to David, "You ***are*** the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you as king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. And I gave you the house of your master and the wives of your master into your bosom, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if ***that were too*** little, I would add to you like these and like these. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do the evil in My eyes? Uriah the Hittite you struck down with the sword, and his wife you took for yourself as a wife, and him you killed with the sword of the sons of Ammon. And now the sword shall not depart from your house forever, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am raising up evil against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give ***them*** to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives before the eyes of this sun. For you, you acted in secret; and I, I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'" And David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this thing you have utterly caused the enemies of the LORD to scorn, the son also who is born to you shall surely die."

12:15-31 And Nathan went to his house. And the LORD struck the child that the wife of Uriah bore to David, and he became sick. And David sought God for the boy; and David fasted a fast, and he would go in and spend the night and lie on the earth. And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the earth, and he was not willing, and he did not eat bread with them. And it was on the seventh day, and the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child had died, for they said, "Look, while the child was alive we spoke to him, and he did not listen to our voice; and how shall we say to him, 'The child has died'? And he will do harm." And David saw that his servants were whispering together, and David understood that the child had died. And David said to his servants, "Has the child died?" And they said, "He has died." And David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his garments, and he went ***into*** the house of the LORD and bowed down; and he went to his own house and asked, and they set bread before him, and he ate. And his servants said to him, "What ***is*** this thing that you have done? For the sake of the child ***while he was*** alive you fasted and wept, and when the child died you arose and ate bread." And he said, "While the child ***was*** still alive I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows? And the LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.' And now he has died;

why ***is*** it ***that*** I ***am*** fasting? Am I able to bring him back again? I am going to him, and he will not return to me." And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and he went in to her and lay with her; and she bore a son, and she called his name Solomon. And the LORD loved him, and He sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah, for the sake of the LORD. And Joab fought against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon and captured the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; I have also captured the city of the waters. And now gather the rest of the people and encamp against the city and capture it, lest I myself capture the city and my name be called over it." And David gathered all the people and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it. And he took the crown of their king from on his head, and its weight ***was*** approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold, and a precious stone, and it was on the head of David. And the spoil of the city he brought out, very much. And the people who ***were*** in it he brought out, and he set ***them*** to the saw and to the picks of iron and to the axes of iron, and he made them pass through the brick mold. And thus he did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon. And David and all the people returned ***to*** Jerusalem.

Chapter 12 Preview

Chapter 11 ended with God's verdict on David's sin. Chapter 12 opens with God sending His prophet. Nathan does not accuse David directly. He tells him a story about a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. David is furious and declares that the man deserves to die. Then Nathan says four words that pierce David's heart: "You are the man!" Nathan delivers God's judgment: the sword will never depart from David's house, and what David did in secret, God will repay in the open.

David does not argue or excuse himself. He says, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan answers at once that the LORD has taken away his sin, and David will not die. But there will be consequences, and the first is the hardest: the child born to Bathsheba will die. David fasts and prays for seven days, and the child dies. Then David gets up, worships, and says words that have comforted grieving parents for three thousand years: "I am going to him." God gives David and Bathsheba another son, Solomon, whom the LORD loves. The chapter ends with the fall of Rabbah. This is a chapter about how God deals with His children when they sin: He confronts, He forgives, He disciplines, and He restores.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1-4 *And the LORD sent Nathan to David; and he came to him and said to him, "Two men were in one city, one rich and one poor. The rich **man** had very many flocks and herds. And the poor **man** had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb which he had bought; and he nourished it, and it grew up with him and with his sons together. From his morsel it would eat, and from his cup it would drink, and in his bosom it would lie, and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, and he spared taking from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare **a meal** for the wayfarer who had come to him; and he took the ewe lamb of the poor man and prepared it for the man who had come to him."*

"The LORD sent Nathan to David." God took the first step. David was not seeking God. God came seeking him. That is grace. God loved David too much to leave him in his sin.

Nathan had a hard job. He was going to confront the most powerful man in the land, a man who had just had a loyal soldier killed to cover his sin. It took courage. It also took wisdom. Nathan did not start with an accusation. He told a story, a parable.

"Two men were in one city, one rich and one poor." The rich man "had very many flocks and herds." The poor man "had nothing at all except one little ewe lamb." He raised it with his children. It ate from his plate, drank from his cup, slept in his arms, "and it was like a daughter to him." When a traveler came to visit the rich man, the rich man did not want to use one of his own animals. He "took the ewe lamb of the poor man and prepared it" for his guest.

The story fit David's sin exactly. David had many wives. Uriah had one. David took her. And the parable pictures Bathsheba as an innocent lamb, not as a partner in the theft.

12:5-6 *And the anger of David burned greatly against the man, and he said to Nathan, "**As** the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this **is** a son of death! And the ewe lamb he shall repay fourfold, because he did this thing and because he had no pity."*

"The anger of David burned greatly against the man." David the shepherd knew how a man could love a lamb. He was outraged. "As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this is a son of death!" A son of death is a man who deserves to die. Then he set the penalty under the Law: "the ewe lamb he shall repay fourfold" (see Exodus 22:1), "because he did this thing and because he had no pity."

Isn't it strange how easily we see sin in others and miss it in ourselves? David was quick to condemn a man for stealing a lamb, while he himself had stolen a wife and taken a life. Jesus warned about seeing the speck in a brother's eye while ignoring the log in our own (Matthew 7:3-5).

Many have noticed that David's sentence of fourfold payment came true in his own family. Four of his sons died: the child of this chapter, Amnon (13:28-29), Absalom (18:14-15), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:24-25). Scripture does not say this was the fulfillment of David's words, but it is a sobering pattern.

12:7-9 *And Nathan said to David, "You **are** the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'I anointed you as king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. And I gave you the house of your master and the wives of your master into your bosom, and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah; and if **that were too** little, I would add to you like these and like these. Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do the evil in My eyes? Uriah the Hittite you struck down with the sword, and his wife you took for yourself as a wife, and him you killed with the sword of the sons of Ammon.*

Then "Nathan said to David," in words that cut to the heart, "You are the man!" Four words in English. Two in Hebrew. The trap closed. David had pronounced judgment on himself.

Then Nathan spoke God's words. "I anointed you as king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul." God listed what He had given David: Saul's house, Saul's wives, the kingdom of Israel and Judah. "And if that were too little, I would add to you like these and like these." God had been generous beyond measure, and He would have given more. David did not need to steal.

"Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do the evil in My eyes?" To despise God's word is to treat it as if it does not matter. David knew the Law. He knew "You shall not murder" and "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:13-14). He ignored them because he wanted what he wanted.

God named the sins plainly. "Uriah the Hittite you struck down with the sword, and his wife you took for yourself as a wife, and him you killed with the sword of the sons of Ammon." David had not swung the sword himself, but God said, you struck him down. Using the enemy's sword did not make David less guilty. God sees through every cover-up.

12:10-12 *And now the sword shall not depart from your house forever, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.' Thus says the LORD: 'Look, I am raising up evil against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give **them** to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives before the eyes of this sun. For you, you acted in secret; and I, I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun.'"*

Then came the sentence. "The sword shall not depart from your house forever, because you despised Me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." David had used the sword to kill Uriah. Now the sword would stay in his own family. The rest of 2 Samuel shows it: murder, rebellion and civil war among David's own sons.

Notice what God says: "you despised Me." Sin against people is always sin against God.

"Look, I am raising up evil against you from your own house, and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives before the eyes of this sun." This came true when David's son Absalom took his father's concubines on the palace roof, the same roof where David's sin began, "before the eyes of all Israel" (16:22).

"For you, you acted in secret; and I, I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun." David's sin was done in secret. Its consequences would be public. God does not cause anyone to sin, and Absalom was fully responsible for his own evil. But God allowed the evil in David's house

to work itself out as a judgment on David's sin. Paul says, "whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

12:13 *And David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.*

"And David said to Nathan," simply, "I have sinned against the LORD." Two words in Hebrew. No excuses. No blaming Bathsheba, or Joab, or the pressures of being king. No bargaining. Just the truth.

This is the difference between David and Saul. When Samuel confronted Saul, Saul made excuses and blamed the people (1 Samuel 15:20-21, 24). When Nathan confronted David, David confessed. Both men sinned. Only one truly repented. That is why God called David a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22). Not because he never sinned, but because when he sinned, he came back to God honestly.

David's fuller confession is Psalm 51, which its title says was written "when Nathan the prophet came to him." There David prays, "Be gracious to me, God, according to Your steadfast love; according to the abundance of Your compassion wipe out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). He admits, "Against You, You alone, I have sinned, and I have done the evil in Your eyes" (Psalm 51:4). And he asks, "Create for me a pure heart, God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). David knew he could offer no sacrifice to pay for this. The Law gave no sacrifice for adultery or murder. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and crushed heart, God, You will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

And Nathan answered at once: "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die." Under the Law, David deserved death twice over. God forgave him. How could a just God do that? Paul answers it in Romans 4. He quotes David from Psalm 32: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds were forgiven, and whose sins were covered" (Romans 4:7). God forgave David the same way He forgives us, by grace through faith, looking ahead to the cross, where Jesus would pay for David's sin and ours. Paul speaks of "the passing over of the sins that had previously occurred," and the cross shows that God is just in doing so (Romans 3:25-26).

If you have sinned greatly, take heart from this verse. There is no sin so great that God will not forgive the one who truly confesses it. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

12:14 *Nevertheless, because by this thing you have utterly caused the enemies of the LORD to scorn, the son also who is born to you shall surely die."*

"Nevertheless, because by this thing you have utterly caused the enemies of the LORD to scorn, the son also who is born to you shall surely die."

Forgiveness and consequences are not the same thing. God forgave David's guilt. David's relationship with God was restored. But the consequences of his sin would still come. Why? Because David's sin had done public harm to God's name. The king of God's people, the man who

sang God's praises, had committed adultery and murder. The enemies of the LORD now had reason to mock Him and His people. God would not let His holiness be treated lightly.

This is hard to read, and I will not pretend it is not. Why should a child die for his father's sin? I want to be careful here. The child was not guilty, and the child was not being punished for his own sin. The Law itself said children were not to be put to death for their fathers' sins (Deuteronomy 24:16). This was God, the giver of all life, taking a life back to Himself as a public discipline of David, the father. Scripture does not give us all of God's reasons, and we should not pretend to know more than it says. But we can say this much: the child did not go to punishment. As we will see in verse 23, David expected to see him again.

12:15-17 *And Nathan went to his house. And the LORD struck the child that the wife of Uriah bore to David, and he became sick. And David sought God for the boy; and David fasted a fast, and he would go in and spend the night and lie on the earth. And the elders of his house stood beside him to raise him from the earth, and he was not willing, and he did not eat bread with them.*

"Nathan went to his house. And the LORD struck the child that the wife of Uriah bore to David, and he became sick." Again the writer calls Bathsheba "the wife of Uriah." The child was the fruit of that sin.

"David sought God for the boy." Even though God had said the child would die, David prayed. "David fasted a fast, and he would go in and spend the night and lie on the earth." For a whole week he lay on the ground in prayer. The elders of his household tried to raise him up and get him to eat, "and he was not willing."

Was David wrong to pray against what God had said? No. God has sometimes changed what He announced when people humbled themselves (Jonah 3:10; 2 Kings 20:1-6). David hoped God might be gracious. Prayer is never wasted, even when the answer is no. David's fasting also shows us a father's broken heart. He loved this child.

12:18-19 *And it was on the seventh day, and the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child had died, for they said, "Look, while the child was alive we spoke to him, and he did not listen to our voice; and how shall we say to him, 'The child has died'? And he will do harm." And David saw that his servants were whispering together, and David understood that the child had died. And David said to his servants, "Has the child died?" And they said, "He has died."*

"On the seventh day, and the child died." The servants were afraid to tell David. If he would not listen to them while the child was alive, what would he do when he heard the child was dead? They thought he might "do harm," perhaps to himself.

But "David saw that his servants were whispering together, and David understood that the child had died." He asked, "Has the child died?" And they said, "He has died."

If you have lost a child, or a baby before birth, these verses may be very hard to read. God's Word does not hide this kind of grief. David's heart was broken, and so is yours. God sees it.

12:20-21 *And David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his garments, and he went **into** the house of the LORD and bowed down; and he went to his own house and asked, and they set bread before him, and he ate. And his servants said to him, "What **is** this thing that you have done? For the sake of the child **while he was** alive you fasted and wept, and when the child died you arose and ate bread."*

Then David did something that surprised everyone. "David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his garments, and he went into the house of the LORD and bowed down." The first place David went after his son died was the house of God, the tent where the ark was kept. He worshiped. Then he went home and ate.

His servants did not understand. "For the sake of the child while he was alive you fasted and wept, and when the child died you arose and ate bread."

David's worship at that moment is one of the most remarkable things in the chapter. He did not turn against God. He bowed before Him. Like Job, who lost his children and fell to the ground and worshiped (Job 1:20-21), David accepted from God's hand what he could not change. That is not the same as not grieving. It is grieving with trust.

12:22-23 *And he said, "While the child **was** still alive I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows? And the LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live.' And now he has died; why **is** it **that** I **am** fasting? Am I able to bring him back again? I am going to him, and he will not return to me."*

David explained. "While the child was still alive I fasted and wept." He had said to himself, "Who knows? And the LORD may be gracious to me, and the child may live." As long as there was hope, he prayed. "And now he has died; why is it that I am fasting? Am I able to bring him back again?"

Then David said, "I am going to him, and he will not return to me."

These words have comforted grieving parents for thousands of years. What did David mean? Some say he only meant, I too will die and go to the grave. But David was not comforted by the thought of the grave. He got up, washed and ate. His grief turned to peace. Most Bible teachers believe David meant that he would see his son again, that the child was with the LORD, and that David would go to be with him. David spoke of his own future in the same hope: "I will return to dwell in the house of the LORD for length of days" (Psalm 23:6).

I believe little children who die, before they are old enough to know right from wrong, are safe with God. Jesus said of little children, "of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). Not every believer agrees on exactly how this works, and Scripture does not spell out every detail. But David's words give us real hope. If you have lost a little one, you can hold on to what David held on to: I am going to him.

12:24-25 *And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and he went in to her and lay with her; and she bore a son, and she called his name Solomon. And the LORD loved him, and He sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet, and he called his name Jedidiah, for the sake of the LORD.*

"David comforted Bathsheba his wife." This is the first time the writer calls her "his wife" by name, and the first time we see David caring for her grief. She had lost her husband and now her child. David "went in to her and lay with her; and she bore a son, and she called his name Solomon."

"And the LORD loved him." This is grace upon grace. Out of the marriage that began in sin, God chose the son who would sit on David's throne, build the temple, and stand in the line of the Messiah (Matthew 1:6). God did not approve of how the marriage began. But He did not hold it against the son, and He did not refuse to bless a repentant couple.

God sent Nathan again, the same prophet who had brought the hard word, now bringing a gift. Nathan "called his name Jedidiah, for the sake of the LORD." Jedidiah means beloved of the LORD. It was God's own way of telling David and Bathsheba, I have not cast you off. I love this child.

There is hope here for anyone whose life has been marked by sin. God can bring good out of broken things when we come back to Him. He does not undo the past, but He can give a new beginning.

12:26-28 *And Joab fought against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon and captured the royal city. And Joab sent messengers to David and said, "I have fought against Rabbah; I have also captured the city of the waters. And now gather the rest of the people and encamp against the city and capture it, lest I myself capture the city and my name be called over it."*

The writer now returns to the war with Ammon, where chapter 11 began. "Joab fought against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon and captured the royal city." He had taken "the city of the waters," likely the part of the city that guarded its water supply. Without water, the rest of the city could not hold out long.

Joab sent word to David: "gather the rest of the people and encamp against the city and capture it, lest I myself capture the city and my name be called over it." Joab wanted the king to have the honor of the final victory. It was a loyal act, and perhaps also a pointed reminder that the king belonged with his army. David should have been there from the start (11:1).

12:29-31 *And David gathered all the people and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it. And he took the crown of their king from on his head, and its weight **was** approximately 75 pounds (a talent) of gold, and a precious stone, and it was on the head of David. And the spoil of the city he brought out, very much. And the people who **were** in it he brought out, and he set **them** to the saw and to the picks of iron and to the axes of iron, and he made them pass through the brick mold. And thus he did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon. And David and all the people returned **to** Jerusalem.*

"David gathered all the people and went to Rabbah and fought against it and captured it." David was back where he belonged.

"He took the crown of their king from on his head." It was made of a talent of gold, a very heavy weight, set with a precious stone, "and it was on the head of David." Some think it was too heavy to wear long and was held over David's head or worn only for a moment. Some also read "their king" as Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, whose name is close to the Hebrew word for king, and think the crown was taken from his idol. Either way, the crown of Ammon now belonged to David. The city's spoil was "very much."

"And the people who were in it he brought out, and he set them to the saw and to the picks of iron and to the axes of iron, and he made them pass through the brick mold." Most translations and teachers today read this as forced labor: the conquered people were put to work cutting, digging and making bricks. Some older translations read it as torture with saws and harrows. The Hebrew can be read either way, but forced labor fits the words best and fits what was usually done with a conquered people. "Thus he did to all the cities of the sons of Ammon. And David and all the people returned to Jerusalem."

The war was over. David had confessed and been forgiven. But the sword Nathan spoke of was already waiting in David's house. The next chapter shows it beginning to fall.

Chapter 12 Summary

The LORD sent Nathan to David with a story of a rich man who took a poor man's only lamb to feed a guest. David burned with anger, swore that the man deserved death and must repay fourfold. Nathan said, "You are the man!" and spoke the LORD's words: God had anointed David, delivered him from Saul and given him everything, yet David despised God's word, struck down Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites and took his wife. Therefore the sword would never depart from his house, and God would raise up evil from his own household and take his wives publicly, because David had sinned in secret. David confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD," and Nathan answered that the LORD had taken away his sin and he would not die, but the child would die because David had caused the LORD's enemies to scorn. The child fell sick. David fasted and lay on the ground for seven days, and the child died. David then rose, washed, worshiped in the house of the LORD and ate, explaining that while the child lived there was hope, but now "I am going to him, and he will not return to me." David comforted Bathsheba, and she bore Solomon, whom the LORD loved and named Jedidiah through Nathan. Joab took the city of the waters at Rabbah and called David to finish the siege. David captured Rabbah, took the Ammonite king's crown and much spoil, put the people to forced labor, and returned to Jerusalem.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. Who took the first step to deal with David's sin, and how? (12:1)

2. How did Nathan's parable match what David had done? (12:1-4; 11:2-27)

3. What did David say the rich man deserved, and what did Nathan answer? (12:5-7)

4. What did God say He had given David, and what did David despise? (12:7-9)

5. What consequences did God announce for David's house? (12:10-12; 16:22)

6. How did David respond, and how is his response different from Saul's in 1 Samuel 15? (12:13; Psalm 51:1-4)

7. What is the difference between forgiveness and consequences in this chapter? (12:13-14)

8. Why did David stop fasting when the child died, and what did he mean by "I am going to him"? (12:20-23)

9. Is there a sin you need to stop excusing and simply confess to God? What does 1 John 1:9 promise you?

10. If you have lost someone you love, how does David's worship in his grief speak to you? How does God's gift of Solomon show that He can bring a new beginning after failure?

Chapter 13: Amnon, Tamar and Absalom's Revenge

Scripture

13:1-22 And it was after this, and Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister, and her name ***was*** Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was in distress, ***so as*** to make himself sick because of Tamar his sister, for she ***was*** a virgin; and it was difficult in the eyes of Amnon to do anything to her. And Amnon had a friend, and his name ***was*** Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, the brother of David; and Jonadab ***was*** a very shrewd man. And he said to him, "Why ***are*** you so weak, son of the king, morning ***after*** morning? Will you not tell me?" And Amnon said to him, "Tamar, the sister of Absalom my brother, I love." And Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and make yourself sick; and your father will come to see you, and you shall say to him, 'Please let Tamar my sister come and feed me bread, and let her make the food before my eyes, so that I may see ***it***, and I will eat from her hand.'" And Amnon lay down and made himself sick; and the king came to see him, and Amnon said to the king, "Please let Tamar my sister come and make two cakes before my eyes, so that I may eat from her hand." And David sent to Tamar, to the house, saying, "Please go to the house of Amnon your brother and make the food for him." And Tamar went ***to*** the house of Amnon her brother, and he ***was*** lying down. And she took the dough and kneaded ***it*** and made cakes before his eyes and cooked the cakes. And she took the pan and poured ***them*** out before him, and he refused to eat. And Amnon said, "Send every man out from me." And every man went out from him. And Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the cakes that she had made and brought ***them*** to Amnon her brother, into the chamber. And she brought ***them*** near to him to eat, and he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." And she said to him, "No, my brother, do not humble me, for it is not done so in Israel; do not do this disgraceful folly. And I, where shall I carry my reproach? And you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel. And now, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." And he was not willing to listen to her voice; and he was stronger than she, and he humbled her and lay with her. And Amnon hated her ***with*** very great hatred, for the hatred with which he hated her ***was*** greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go!" And she said to him, "No, because this great evil, to send me away, ***is greater*** than the other that you have done with me." And he was not willing to listen to her. And he called his young man who attended him and said, "Please send this ***woman*** away from me, outside, and lock the door after her." And on her ***was*** a full-length tunic, for thus the daughters of the king, the virgins, would dress ***in*** robes. And his attendant brought her outside and locked the door after her. And Tamar took ashes on her head, and the full-length tunic which ***was*** on her she tore; and she put her hand on her head and went on, going and crying out. And Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? And now, my sister, keep silent; he ***is*** your brother. Do not set your heart on this matter." And Tamar dwelt, desolate, ***in*** the house of Absalom her brother. And King David heard all these things, and he burned ***with anger*** exceedingly. And Absalom did not speak with Amnon ***anything*** from bad to good, for Absalom hated Amnon because of the matter that he had humbled Tamar his sister.

13:23-39 And it was after two full years, and Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which ***is*** beside Ephraim; and Absalom invited all the sons of the king. And Absalom came to the king and said, "Look, please, your servant has sheepshearers; please let the king and his servants go with your servant." And the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, please let us not all go, and we will not be heavy on you." And he urged him, and he was not willing to go, and he blessed him. And Absalom said, "***If*** not, please let Amnon my brother go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" And Absalom urged him, and he sent with him Amnon and all the sons of the king. And Absalom commanded his servants, saying, "Please see: when the heart of Amnon is good with the wine, and I say to you, 'Strike down Amnon,' then you shall kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not commanded you? Be strong and become sons of strength." And the servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded. And all the sons of the king arose, and they mounted, each man on his mule, and fled. And it was, ***while*** they ***were*** on the way, and the report came to David, saying, "Absalom has struck down all the sons of the king, and not one of them is left." And the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the earth, and all his servants ***were*** standing ***with*** torn garments. And Jonadab the son of Shimeah, the brother of David, answered and said, "Let not my lord say ***that*** they have killed all the young men, the sons of the king, for Amnon alone has died; for by the mouth of Absalom it has been set since the day he humbled Tamar his sister. And now, let not my lord the king set a word to his heart, saying, 'All the sons of the king have died,' for Amnon alone has died." And Absalom fled. And the young man who was keeping watch lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, many people ***were*** coming from the way behind him, from the side of the mountain. And Jonadab said to the king, "Look, the sons of the king have come; according to the word of your servant, so it has happened." And it was, as he finished speaking, and look, the sons of the king came, and they lifted up their voice and wept; and also the king and all his servants wept a very great weeping. And Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And he mourned over his son all the days. And Absalom fled and went ***to*** Geshur, and he was there three years. And ***the soul of*** David the king longed to go out to Absalom, for he was comforted concerning Amnon, that he had died.

Chapter 13 Preview

In chapter 12 Nathan told David, "the sword shall not depart from your house forever" (12:10). Chapter 13 is where that word begins to come true. Amnon, David's oldest son, becomes obsessed with his half-sister Tamar, the full sister of Absalom. With the help of a crafty cousin, he tricks his father into sending her to his house, and there he forces himself on her and then throws her out. Tamar is left desolate. David hears of it and is very angry, but he does nothing. Absalom says nothing either, but he hates Amnon, and he waits.

Two years later Absalom has Amnon killed at a sheepshearing feast, and then he flees to his mother's people in Geshur. David mourns, and in time he longs for the son who has run away. This is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible. I will speak plainly about what Amnon did, because Scripture does, and I will keep the details modest, because Scripture does too. Tamar did nothing wrong. If you have suffered abuse yourself, please read this chapter knowing that God saw Tamar, and He sees you.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-2 *And it was after this, and Absalom the son of David had a beautiful sister, and her name **was** Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was in distress, **so as** to make himself sick because of Tamar his sister, for she **was** a virgin; and it was difficult in the eyes of Amnon to do anything to her.*

"And it was after this." The writer ties this chapter to what came before. David had sinned with a woman and covered it with a killing. Now in his own house a son will sin against a woman, and another son will answer with a killing. The sword has come home.

Amnon was David's firstborn, the son of Ahinoam (3:2), and the likely heir to the throne. Absalom was the third son, born to Maacah, the daughter of the king of Geshur (3:3). Tamar was Absalom's full sister and Amnon's half-sister. She was "a beautiful sister," and "Amnon the son of David loved her."

What the writer calls love here is not love. It is desire. Amnon made himself sick over her, "for she was a virgin; and it was difficult in the eyes of Amnon to do anything to her." The king's unmarried daughters were guarded and kept apart, and Amnon could not get near her. Real love seeks the good of the other person (1 Corinthians 13:4-5). Amnon was thinking only of himself.

13:3-5 *And Amnon had a friend, and his name **was** Jonadab, the son of Shimeah, the brother of David; and Jonadab **was** a very shrewd man. And he said to him, "Why **are** you so weak, son of the king, morning **after** morning? Will you not tell me?" And Amnon said to him, "Tamar, the sister of Absalom my brother, I love." And Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and make yourself sick; and your father will come to see you, and you shall say to him, 'Please let Tamar my sister come and feed me bread, and let her make the food before my eyes, so that I may see **it**, and I will eat from her hand.'"*

"And Amnon had a friend, and his name was Jonadab." Jonadab was David's nephew, the son of David's brother Shimeah, so he was Amnon's cousin. The writer calls him "a very shrewd man." The word means clever, and here it is cleverness put to evil use.

Jonadab saw that Amnon looked "so weak, son of the king, morning after morning," and asked why. Amnon told him. Jonadab did not warn him or tell him to put the thought away. He gave him a plan. Pretend to be sick. When your father comes, ask him to send Tamar to cook for you, so that you can eat "from her hand."

We all need friends, but the wrong friend can lead us into ruin. A true friend tells us the truth when we are going wrong. Jonadab helped Amnon do what he wanted. Paul put it simply: "bad associations corrupt good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

13:6-10 *And Amnon lay down and made himself sick; and the king came to see him, and Amnon said to the king, "Please let Tamar my sister come and make two cakes before my eyes, so that I may eat from her hand." And David sent to Tamar, to the house, saying, "Please go to the house of Amnon your brother and make the food for him." And Tamar went* ***to*** *the house of Amnon her brother, and he* ***was*** *lying down. And she took the dough and kneaded* ***it*** *and made cakes before his eyes and cooked the cakes. And she took the pan and poured* ***them*** *out before him, and he refused to eat. And Amnon said, "Send every man out from me." And every man went out from him. And Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the cakes that she had made and brought* ***them*** *to Amnon her brother, into the chamber.*

Amnon did exactly what Jonadab told him. He "lay down and made himself sick; and the king came to see him." David came because he loved his son. He did not see the trap. "And David sent to Tamar, to the house, saying, Please go to the house of Amnon your brother and make the food for him."

David did not know what he was sending her into. But the father who should have protected his daughter was the one who sent her there. It is a painful picture. David's own sin with Bathsheba had begun when he "sent" for a woman (11:4). Now he sends his daughter, without knowing it, to a son who acts as he did.

Tamar went in kindness and obedience. She "took the dough and kneaded it and made cakes before his eyes and cooked the cakes." Then Amnon refused to eat and said, "Send every man out from me." When they were alone, he told her to bring the food into the inner room. She did. She had no reason to fear her own brother.

13:11-14 *And she brought* ***them*** *near to him to eat, and he took hold of her and said to her, "Come, lie with me, my sister." And she said to him, "No, my brother, do not humble me, for it is not done so in Israel; do not do this disgraceful folly. And I, where shall I carry my reproach? And you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel. And now, please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." And he was not willing to listen to her voice; and he was stronger than she, and he humbled her and lay with her.*

"He took hold of her and said to her, Come, lie with me, my sister." Notice that he calls her "my sister" even as he grabs her. He knew exactly who she was.

Tamar's answer is brave and wise. "No, my brother, do not humble me, for it is not done so in Israel; do not do this disgraceful folly." She called it what it was: a wicked, shameful act. The Law forbade it (Leviticus 18:9). Then she thought about what it would do to both of them. "And I, where shall I carry my reproach? And you, you will be like one of the fools in Israel." A fool in the Bible is not someone who lacks brains. He is someone who lives as if God does not matter. Last, she tried to buy time: "please speak to the king, for he will not withhold me from you." Whether David could have allowed such a marriage under the Law or not, Tamar was looking for any way out.

"And he was not willing to listen to her voice; and he was stronger than she, and he humbled her and lay with her." The Scripture is plain and it is brief. Amnon raped his sister. She said no. She

pleaded. He used his strength against her. The whole guilt is his. The Law said the same thing in a case like this: the man who forces a woman is guilty, and "to the young woman you shall not do anything" (Deuteronomy 22:25-26), because she is a victim, just as a man attacked by his neighbor is.

I want to say this plainly for anyone reading who has been through something like this. What happened to Tamar was not her fault. What happened to you was not your fault. God does not look at the one who was wronged with blame. He looks with compassion.

13:15-17 *And Amnon hated her **with** very great hatred, for the hatred with which he hated her **was** greater than the love with which he had loved her. And Amnon said to her, "Get up, go!" And she said to him, "No, because this great evil, to send me away, **is greater** than the other that you have done with me." And he was not willing to listen to her. And he called his young man who attended him and said, "Please send this **woman** away from me, outside, and lock the door after her."*

"And Amnon hated her with very great hatred, for the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her." This shows what his "love" had been all along. Lust that gets what it wants often turns to disgust. He could not stand to look at what he had done, so he could not stand to look at her.

"Get up, go!" Tamar answered, "No, because this great evil, to send me away, is greater than the other that you have done with me." In that culture, a woman who had been violated was left with no hope of marriage and no place in society. By the Law, Amnon was bound to provide for her (Exodus 22:16; Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Instead he cast her out like garbage. He would not even say her name. To his servant he said, "Please send this woman away from me, outside, and lock the door after her," as if she were the one who had done wrong.

13:18-19 *And on her **was** a full-length tunic, for thus the daughters of the king, the virgins, would dress **in** robes. And his attendant brought her outside and locked the door after her. And Tamar took ashes on her head, and the full-length tunic which **was** on her she tore; and she put her hand on her head and went on, going and crying out.*

"And on her was a full-length tunic, for thus the daughters of the king, the virgins, would dress in robes." Tamar's robe marked her as a king's daughter who had not married. Amnon's servant put her out and locked the door.

"And Tamar took ashes on her head, and the full-length tunic which was on her she tore; and she put her hand on her head and went on, going and crying out." Ashes and a torn garment were signs of deep mourning. A hand on the head was a sign of grief and shame. Tamar did not hide what had been done to her. She cried out in the open. That took courage. She was telling the world that a great wrong had been done, and she was asking for justice.

13:20 *And Absalom her brother said to her, "Has Amnon your brother been with you? And now, my sister, keep silent; he **is** your brother. Do not set your heart on this matter." And Tamar dwelt, desolate, **in** the house of Absalom her brother.*

Absalom met her. "Has Amnon your brother been with you?" He seems to have guessed at once. Then he said, "And now, my sister, keep silent; he is your brother. Do not set your heart on this matter."

Absalom took her into his house, and that was a kindness. But his words were not kind. Keep silent. Don't take it to heart. Too often those who have been abused are told the same thing, often by people who care for them: don't talk about it, it will only cause trouble, he is family. Absalom had his own reasons for quiet. He was already planning revenge. But silence did not heal Tamar. "And Tamar dwelt, desolate, in the house of Absalom her brother." Desolate means ruined, left alone, like a land laid waste. That is the last we hear of her. Absalom later named his own daughter Tamar (14:27), which may tell us how much he loved his sister.

If you have been told to keep silent about abuse, I want you to hear from God's Word that Tamar's cry was right. Wrong done in the dark should be brought into the light. Tell someone safe: a pastor, a counselor, a trusted friend, and where a crime has been done, the authorities. If you are in danger now, get to safety. "The LORD is near to the broken of heart, and the crushed of spirit He saves" (Psalm 34:18).

13:21-22 *And King David heard all these things, and he burned **with anger** exceedingly. And Absalom did not speak with Amnon **anything** from bad to good, for Absalom hated Amnon because of the matter that he had humbled Tamar his sister.*

"And King David heard all these things, and he burned with anger exceedingly." David was angry, and he should have been. But that is all the verse says. He was angry, and he did nothing. He did not punish Amnon. He did not defend Tamar. He did not bring the matter to justice, though he was the king and the judge of Israel and her father. Some ancient copies add that he did not want to grieve Amnon, because he loved him as his firstborn. Whatever the reason, David failed his daughter.

Why? Scripture does not say. Perhaps David felt he had no right to judge Amnon's sin after his own with Bathsheba. Perhaps he loved his son too much. Perhaps he simply avoided the pain. But a leader's anger that never turns into right action does no good, and it does harm. When those with power to protect the wronged do nothing, the wronged are hurt twice. Parents, pastors and church leaders need to hear this. If someone in your care is abused, anger is not enough. Act.

"And Absalom did not speak with Amnon anything from bad to good." He said nothing to him at all, neither good nor bad. "For Absalom hated Amnon." When justice is not done by those who should do it, people will often take it into their own hands, and that is what happened next.

13:23-27 *And it was after two full years, and Absalom had sheepshearers at Baal-hazor, which **is** beside Ephraim; and Absalom invited all the sons of the king. And Absalom came to the king and said, "Look, please, your servant has sheepshearers; please let the king and his servants go with your servant." And the king said to Absalom, "No, my son, please let us not all go, and we will not be heavy on you." And he urged him, and he was not willing to go, and he blessed him. And Absalom said, "**If** not, please let Amnon my brother go with us." And the king said to him, "Why should he go with you?" And Absalom urged him, and he sent with him Amnon and all the sons of the king.*

"And it was after two full years." Two years went by, and still nothing was done. Absalom waited, and his hatred did not cool. Sheepshearing time was a time of feasting, like a harvest festival. Absalom held one "at Baal-hazor, which is beside Ephraim," north of Jerusalem, "and Absalom invited all the sons of the king."

He invited David first. David said no: "please let us not all go, and we will not be heavy on you." Then Absalom asked for Amnon by name. "Please let Amnon my brother go with us." David asked, "Why should he go with you?" David seems to have sensed something was wrong. But Absalom kept pressing, and David gave in and sent Amnon and all his sons. Once again David sent a child of his into danger.

13:28-29 *And Absalom commanded his servants, saying, "Please see: when the heart of Amnon is good with the wine, and I say to you, 'Strike down Amnon,' then you shall kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not commanded you? Be strong and become sons of strength." And the servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded. And all the sons of the king arose, and they mounted, each man on his mule, and fled.*

Absalom gave his servants their orders: "when the heart of Amnon is good with the wine, and I say to you," give the word, "then you shall kill him. Do not be afraid; have I not commanded you?"

Notice how Absalom's plan mirrors Amnon's. Amnon used food and a feigned sickness to get Tamar alone. Absalom used a feast and wine to get Amnon off his guard. And notice how it mirrors David. David made Uriah drunk (11:13) and then arranged his death by the hands of others. David's sons were repeating their father's sins.

"And the servants of Absalom did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded." Amnon died. The other sons ran for their lives, "each man on his mule." Was this justice for Tamar? No. It was murder. Absalom did not bring Amnon before the king or the elders. He took revenge, and he removed the son who stood ahead of him in line for the throne. God says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19). Revenge never heals the wound it claims to avenge.

13:30-33 *And it was, **while** they **were** on the way, and the report came to David, saying, "Absalom has struck down all the sons of the king, and not one of them is left." And the king arose and tore his garments and lay on the earth, and all his servants **were** standing **with** torn garments. And Jonadab the son of Shimeah, the brother of David, answered and said, "Let not my lord say **that** they have killed all the young men, the sons of the king, for Amnon alone has died; for by the mouth of Absalom it has been set since the day he humbled Tamar his sister. And now, let not my lord the king set a word to his heart, saying, 'All the sons of the king have died,' for Amnon alone has died."*

News travels fast and gets worse as it goes. The first report said, "Absalom has struck down all the sons of the king, and not one of them is left." David "tore his garments and lay on the earth," and his servants stood by with torn garments.

Then Jonadab spoke up, the same cousin who had planned the trap for Tamar. "Amnon alone has died; for by the mouth of Absalom it has been set since the day he humbled Tamar his sister." Jonadab knew. He had known for two years what Absalom intended. He gave Amnon the plan to ruin Tamar, and he watched Absalom plan to kill Amnon, and he said nothing to anyone until it was done. He is a picture of the person who always knows the inside story and never does the right thing with it.

13:34-36 *And Absalom fled. And the young man who was keeping watch lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, many people **were** coming from the way behind him, from the side of the mountain. And Jonadab said to the king, "Look, the sons of the king have come; according to the word of your servant, so it has happened." And it was, as he finished speaking, and look, the sons of the king came, and they lifted up their voice and wept; and also the king and all his servants wept a very great weeping.*

"And Absalom fled." The watchman saw a crowd coming down the hill. Jonadab said, "Look, the sons of the king have come." They arrived weeping, "and also the king and all his servants wept a very great weeping."

This is the second son David has lost. The first was the baby of chapter 12. Now Amnon is dead by his brother's hand, and Absalom has run away. Nathan's words were coming true: "I am raising up evil against you from your own house" (12:11). Sin's harvest is bitter, and it often falls on the people we love most.

13:37-39 *And Absalom fled and went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. And he mourned over his son all the days. And Absalom fled and went **to** Geshur, and he was there three years. And **the soul of** David the king longed to go out to Absalom, for he was comforted concerning Amnon, that he had died.*

Absalom "went to Talmai the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur." Talmai was his grandfather, his mother's father (3:3). Geshur was a small kingdom northeast of the Sea of Galilee, outside David's reach. "And he was there three years."

"And he mourned over his son all the days." The "he" here is David, mourning for Amnon. Then the chapter ends: "the soul of David the king longed to go out to Absalom, for he was comforted

concerning Amnon, that he had died." In time David's grief for Amnon eased, and he began to long for Absalom. But he did not go to him, and he did not deal with what Absalom had done. David's heart was pulled in two, and he did what he had done with Amnon: nothing. That failure sets up the next chapter.

What do we learn here? A father's love is a good thing, but love that will not discipline is not full love. God Himself disciplines the children He loves (Hebrews 12:6). David's house was falling apart, and part of the reason was that David would not act. Sin left alone does not go away. It grows.

Chapter 13 Summary

Amnon, David's firstborn, desired his beautiful half-sister Tamar, Absalom's sister. On the advice of his shrewd cousin Jonadab he pretended to be sick and asked David to send Tamar to cook for him. When they were alone he seized her. Tamar refused, called it a disgraceful folly in Israel, and pleaded with him, but he was stronger than she and he raped her. Then he hated her more than he had desired her, and had her thrown out and the door locked. Tamar tore her royal robe, put ashes on her head and went away crying out. Absalom told her to keep silent and took her into his house, where she lived desolate. David was very angry but did nothing. Two years later Absalom invited the king's sons to a sheepshearing feast and had his servants kill Amnon when he was drunk. A report came that all the king's sons were dead, but Jonadab said only Amnon had died, as Absalom had planned since the day Tamar was wronged. Absalom fled to his grandfather Talmai, king of Geshur, and stayed three years. David mourned for Amnon, and in time he longed for Absalom.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. How did Nathan's word in 12:10-11 begin to come true in this chapter? (13:1, 14, 29)

2. What kind of friend was Jonadab, and what did his advice lead to? (13:3-5, 32-33)

3. How did Tamar answer Amnon, and what does her answer show about her? (13:12-13)

4. What does Amnon's hatred afterward reveal about the "love" he claimed? (13:15)

5. What did Tamar do after she was sent away, and why did it take courage? (13:19)

6. What did David do when he heard what Amnon had done, and what did he fail to do? (13:21)

7. How did Absalom's revenge mirror the sins of Amnon and of David? (13:28-29; 11:13-15)

8. Absalom told Tamar to keep silent. Why is silence so harmful to someone who has been abused, and how can we be a safe person to tell? (13:20)

9. David was angry but did nothing. Is there a wrong you have seen that you need to act on, not just feel angry about?

10. If you have been wronged, how does it help to know that God saw Tamar and is near to the broken of heart? (Psalm 34:18)

Chapter 14: Absalom Brought Home

Scripture

14:1-17 And Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the heart of the king ***was*** toward Absalom. And Joab sent to Tekoa and took from there a wise woman, and he said to her, "Please act as a mourner, and please put on garments of mourning, and do not anoint yourself ***with*** oil, and you shall be like a woman who ***has been*** mourning over a dead ***person*** these many days. And you shall go to the king and speak to him according to this word." And Joab put the words in her mouth. And the Tekoite woman spoke to the king, and she fell on her face to the earth and bowed down and said, "Save, O king!" And the king said to her, "What ***is the matter*** with you?" And she said, "Truly I ***am*** a widow woman, and my husband has died. And your maidservant had two sons, and the two of them struggled together in the field, and ***there was*** no one to deliver between them; and the one struck the other and killed him. And look, the whole clan has risen up against your maidservant, and they have said, 'Give up the one who struck his brother, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed, and let us destroy the heir also.' And they will extinguish my coal which is left, so as not to set for my husband a name and a remnant on the face of the ground." And the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I, I will give command concerning you." And the Tekoite woman said to the king, "On me, my lord the king, ***be*** the iniquity, and on the house of my father; and the king and his throne ***be*** innocent." And the king said, "The one who speaks to you, you shall bring him to me, and he will not touch you again anymore." And she said, "Please let the king remember the LORD your God, so that the avenger of blood will not multiply destroying, and they will not destroy my son." And he said, "***As*** the LORD lives, not one of the hairs of your son shall fall to the earth." And the woman said, "Please let your maidservant speak a word to my lord the king." And he said, "Speak." And the woman said, "And why have you planned like this against the people of God? And by the king's speaking this word ***he is*** like one guilty, in the king's not bringing back his banished ***one***. For we shall surely die, and ***we are*** like water poured out on the earth, which cannot be gathered up; and God does not take away life, and He devises plans so that the banished ***one*** is not cast out from Him. And now, that I have come to speak this word to the king my lord, ***it is*** because the people have made me afraid; and your maidservant said, 'Let me please speak to the king; perhaps the king will do the word of his maidservant. For the king will hear, to deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man ***who seeks*** to destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.' And your maidservant said, 'Please let the word of my lord the king be for rest; for like the angel of God, so ***is*** my lord the king, to hear the good and the bad.' And the LORD your God, may He be with you."

14:18-33 And the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide from me anything that I am asking you." And the woman said, "Please let my lord the king speak." And the king said, "***Is*** the hand of Joab with you in all this?" And the woman answered and said, "***As*** your soul lives, my lord the king, there is no going to the right or going to the left from all that my lord the king has spoken; for your servant Joab, he commanded me, and he put in the mouth of your maidservant all these words. In order to change the face of the matter your servant Joab has done this thing; and my lord ***is*** wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that ***is*** in the land." And the king said to Joab, "Look, please, I have done this thing; and go, bring back the

young man Absalom." And Joab fell on his face to the earth and bowed down and blessed the king; and Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, in that the king has done the word of your servant." And Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom ***to*** Jerusalem. And the king said, "He shall turn aside to his house, and my face he shall not see." And Absalom turned aside to his house, and the face of the king he did not see. And like Absalom there was no man ***so*** handsome in all Israel, to be praised greatly; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he shaved his head (and it was at the end of every year that he would shave ***it***, for it was heavy on him, and he would shave it), he would weigh the hair of his head, approximately 5 pounds (two hundred shekels) by the weight of the king. And to Absalom were born three sons and one daughter, and her name ***was*** Tamar; she was a woman beautiful of appearance. And Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem two full years, and the face of the king he did not see. And Absalom sent to Joab to send him to the king, and he was not willing to come to him; and he sent again a second ***time***, and he was not willing to come. And he said to his servants, "See, the plot of Joab ***is*** next to my hand, and he has barley there; go and set it ablaze with fire." And the servants of Absalom set the plot ablaze with fire. And Joab arose and went to Absalom, to the house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set the plot that ***is*** mine ablaze with fire?" And Absalom said to Joab, "Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, and let me send you to the king to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? ***It would be*** good for me ***that*** I ***were*** still there."' And now let me see the face of the king; and if there is iniquity in me, then he shall put me to death." And Joab went to the king and told him; and he called Absalom, and he came to the king and bowed down to him on his face to the earth before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.

Chapter 14 Preview

Absalom has been in Geshur for three years, and David longs for him but will not bring him back. Joab sees the king's heart and comes up with a plan. He hires a wise woman from Tekoa to come before the king with a made-up story about her two sons, one of whom killed the other. When David promises to protect the son who is left, she turns the story on him: why will the king not bring home his own banished son? David sees Joab's hand in it, and he gives in. Absalom comes back to Jerusalem.

But David brings him back only halfway. Absalom may live in the city, but he may not see the king's face. For two years father and son live a few streets apart and never meet. Absalom finally forces Joab's hand by setting his barley field on fire, and David receives him with a kiss. It looks like a happy ending. It is not. There is no repentance on Absalom's part, no justice for Amnon's murder, and no real healing between them. The next chapter shows what Absalom does with his freedom.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-3 *And Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the heart of the king **was** toward Absalom. And Joab sent to Tekoa and took from there a wise woman, and he said to her, "Please act as a mourner, and please put on garments of mourning, and do not anoint yourself **with** oil, and you shall be like a woman who **has been** mourning over a dead **person** these many days. And you shall go to the king and speak to him according to this word." And Joab put the words in her mouth.*

"Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the heart of the king was toward Absalom." Joab was David's nephew and the commander of his army. He was hard and practical. He saw that David was torn and that the kingdom was unsettled with the likely heir living in exile.

So Joab "sent to Tekoa and took from there a wise woman." Tekoa was a town in the hills of Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem, later the home of the prophet Amos (Amos 1:1). Joab told her to dress as a woman in long mourning, with no oil on her skin, and "Joab put the words in her mouth." She was an actress with a script.

Joab had used the same method Nathan used. Nathan told David a story to bring him to the truth (12:1-7). Joab told David a story to bring him to the decision Joab wanted. The method was the same. The purpose was very different.

14:4-7 *And the Tekoite woman spoke to the king, and she fell on her face to the earth and bowed down and said, "Save, O king!" And the king said to her, "What **is the matter** with you?" And she said, "Truly I **am** a widow woman, and my husband has died. And your maidservant had two sons, and the two of them struggled together in the field, and **there was** no one to deliver between them; and the one struck the other and killed him. And look, the whole clan has risen up against your maidservant, and they have said, 'Give up the one who struck his brother, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed, and let us destroy the heir also.' And they will extinguish my coal which is left, so as not to set for my husband a name and a remnant on the face of the ground."*

The woman fell before the king and cried, "Save, O king!" Kings in Israel heard cases from their people, and a widow had the right to come to the king for help.

Her story was this. She was a widow with two sons. They fought in the field, "and there was no one to deliver between them; and the one struck the other and killed him." Now the whole clan demanded the son who was left, "so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed." Under the Law, the nearest relative of a murdered man was the avenger of blood, the one responsible to put the murderer to death (Numbers 35:19). But if this son died, the family line would end. "They will extinguish my coal which is left, so as not to set for my husband a name and a remnant on the face of the ground."

The coal was the last live ember in the fire, the one you save to start the fire again in the morning. Her story was close enough to David's own family that he should have seen it coming. One son had killed another. The question was whether the killer should be spared.

14:8-11 *And the king said to the woman, "Go to your house, and I, I will give command concerning you." And the Tekoite woman said to the king, "On me, my lord the king,* ***be*** *the iniquity, and on the house of my father; and the king and his throne* ***be*** *innocent." And the king said, "The one who speaks to you, you shall bring him to me, and he will not touch you again anymore." And she said, "Please let the king remember the LORD your God, so that the avenger of blood will not multiply destroying, and they will not destroy my son." And he said, "****As*** *the LORD lives, not one of the hairs of your son shall fall to the earth."*

David first said, "Go to your house, and I, I will give command concerning you." She pressed him. She offered to carry any guilt herself: "On me, my lord the king, be the iniquity, and on the house of my father; and the king and his throne be innocent." David promised more: whoever threatens you, bring him to me, "and he will not touch you again anymore."

She pressed again until she had a sworn promise. "Please let the king remember the LORD your God, so that the avenger of blood will not multiply destroying." David swore: "As the LORD lives, not one of the hairs of your son shall fall to the earth." Now he was bound by his own oath. Like Nathan's parable, the story led David to pass judgment, and then the judgment was turned on him.

14:12-14 *And the woman said, "Please let your maidservant speak a word to my lord the king." And he said, "Speak." And the woman said, "And why have you planned like this against the people of God? And by the king's speaking this word* ***he is*** *like one guilty, in the king's not bringing back his banished* ***one****. For we shall surely die, and* ***we are*** *like water poured out on the earth, which cannot be gathered up; and God does not take away life, and He devises plans so that the banished* ***one*** *is not cast out from Him.*

"Please let your maidservant speak a word to my lord the king." Then she came to her point. "Why have you planned like this against the people of God?" In giving her son a pardon, the king had condemned himself, "in the king's not bringing back his banished one."

Then she spoke words that are true, even though she spoke them in a staged scene. "For we shall surely die, and we are like water poured out on the earth, which cannot be gathered up." Life is short. Once it is spilled, it cannot be gathered again. Do not waste the time you have with your son.

"And God does not take away life, and He devises plans so that the banished one is not cast out from Him." This is one of the great sentences in the Old Testament, even in the mouth of a hired speaker. God does not want the banished to stay banished. He makes ways to bring them home. That is exactly what God did for us in Christ. We were far off, cast out by our sin, and He planned a way to bring us back, at the cost of His own Son (Ephesians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

But there is a difference. God brings the banished home in a way that is both just and merciful. Sin is paid for at the cross. The woman's argument skipped over justice. Absalom had not repented, and the murder of Amnon was never answered. David would bring Absalom back without either one.

14:15-17 *And now, that I have come to speak this word to the king my lord, **it is** because the people have made me afraid; and your maidservant said, 'Let me please speak to the king; perhaps the king will do the word of his maidservant. For the king will hear, to deliver his maidservant from the hand of the man **who seeks** to destroy me and my son together from the inheritance of God.' And your maidservant said, 'Please let the word of my lord the king be for rest; for like the angel of God, so **is** my lord the king, to hear the good and the bad.' And the LORD your God, may He be with you."*

The woman went back to her story so that the king would not feel trapped. She said the people had made her afraid, and she hoped the king would deliver her and her son "from the inheritance of God," meaning from being cut off from their place among God's people.

Then she flattered him: "like the angel of God, so is my lord the king, to hear the good and the bad." She meant that David was wise enough to sort out right and wrong. "And the LORD your God, may He be with you." Her speech was skillful. It mixed real truth, real flattery and real pressure.

14:18-20 *And the king answered and said to the woman, "Please do not hide from me anything that I am asking you." And the woman said, "Please let my lord the king speak." And the king said, "**Is** the hand of Joab with you in all this?" And the woman answered and said, "**As** your soul lives, my lord the king, there is no going to the right or going to the left from all that my lord the king has spoken; for your servant Joab, he commanded me, and he put in the mouth of your maidservant all these words. In order to change the face of the matter your servant Joab has done this thing; and my lord **is** wise, according to the wisdom of the angel of God, to know all that **is** in the land."*

David was not fooled about who was behind it. "Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman admitted it at once. "Your servant Joab, he commanded me, and he put in the mouth of your maidservant all these words." Joab did it, she said, "In order to change the face of the matter." She flattered David again, saying that he was wise like "the angel of God, to know all that is in the land."

David knew he had been played. But he also wanted to be played. Joab had given him a reason to do what his heart already wanted to do.

14:21-24 *And the king said to Joab, "Look, please, I have done this thing; and go, bring back the young man Absalom." And Joab fell on his face to the earth and bowed down and blessed the king; and Joab said, "Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, in that the king has done the word of your servant." And Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom **to** Jerusalem. And the king said, "He shall turn aside to his house, and my face he shall not see." And Absalom turned aside to his house, and the face of the king he did not see.*

"Go, bring back the young man Absalom." Joab bowed and thanked the king, because he had won favor. Then he "went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem."

But David added a condition. "He shall turn aside to his house, and my face he shall not see." So Absalom was home but not welcome. He was neither forgiven nor punished. This was the worst of both choices. If Absalom was guilty, justice should have been done. If David meant to forgive, he

should have forgiven fully and restored him. Instead David left the matter open, and an open wound festers.

This is a warning for families and for churches. Half-forgiveness, where we let someone back in but keep him at arm's length forever, without dealing with the sin honestly, does not heal anyone. Real reconciliation needs truth and repentance on one side and real forgiveness on the other (Luke 17:3-4).

14:25-27 *And like Absalom there was no man **so** handsome in all Israel, to be praised greatly; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. And when he shaved his head (and it was at the end of every year that he would shave **it**, for it was heavy on him, and he would shave it), he would weigh the hair of his head, approximately 5 pounds (two hundred shekels) by the weight of the king. And to Absalom were born three sons and one daughter, and her name **was** Tamar; she was a woman beautiful of appearance.*

Now the writer tells us about Absalom himself. "And like Absalom there was no man so handsome in all Israel, to be praised greatly; from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him." He was the most admired man in the land.

His hair was famous. He cut it once a year when it got too heavy, and it weighed about five pounds, "two hundred shekels by the weight of the king." Remember that hair. It will matter in chapter 18.

He had three sons and a daughter, and he named the daughter Tamar, after his sister. She too was beautiful. Later, in 18:18, Absalom says he has no son to carry on his name, so it seems his sons died young. Scripture does not tell us how.

Why tell us all this about his looks? Because Israel was about to choose a king by his looks again, as it once chose Saul, who was taller than everyone (1 Samuel 9:2). God told Samuel, "man sees according to the eyes, and the LORD sees according to the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). Absalom was beautiful on the outside. His heart was another matter.

14:28-32 *And Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem two full years, and the face of the king he did not see. And Absalom sent to Joab to send him to the king, and he was not willing to come to him; and he sent again a second **time**, and he was not willing to come. And he said to his servants, "See, the plot of Joab **is** next to my hand, and he has barley there; go and set it ablaze with fire." And the servants of Absalom set the plot ablaze with fire. And Joab arose and went to Absalom, to the house, and said to him, "Why have your servants set the plot that **is** mine ablaze with fire?" And Absalom said to Joab, "Look, I sent to you, saying, 'Come here, and let me send you to the king to say, "Why have I come from Geshur? **It would be** good for me **that** I **were** still there."' And now let me see the face of the king; and if there is iniquity in me, then he shall put me to death."*

"And Absalom dwelt in Jerusalem two full years, and the face of the king he did not see." Two years of silence before the murder (13:23), three years in Geshur (13:38), and now two more years in the same city as his father without a word.

Absalom sent for Joab twice, and Joab would not come. So Absalom told his servants to set Joab's barley field on fire. That got Joab's attention. When Joab came angry, Absalom said, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be good for me that I were still there." Then he said, "let me see the face of the king; and if there is iniquity in me, then he shall put me to death."

Notice what Absalom does not say. He never says he was wrong. He dares his father to judge him, knowing David will not. And he burns a field to get his way. This is the same man who waited two years to kill his brother. He gets what he wants by force.

14:33 *And Joab went to the king and told him; and he called Absalom, and he came to the king and bowed down to him on his face to the earth before the king; and the king kissed Absalom.*

"And Joab went to the king and told him; and he called Absalom, and he came to the king and bowed down to him on his face to the earth before the king; and the king kissed Absalom."

On the surface this looks like the father of the prodigal son running to kiss his boy (Luke 15:20). But it is not the same at all. The prodigal came home saying, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you" (Luke 15:21). Absalom never said that. He bowed, he received the kiss, and he went out to plan a rebellion. A kiss without repentance did not reconcile them. In the next chapter Absalom will use kisses himself to steal the hearts of the people.

God's forgiveness is free, but it is not cheap. It comes to those who turn back to Him. If there is someone you need to make peace with, do not settle for an outward show. Speak the truth, own your part, and let God do the real work of healing.

Chapter 14 Summary

Joab saw that David longed for Absalom and sent for a wise woman from Tekoa. Dressed as a mourner, she told David a made-up story: she was a widow whose one son had killed the other, and her clan wanted to put the killer to death and end her husband's line. David swore by the LORD that not a hair of her son would fall. Then she turned the story on him and asked why he would not bring back his own banished son, since we all die like water spilled on the ground, and God plans ways for the banished not to be cast out from Him. David saw that Joab was behind it, but he told Joab to bring Absalom back. Joab brought him from Geshur, but David would not let Absalom see his face. Absalom was the most handsome man in Israel, with heavy hair he cut once a year. After two years without seeing the king, Absalom had Joab's barley field set on fire to force him to come, then demanded to see the king. Joab told David, and David called Absalom and kissed him.

There is a relationship in my life that is only half mended. I have tried from my side, and the other person has chosen not to. That is painful. I cannot control their choice, but I can keep my heart open and keep praying.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. What did Joab see in David, and what did he do about it? (14:1-3)

2. What story did the woman of Tekoa tell, and how did it fit David's family? (14:5-7)

3. How did the woman get David to bind himself with an oath? (14:8-11)

4. What true thing did she say about God and the banished? (14:14)

5. What condition did David put on Absalom's return, and what did it leave unsettled? (14:24)

6. Why does the writer tell us about Absalom's looks and his hair? (14:25-26; 1 Samuel 16:7)

7. How did Absalom get Joab to come to him, and what does that show about him? (14:29-32)

8. How was Absalom's homecoming different from the prodigal son's? (14:33; Luke 15:20-21)

9. God plans ways for the banished to come home. How has He done that for you in Christ? (Ephesians 2:13)

10. Is there a relationship in your life that is half-mended? What would truth and real forgiveness look like there?

Chapter 15: Absalom's Conspiracy and David's Flight

Scripture

15:1-12 And it was after this, and Absalom made for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men running before him. And Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way of the gate; and it was, every man who had a case to come to the king for judgment, Absalom called to him and said, "From which city ***are*** you?" And he said, "Your servant ***is*** from one of the tribes of Israel." And Absalom said to him, "See, your matters ***are*** good and right, and ***there is*** no one listening to you from the king." And Absalom said, "Who will make me a judge in the land, and to me every man who has a case and judgment would come, and I would justify him!" And it was, when a man drew near to bow down to him, he would stretch out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. And Absalom did according to this manner to all Israel who came for judgment to the king; and Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel. And it was at the end of forty years, and Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow which I vowed to the LORD in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back ***to*** Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.'" And the king said to him, "Go in peace." And he arose and went to Hebron. And Absalom sent spies through all the tribes of Israel, saying, "When you hear the sound of the ram's horn, then you shall say, 'Absalom has become king in Hebron.'" And with Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem, invited, and going in their innocence, and they did not know anything. And Absalom sent ***for*** Ahithophel the Gilonite, the counselor of David, from his city, from Giloh, while he was sacrificing the sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, and the people ***were*** going on and increasing with Absalom.

15:13-23 And the one bringing the news came to David, saying, "The heart of the men of Israel is after Absalom." And David said to all his servants who ***were*** with him in Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, for there will be no escape for us from before Absalom. Hurry to go, lest he hurry and overtake us and thrust the evil upon us and strike the city with the mouth of the sword." And the servants of the king said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king chooses, look, your servants!" And the king went out, and all his household at his feet; and the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people at his feet, and they stood ***at*** the farthest house. And all his servants ***were*** passing on beside him, and all the Kerethites and all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come at his foot from Gath, ***were*** passing on before the king. And the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why will you also go with us? Return and dwell with the king, for you ***are*** a foreigner, and also you ***are*** an exile from your place. Yesterday ***was*** your coming, and today shall I make you wander with us to go? And I am going wherever I am going. Return, and take back your brothers; steadfast love and truth ***be*** with you." And Ittai answered the king and said, "***As*** the LORD lives and ***as*** my lord the king lives, surely in the place where my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, surely there your servant will be." And David said to Ittai, "Go and pass on." And Ittai the Gittite passed on, and all his men and all the little ones who ***were*** with him. And all the land ***was*** weeping ***with*** a great voice, and all the people ***were*** passing on; and the king ***was*** passing on in the wadi of Kidron, and all the people ***were*** passing on, on the face of the way ***to*** the wilderness.

15:24-37 And look, Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, carrying the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up, until all the people had finished passing out from the city. And the king said to Zadok, "Take back the ark of God ***to*** the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, then He will bring me back and show me it and His habitation. And if He says thus, 'I do not delight in you,' look, ***here*** I ***am***; let Him do to me as ***it*** is good in His eyes." And the king said to Zadok the priest, "***Are*** you a seer? Return to the city in peace, and Ahimaaz your son and Jonathan the son of Abiathar, your two sons, with you. See, I will be lingering in the plains of the wilderness until a word comes from you to tell me." And Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back ***to*** Jerusalem, and they remained there. And David ***was*** going up by the ascent of the olive trees, going up and weeping, and his head ***was*** covered, and he ***was*** walking barefoot; and all the people who ***were*** with him covered each man his head, and they went up, going up and weeping. And one told David, saying, "Ahithophel ***is*** among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please make the counsel of Ahithophel foolish." And it was, David was coming to the top, where one would bow down to God, and look, Hushai the Arkite ***was*** to meet him, his tunic torn and soil on his head. And David said to him, "If you pass on with me, then you will be a burden on me. And if you return ***to*** the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; I ***was*** the servant of your father from of old, and now I ***am*** your servant,' then you will frustrate for me the counsel of Ahithophel. And ***are*** not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? And it shall be, every word that you hear from the house of the king, you shall tell to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests. Look, there with them ***are*** their two sons, Ahimaaz ***the son*** of Zadok and Jonathan ***the son*** of Abiathar; and you shall send to me by their hand every word that you hear." And Hushai the friend of David came ***into*** the city, and Absalom was coming ***into*** Jerusalem.

Chapter 15 Preview

Absalom is back in his father's favor, and he uses it to steal the kingdom. He rides in a chariot with fifty runners. He stands at the city gate every morning and tells everyone with a complaint that the king will not hear them, but if he were judge, he would do them justice. He shakes hands and kisses, and slowly "Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel." Then he asks leave to go to Hebron to pay a vow, and there he has himself proclaimed king. Even David's wisest counselor, Ahithophel, joins him.

David does not stand and fight. He leaves Jerusalem to spare the city, and the chapter follows him step by step: across the Kidron valley, up the Mount of Olives, weeping and barefoot with his head covered. Along the way we see who is loyal: a foreign soldier named Ittai who will go with David to death, the priests Zadok and Abiathar who carry the ark, and David's friend Hushai, whom David sends back to the city to work against Ahithophel's advice. David sends the ark back too, and puts himself in God's hands: "let Him do to me as it is good in His eyes." Psalm 3 comes from this time.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-4 *And it was after this, and Absalom made for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men running before him. And Absalom would rise early and stand beside the way of the gate; and it was, every man who had a case to come to the king for judgment, Absalom called to him and said, "From which city **are** you?" And he said, "Your servant **is** from one of the tribes of Israel." And Absalom said to him, "See, your matters **are** good and right, and **there is** no one listening to you from the king." And Absalom said, "Who will make me a judge in the land, and to me every man who has a case and judgment would come, and I would justify him!"*

"And it was after this, and Absalom made for himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men running before him." Runners before a chariot were a sign of royalty. Samuel had warned that a king would take the people's sons, "and they will run before his chariot" (1 Samuel 8:11). Absalom was acting like a king before he was one.

Then he went to work on the people. He "would rise early and stand beside the way of the gate." The city gate was where cases were heard and business was done. Every man who came with a case for the king, Absalom stopped. He asked where he was from, listened, and said, "See, your matters are good and right, and there is no one listening to you from the king."

He had not heard the other side. He told every man he was right. Then he said, "Who will make me a judge in the land, and to me every man who has a case and judgment would come, and I would justify him!" He promised everybody what they wanted. Politicians have done this ever since. "The first in his case is righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him" (Proverbs 18:17). Absalom never waited for the neighbor.

Was there truth in his charge? Perhaps some. David may have grown distant from his people after his sin and his family's troubles. But Absalom did not want to fix the problem. He wanted to use it.

15:5-6 *And it was, when a man drew near to bow down to him, he would stretch out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. And Absalom did according to this manner to all Israel who came for judgment to the king; and Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel.*

"When a man drew near to bow down to him, he would stretch out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him." The king's son refused to let people bow. He treated them as equals. It looked humble. It was a strategy.

"And Absalom stole the heart of the men of Israel." The word stole is the right word. He did not win their hearts honestly. He took them by flattery and deceit. Beware of the leader who tells you only what you want to hear and who runs down those in authority so he can take their place. Jesus said the true shepherd enters by the door, and the thief comes another way (John 10:1).

15:7-9 *And it was at the end of forty years, and Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow which I vowed to the LORD in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I dwelt at Geshur in Syria, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back **to** Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.'" And the king said to him, "Go in peace." And he arose and went to Hebron.*

"And it was at the end of forty years." The SLB follows the Hebrew text here, which reads forty. Most teachers think it means four years after Absalom came back, as some ancient copies read, since David reigned only forty years in all. Either way, the plot was long and patient.

Absalom asked to go to Hebron "and pay my vow which I vowed to the LORD." He said he had vowed in Geshur that if the LORD brought him back to Jerusalem, "then I will serve the LORD." It was a religious cover for a political plot. Hebron was a good choice. It was where David had first been made king (2:4), it was Absalom's birthplace (3:2-3), and some there may have resented that David moved the capital to Jerusalem.

"And the king said to him, Go in peace." Those were the last words David ever spoke to his son.

15:10-12 *And Absalom sent spies through all the tribes of Israel, saying, "When you hear the sound of the ram's horn, then you shall say, 'Absalom has become king in Hebron.'" And with Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem, invited, and going in their innocence, and they did not know anything. And Absalom sent **for** Ahithophel the Gilonite, the counselor of David, from his city, from Giloh, while he was sacrificing the sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, and the people **were** going on and increasing with Absalom.*

Absalom had planned it well. He sent spies, secret messengers, through all the tribes: "When you hear the sound of the ram's horn," they were to shout that Absalom had become king in Hebron. On one signal the news would spread everywhere at once.

He took two hundred men from Jerusalem with him, "invited, and going in their innocence, and they did not know anything." They thought they were going to a religious feast. Their presence made it look as if leading men of Jerusalem backed him.

Then he sent for "Ahithophel the Gilonite, the counselor of David." This was a blow to David. Ahithophel was the wisest man in the kingdom (16:23). He was also very likely Bathsheba's grandfather. His son Eliam was one of David's mighty men (23:34), and Bathsheba was "the daughter of Eliam" (11:3). If so, Ahithophel may have carried a grudge for years over what David did to his granddaughter and to Uriah. "And the conspiracy was strong, and the people were going on and increasing with Absalom."

15:13-16 *And the one bringing the news came to David, saying, "The heart of the men of Israel is after Absalom." And David said to all his servants who **were** with him in Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, for there will be no escape for us from before Absalom. Hurry to go, lest he hurry and overtake us and thrust the evil upon us and strike the city with the mouth of the sword." And the servants of the king said to the king, "According to all that my lord the king chooses, look, your servants!" And the king went out, and all his household at his feet; and the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house.*

"The heart of the men of Israel is after Absalom." When David heard it, he made a quick decision. "Arise, and let us flee, for there will be no escape for us from before Absalom." He did not want Jerusalem besieged and its people killed by the sword. He would leave the city rather than see it destroyed.

Was David afraid? Perhaps. But I also see a broken man who knew that this trouble had come from his own sin, as Nathan said it would (12:11). He would not cling to his throne. He would trust God with it.

His servants said, "According to all that my lord the king chooses, look, your servants!" David still had men who loved him. He left with his household, but "the king left ten women, concubines, to keep the house." A concubine was a wife of lower rank. This detail will matter in the next chapter.

15:17-18 *And the king went out, and all the people at his feet, and they stood **at** the farthest house. And all his servants **were** passing on beside him, and all the Kerethites and all the Pelethites and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come at his foot from Gath, **were** passing on before the king.*

The king stopped "at the farthest house," the last house on the edge of the city, and watched his people pass by. Among them were "all the Kerethites and all the Pelethites," David's foreign bodyguard (8:18), "and all the Gittites, six hundred men who had come at his foot from Gath." Gittites were men from the Philistine city of Gath. David had lived there when he ran from Saul (1 Samuel 27), and these men had followed him ever since. It is striking that some of David's most loyal men were foreigners, while his own son and his own people turned against him.

15:19-22 *And the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why will you also go with us? Return and dwell with the king, for you **are** a foreigner, and also you **are** an exile from your place. Yesterday **was** your coming, and today shall I make you wander with us to go? And I am going wherever I am going. Return, and take back your brothers; steadfast love and truth **be** with you." And Ittai answered the king and said, "**As** the LORD lives and **as** my lord the king lives, surely in the place where my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, surely there your servant will be." And David said to Ittai, "Go and pass on." And Ittai the Gittite passed on, and all his men and all the little ones who **were** with him.*

David spoke to Ittai, the leader of the Gittites. "Why will you also go with us? Return and dwell with the king, for you are a foreigner." Ittai had only come "Yesterday," David said, and he owed him nothing. "Return, and take back your brothers; steadfast love and truth be with you."

Ittai's answer is one of the great statements of loyalty in the Bible. "As the LORD lives and as my lord the king lives, surely in the place where my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, surely there your servant will be." Ittai, a Philistine, swore by the LORD, the God of Israel. He sounds like Ruth the Moabite, who told Naomi, "where you go, I will go" (Ruth 1:16).

David said, "Go and pass on." Ittai went, with all his men "and all the little ones who were with him." He brought his family into exile with the king. That is what it means to follow your king when it costs something. Jesus calls us to the same loyalty: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross, and let him follow Me" (Matthew 16:24).

15:23 *And all the land **was** weeping **with** a great voice, and all the people **were** passing on; and the king **was** passing on in the wadi of Kidron, and all the people **were** passing on, on the face of the way **to** the wilderness.*

"And all the land was weeping with a great voice." The people of the countryside wept as their king went by. "And the king was passing on in the wadi of Kidron." A wadi is a valley with a stream that runs only in the rainy season. The Kidron lies between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives on the east.

About a thousand years later, the Son of David crossed the same valley on the night He was betrayed. "Jesus went out with His disciples beyond the winter brook of Kidron, where there was a garden" (John 18:1). David crossed it weeping, betrayed by his son and his counselor. Jesus crossed it on His way to Gethsemane, betrayed by His friend. David went for his own sins. Jesus went for ours.

15:24-26 *And look, Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, carrying the ark of the covenant of God; and they set down the ark of God, and Abiathar went up, until all the people had finished passing out from the city. And the king said to Zadok, "Take back the ark of God **to** the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, then He will bring me back and show me it and His habitation. And if He says thus, 'I do not delight in you,' look, **here** I **am**; let Him do to me as **it** is good in His eyes."*

"And look, Zadok also, and all the Levites with him, carrying the ark of the covenant of God." The ark was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law, the sign of God's presence with His people. Zadok and Abiathar were the two high priests in David's day. They brought the ark out so it could go with the king.

But David said, "Take back the ark of God to the city." He would not use the ark as a lucky charm, as Israel once did in the days of Eli, when they carried it into battle and lost it (1 Samuel 4:3-11). David knew God could not be carried around and used. "If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, then He will bring me back and show me it and His habitation." And if God says He does not delight in me, "look, here I am; let Him do to me as it is good in His eyes."

This is the David we love. Humbled, he puts himself completely in God's hands. He does not demand that God restore him. He trusts God either way. That is real faith: not using God to get what we want, but surrendering to what He wants.

15:27-29 *And the king said to Zadok the priest, "**Are** you a seer? Return to the city in peace, and Ahimaaz your son and Jonathan the son of Abiathar, your two sons, with you. See, I will be lingering in the plains of the wilderness until a word comes from you to tell me." And Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back **to** Jerusalem, and they remained there.*

David gave the priests a job. "Are you a seer?" may mean, are you not a man who sees what is going on? Go back and keep watch. Their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, would carry word to David, who would wait "in the plains of the wilderness," near the fords of the Jordan, "until a word comes from you to tell me."

So "Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem, and they remained there." David trusted God, and he also used good sense. Faith and planning are not enemies. Nehemiah later prayed and set a guard at the same time (Nehemiah 4:9).

15:30 *And David **was** going up by the ascent of the olive trees, going up and weeping, and his head **was** covered, and he **was** walking barefoot; and all the people who **were** with him covered each man his head, and they went up, going up and weeping.*

"And David was going up by the ascent of the olive trees, going up and weeping, and his head was covered, and he was walking barefoot." This is the Mount of Olives, the ridge just east of Jerusalem across the Kidron. A covered head and bare feet were signs of mourning and shame. The king of Israel climbed it in tears. "And all the people who were with him covered each man his head, and they went up, going up and weeping."

The Mount of Olives appears again and again in the life of Jesus. He wept over Jerusalem as He came down that slope (Luke 19:41). He prayed there in agony the night He was betrayed (Luke 22:39). And it was from the Mount of Olives that He rose to heaven (Acts 1:12), with the angels' promise: "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Zechariah says that when the Lord comes, "His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives" (Zechariah 14:4). I believe that is a real future day, when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation to set up His kingdom.

So the hill where David the king went up weeping and in disgrace is the very hill where the Son of David will one day stand in glory. David left Jerusalem in sorrow. Jesus will come to Jerusalem as King.

15:31 *And one told David, saying, "Ahithophel **is** among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please make the counsel of Ahithophel foolish."*

Then came more bad news: "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." David did not panic. He prayed. "O LORD, please make the counsel of Ahithophel foolish." It is a short prayer, but it was answered, as we will see in chapter 17.

Many see Ahithophel as a picture of Judas, the trusted friend who betrayed his master. David wrote in Psalm 41:9 of the man "who ate my bread" turning against him, and Jesus applied that verse to Judas (John 13:18). Both Ahithophel and Judas would end their lives by hanging

themselves (17:23; Matthew 27:5). Psalm 55:12-14 may also describe this betrayal: "But you, a man as my equal, my close friend and my acquaintance."

15:32-37 *And it was, David was coming to the top, where one would bow down to God, and look, Hushai the Arkite* ***was*** *to meet him, his tunic torn and soil on his head. And David said to him, "If you pass on with me, then you will be a burden on me. And if you return* ***to*** *the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; I* ***was*** *the servant of your father from of old, and now I* ***am*** *your servant,' then you will frustrate for me the counsel of Ahithophel. And* ***are*** *not Zadok and Abiathar the priests with you there? And it shall be, every word that you hear from the house of the king, you shall tell to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests. Look, there with them* ***are*** *their two sons, Ahimaaz* ***the son*** *of Zadok and Jonathan* ***the son*** *of Abiathar; and you shall send to me by their hand every word that you hear." And Hushai the friend of David came* ***into*** *the city, and Absalom was coming* ***into*** *Jerusalem.*

God's answer to that prayer was already walking toward David. "David was coming to the top, where one would bow down to God," a place of worship on the summit, "and look, Hushai the Arkite was to meet him, his tunic torn and soil on his head." Hushai was in mourning for his king.

David saw what Hushai could do. An old man might slow the march, "you will be a burden on me." But in the city he could be of great use. Tell Absalom, "I will be your servant, O king." Hushai would pretend to switch sides, "then you will frustrate for me the counsel of Ahithophel." Whatever he heard, he would pass to Zadok and Abiathar, and their sons would run it to David.

David prayed, and then he acted. He asked God to defeat Ahithophel's counsel, and when God sent Hushai, David put him to work. Prayer is not an excuse to do nothing. It is the first thing we do, and it shapes everything else we do.

"And Hushai the friend of David came into the city, and Absalom was coming into Jerusalem." The two men entered the city at nearly the same time. The stage was set.

Chapter 15 Summary

After coming home, Absalom got himself a chariot and fifty runners and stood at the gate every morning, telling everyone with a case that he was right and that the king would not hear him, and wishing aloud that he were judge. He kissed those who came to bow, and so he stole the heart of the men of Israel. Then he asked to go to Hebron to pay a vow, sent secret messengers through the tribes, and was proclaimed king there, with two hundred unknowing men from Jerusalem and David's counselor Ahithophel on his side. When David heard, he left Jerusalem with his household and servants, leaving ten concubines to keep the house. Ittai the Gittite refused to turn back and swore to be with the king in death or life. David crossed the Kidron while the land wept. He sent Zadok and Abiathar back with the ark, trusting God to bring him back or do as He pleased. David went up the Mount of Olives weeping, barefoot and with his head covered. Told that Ahithophel had joined Absalom, he prayed that God would make his counsel foolish. At the top he met Hushai and sent him back to Jerusalem to defeat Ahithophel's counsel and send word through the priests' sons.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. How did Absalom steal the hearts of the men of Israel? (15:1-6)

2. What did Absalom use as a cover to go to Hebron, and why was Hebron a good place for his plot? (15:7-10)

3. Why was it such a blow that Ahithophel joined Absalom? (15:12; 16:23)

4. What did Ittai say to David, and why is his loyalty so striking? (15:19-21)

5. Why did David send the ark back to Jerusalem, and what did he say about God's will? (15:25-26)

6. What happened on the Mount of Olives in David's life, and what will happen there in the future? (15:30; Acts 1:11-12; Zechariah 14:4)

7. How did David answer the news about Ahithophel, and how did God begin to answer him? (15:31-34)

8. Absalom told every man what he wanted to hear. How can we tell a true leader from a flatterer?

9. Ittai chose to follow David "whether for death or for life." What does following Jesus cost you right now? (Matthew 16:24)

10. David said, "let Him do to me as it is good in His eyes." Is there an area of your life where you need to pray that prayer?

Chapter 16: Ziba, Shimei and Ahithophel's Counsel

Scripture

16:1-14 And David passed on a little from the top, and look, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth ***was*** to meet him, and a pair of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred ***loaves of*** bread and one hundred clusters of raisins and one hundred ***cakes of*** summer fruit and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, "What ***are*** these to you?" And Ziba said, "The donkeys ***are*** for the household of the king to ride, and the bread and the summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for the weary in the wilderness to drink." And the king said, "And where ***is*** the son of your master?" And Ziba said to the king, "Look, he ***is*** staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore to me the kingdom of my father.'" And the king said to Ziba, "Look, all that ***belonged*** to Mephibosheth ***is*** yours." And Ziba said, "I bow down; may I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king." And King David came to Bahurim, and look, from there a man of the clan of the house of Saul ***was*** coming out, and his name ***was*** Shimei the son of Gera; he ***was*** coming out, coming out and cursing. And he stoned David and all the servants of King David with stones; and all the people and all the mighty men ***were*** on his right and on his left. And thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, man of blood and man of worthlessness! The LORD has brought back on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son; and look, you ***are*** in your evil, for you ***are*** a man of blood!" And Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please let me cross over and take off his head." And the king said, "What ***is there*** to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah? Thus he curses, for the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David'; and who shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Look, my son who came out from my inward parts is seeking my life; and how much more now the Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has spoken to him. Perhaps the LORD will look on my eye, and the LORD will repay me good instead of his cursing this day." And David and his men went on the way, and Shimei ***was*** going on the side of the mountain alongside him, going and cursing; and he stoned with stones alongside him and showered dust. And the king and all the people who ***were*** with him came weary, and he refreshed himself there.

16:15-23 And Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came ***to*** Jerusalem, and Ahithophel ***was*** with him. And it was, when Hushai the Arkite, the friend of David, came to Absalom, and Hushai said to Absalom, "Let the king live! Let the king live!" And Absalom said to Hushai, "***Is*** this your steadfast love with your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. And second, whom should I serve? ***Should it*** not ***be*** before his son? Just as I served before your father, so I will be before you." And Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel for yourselves; what shall we do?" And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to the concubines of your father, whom he left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who ***are*** with you will be strong." And they pitched the tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went in to the concubines of his father before the eyes of all Israel. And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days,

was as ***when*** a man inquires by the word of God; so ***was*** all the counsel of Ahithophel, both to David and to Absalom.

Chapter 16 Preview

As David goes down the far side of the Mount of Olives, two men from the house of Saul meet him. The first is Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, who brings food and donkeys and tells David that his master has stayed behind in Jerusalem hoping to get back his grandfather's kingdom. David believes him and gives Ziba everything that belonged to Mephibosheth. The second is Shimei, who walks along the hillside cursing David and throwing stones and dust at him. Abishai wants to cut off his head, but David says no. Perhaps the LORD has told Shimei to curse him, and perhaps the LORD will see his trouble and repay him with good.

Meanwhile in Jerusalem, Hushai greets Absalom with "Let the king live!" and convinces him that he has changed sides. Then Absalom asks Ahithophel for advice, and Ahithophel tells him to take his father's concubines publicly, so that all Israel will know the break with David can never be healed. Absalom does it, on the palace roof, before the eyes of all Israel. This is the very thing Nathan foretold in 12:11-12. I will speak of it modestly, as Scripture does.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-2 *And David passed on a little from the top, and look, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth* ***was*** *to meet him, and a pair of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred* ***loaves of*** *bread and one hundred clusters of raisins and one hundred* ***cakes of*** *summer fruit and a skin of wine. And the king said to Ziba, "What* ***are*** *these to you?" And Ziba said, "The donkeys* ***are*** *for the household of the king to ride, and the bread and the summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for the weary in the wilderness to drink."*

"David passed on a little from the top, and look, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth was to meet him." Ziba had been a servant of Saul, and David had put him in charge of the land he gave back to Jonathan's lame son Mephibosheth (9:9-10).

Ziba came with "a pair of saddled donkeys, and on them two hundred loaves of bread and one hundred clusters of raisins and one hundred cakes of summer fruit and a skin of wine." It was a generous gift at the right moment. When David asked what it was for, Ziba said, "The donkeys are for the household of the king to ride, and the bread and the summer fruit for the young men to eat, and the wine for the weary in the wilderness to drink." It looked like loyalty. It may also have been an investment.

16:3-4 *And the king said, "And where **is** the son of your master?" And Ziba said to the king, "Look, he **is** staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the house of Israel will restore to me the kingdom of my father.'" And the king said to Ziba, "Look, all that **belonged** to Mephibosheth **is** yours." And Ziba said, "I bow down; may I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king."*

"And where is the son of your master?" David asked. Ziba answered that Mephibosheth had stayed in Jerusalem, saying, "Today the house of Israel will restore to me the kingdom of my father."

That story does not make much sense. Why would Absalom, who was making himself king, hand the throne to a lame grandson of Saul? In chapter 19 Mephibosheth will tell a very different story: that Ziba deceived him and left him behind (19:26-27). We will look at which story is true when we get there.

But David did not stop to ask. He was tired, hurt, and ready to believe the worst. "Look, all that belonged to Mephibosheth is yours." He made a major decision on one side of the story. "The first in his case is righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him" (Proverbs 18:17). We are all tempted to make quick judgments when we are under stress. That is when we most need to wait and hear the other side.

16:5-8 *And King David came to Bahurim, and look, from there a man of the clan of the house of Saul **was** coming out, and his name **was** Shimei the son of Gera; he **was** coming out, coming out and cursing. And he stoned David and all the servants of King David with stones; and all the people and all the mighty men **were** on his right and on his left. And thus Shimei said when he cursed, "Get out, get out, man of blood and man of worthlessness! The LORD has brought back on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son; and look, you **are** in your evil, for you **are** a man of blood!"*

"And King David came to Bahurim," a village just east of the Mount of Olives on the road to the Jordan, "and look, from there a man of the clan of the house of Saul was coming out, and his name was Shimei the son of Gera." He came out "cursing." He threw stones at David and his servants, even though David was surrounded by his mighty men.

"Get out, get out, man of blood and man of worthlessness!" A man of worthlessness was a scoundrel, a good-for-nothing. Then Shimei said, "The LORD has brought back on you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned."

Was Shimei right? As far as Saul's house went, no. David had refused again and again to lay a hand on Saul (1 Samuel 24 and 26). He had mourned Saul and Jonathan (chapter 1), punished the killers of Ish-bosheth (4:9-12), and grieved Abner (3:31-37). Shimei blamed David for blood he had not shed. But David did have blood on his hands, the blood of Uriah. Shimei had the wrong charge, but he was not wrong that David was a sinner under God's discipline. Sometimes a harsh critic is wrong in the details and still says something we need to hear.

16:9-10 *And Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please let me cross over and take off his head." And the king said, "What **is there** to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah? Thus he curses, for the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David'; and who shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"*

Abishai, Joab's brother, said what many were thinking. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please let me cross over and take off his head." A dead dog meant a worthless nobody.

David answered, "What is there to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah?" In other words, you and I do not think alike. "Thus he curses, for the LORD has said to him," David said, "Curse David." And who could ask Shimei, "Why have you done so?"

David did not mean that God had made Shimei sin, or that Shimei was innocent. God tempts no one to evil (James 1:13). David meant that God was sovereign over this moment and might be using even Shimei's curses to humble him. David would rather take the curse from God's hand than strike back in his own strength.

16:11-12 *And David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "Look, my son who came out from my inward parts is seeking my life; and how much more now the Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has spoken to him. Perhaps the LORD will look on my eye, and the LORD will repay me good instead of his cursing this day."*

"Look, my son who came out from my inward parts is seeking my life; and how much more now the Benjaminite!" David's own son wanted him dead. Why be shocked that a man from Saul's tribe hated him? "Leave him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has spoken to him."

Then David said, "Perhaps the LORD will look on my eye, and the LORD will repay me good instead of his cursing this day." The phrase "look on my eye" may mean look on my tears, or look on my affliction. David hoped God would see his humble suffering and turn the curse into blessing.

This is a good word for anyone who is being attacked unfairly. David did not hit back. He left it to God. Jesus did the same, and far more. "Being reviled, did not revile in return; suffering, He did not threaten, but He kept handing Himself over to the One who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). When we are cursed, we can choose to trust the God who sees.

16:13-14 *And David and his men went on the way, and Shimei **was** going on the side of the mountain alongside him, going and cursing; and he stoned with stones alongside him and showered dust. And the king and all the people who **were** with him came weary, and he refreshed himself there.*

So David and his men walked on, "and Shimei was going on the side of the mountain alongside him, going and cursing; and he stoned with stones alongside him and showered dust." It must have gone on for a long way.

"And the king and all the people who were with him came weary, and he refreshed himself there." They reached a place near the Jordan, most likely the place where David had told the priests to

send word (15:28), and they rested. After a long day of grief, humiliation and insult, God gave them rest. Psalm 3, written "when he fled from before Absalom his son," may come from this very night. "I, I lay down and slept; I awoke, for the LORD sustains me" (Psalm 3:5).

16:15-19 *And Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came **to** Jerusalem, and Ahithophel **was** with him. And it was, when Hushai the Arkite, the friend of David, came to Absalom, and Hushai said to Absalom, "Let the king live! Let the king live!" And Absalom said to Hushai, "**Is** this your steadfast love with your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" And Hushai said to Absalom, "No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain. And second, whom should I serve? **Should it** not **be** before his son? Just as I served before your father, so I will be before you."*

Back in Jerusalem, "Absalom and all the people, the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him." Then Hushai came to Absalom and said, "Let the king live! Let the king live!"

Absalom was suspicious. "Is this your steadfast love with your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?" Steadfast love (hesed in Hebrew) is the loyal, covenant love that keeps faith. Hushai had been known as "the friend of David," a title that may have been an official position, the king's trusted adviser.

Hushai's answer was clever. "No, but whom the LORD and this people and all the men of Israel have chosen, his I will be, and with him I will remain." Absalom heard it as about himself. But Hushai never said Absalom's name. The one the LORD had chosen was David. Then he added, "Just as I served before your father, so I will be before you." It was a double-edged answer, and Absalom was proud enough to take it as praise.

16:20-22 *And Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give counsel for yourselves; what shall we do?" And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Go in to the concubines of your father, whom he left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who **are** with you will be strong." And they pitched the tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went in to the concubines of his father before the eyes of all Israel.*

"Give counsel for yourselves; what shall we do?" Ahithophel's first advice was this: "Go in to the concubines of your father, whom he left to keep the house; and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strong."

In the ancient world, taking the former king's wives was a public claim to his throne (compare 3:7 and 12:8). It also made the break with David final. Absalom's followers would know there was no going back, no peace deal in which they might be handed over. To make yourself odious means to make yourself a stench, so hated there could never be peace.

"And they pitched the tent for Absalom on the roof, and Absalom went in to the concubines of his father before the eyes of all Israel." The writer does not linger, and neither will we. It was wicked. It broke God's Law (Leviticus 18:8). It shamed his father and wronged the ten women, who had no

say in it. And it happened on the roof of the palace, the very place where David had first looked down at Bathsheba (11:2).

Nathan had said, "I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he will lie with your wives before the eyes of this sun" (12:11). God did not make Absalom sin. Absalom chose his evil freely and is fully to blame. But God had warned that what David did in secret would be repaid in the open, and here it was. "Whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

16:23 *And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days,* ***was*** *as* ***when*** *a man inquires by the word of God; so* ***was*** *all the counsel of Ahithophel, both to David and to Absalom.*

"And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as when a man inquires by the word of God." People treated his advice as if God Himself had spoken. "So was all the counsel of Ahithophel, both to David and to Absalom."

That is a frightening verse. Ahithophel's counsel was brilliant, but it was not godly. His first advice to Absalom was to commit a gross sin in public. Wisdom without the fear of the LORD is dangerous. The cleverest person in the room is not always the one to follow. "The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the LORD" (Proverbs 9:10). David had prayed that God would turn this counsel to foolishness (15:31), and in the next chapter God does.

Chapter 16 Summary

Just past the top of the Mount of Olives, Ziba met David with saddled donkeys and food and wine for the king's people. He told David that Mephibosheth had stayed in Jerusalem expecting Israel to give him back Saul's kingdom, and David gave Ziba all that was Mephibosheth's. At Bahurim, Shimei son of Gera, of Saul's clan, came out cursing David as a man of blood and throwing stones and dust. Abishai wanted to kill him, but David would not allow it, saying the LORD may have told him to curse, and the LORD might repay good for it. David and his people came weary to the Jordan and rested. In Jerusalem, Hushai greeted Absalom as king and said he would serve whom the LORD and Israel had chosen. Absalom asked Ahithophel for counsel, and Ahithophel told him to go in to his father's concubines so that all Israel would know he had made himself odious to his father. They pitched a tent on the roof, and Absalom did so before all Israel. Ahithophel's counsel was treated as if it were the word of God.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. What did Ziba bring to David, and what did he say about Mephibosheth? (16:1-3)

2. Why was David's quick decision about Mephibosheth unwise? (16:4; Proverbs 18:17)

3. What did Shimei accuse David of, and was he right? (16:7-8)

4. Why did David refuse to let Abishai kill Shimei? (16:10-12)

5. How did Hushai answer Absalom in a way that was true and also misleading? (16:16-19)

6. What did Ahithophel advise, and how did it fulfill Nathan's word in 12:11-12? (16:21-22)

7. What does 16:23 say about Ahithophel's counsel, and why is that a warning? (Proverbs 9:10)

8. David hoped God would "repay me good" for Shimei's cursing. How do you answer people who attack you unfairly? (1 Peter 2:23)

9. Is there a critic in your life who may be wrong in the details but right that you need to change?

10. Where are you tempted to make a quick judgment based on one side of a story?

Chapter 17: Hushai Defeats Ahithophel's Counsel

Scripture

17:1-14 And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Please let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he ***is*** weary and slack of hands, and I will terrify him, and all the people who ***are*** with him will flee, and I will strike down the king alone. And I will bring back all the people to you. Like the returning of the whole ***is*** the man whom you are seeking; all the people will be ***at*** peace." And the word was right in the eyes of Absalom and in the eyes of all the elders of Israel. And Absalom said, "Please call Hushai the Arkite also, and let us hear what ***is*** in his mouth, he also." And Hushai came to Absalom, and Absalom said to him, saying, "According to this word Ahithophel has spoken. Shall we do his word? If not, you speak." And Hushai said to Absalom, "The counsel that Ahithophel has counseled is not good this time." And Hushai said, "You, you know your father and his men, that they ***are*** mighty men, and they ***are*** bitter of soul, like a bear robbed of cubs in the field; and your father ***is*** a man of war, and he will not spend the night with the people. Look, now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in one of the places; and it will be, when ***some*** fall among them at the first, then whoever hears will hear and say, 'There has been a slaughter among the people who ***are*** after Absalom.' And he also, a son of strength whose heart ***is*** like the heart of the lion, will utterly melt; for all Israel knows that your father ***is*** a mighty man, and ***that*** those who ***are*** with him ***are*** sons of strength. For I counsel: let all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, like the sand which ***is*** by the sea for multitude, and your face going into the battle. And we will come against him in one of the places where he is found, and we will light on him as the dew falls on the ground; and there will not be left of him and of all the men who ***are*** with him even one. And if he is gathered into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it to the wadi until not even a pebble is found there." And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Arkite ***is*** better than the counsel of Ahithophel." And the LORD had commanded to frustrate the good counsel of Ahithophel, in order that the LORD might bring the evil upon Absalom.

17:15-29 And Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, "Like this and like that Ahithophel counseled Absalom and the elders of Israel, and like this and like that I, I have counseled. And now send quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend the night tonight at the plains of the wilderness, and also be sure to pass over, lest the king and all the people who ***are*** with him be swallowed up.'" And Jonathan and Ahimaaz ***were*** staying at En-rogel, and the maidservant would go and tell them, and they would go and tell King David; for they could not be seen coming into the city. And a young man saw them and told Absalom; and the two of them went quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim, and he had a well in his courtyard, and they went down there. And the woman took and spread the covering over the face of the well and spread crushed grain on it, and nothing was known. And the servants of Absalom came to the woman, to the house, and said, "Where ***are*** Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" And the woman said to them, "They have passed over the brook of water." And they sought and did not find ***them***, and they returned ***to*** Jerusalem. And it was after they had gone, and they came up from the well and went and told King David; and they said to David, "Arise and pass over the water quickly, for thus

Ahithophel has counseled against you." And David arose, and all the people who ***were*** with him, and they passed over the Jordan; until the light of the morning, not even one was missing who had not passed over the Jordan. And Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not done, and he saddled the donkey and arose and went to his house, to his city; and he gave command concerning his household, and he hanged himself and died; and he was buried in the tomb of his father. And David had come to Mahanaim, and Absalom had passed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And Absalom had set Amasa in place of Joab over the army; and Amasa ***was*** the son of a man, and his name ***was*** Ithra the Israelite, who had gone in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, the sister of Zeruiah, the mother of Joab. And Israel and Absalom encamped ***in*** the land of Gilead. And it was, when David came to Mahanaim, and Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, beds and basins and vessels of a potter, and wheat and barley and flour and roasted grain, and beans and lentils and roasted grain, and honey and curds and sheep and cheese of the herd, they brought for David and for the people who ***were*** with him to eat; for they said, "The people ***are*** hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

Chapter 17 Preview

Ahithophel gives Absalom a second piece of advice, and this one is deadly. Let me take twelve thousand men tonight, he says, catch David while he is tired, scatter his people, and kill the king alone. Then all Israel will come over to you in peace. It is exactly the right plan, and Absalom and the elders like it. But Absalom asks Hushai too, and Hushai paints a picture of David as a wild bear robbed of her cubs, hiding in a cave and ready to ambush. Wait, he says, gather all Israel from Dan to Beersheba, and lead them yourself. Absalom chooses Hushai's plan. The writer tells us why: the LORD had ordered it, to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel and bring disaster on Absalom.

Hushai sends word to David through the priests' sons, who escape Absalom's men by hiding in a well. David crosses the Jordan in the night. Ahithophel, seeing his advice ignored, goes home, puts his house in order, and hangs himself. David reaches Mahanaim, and three men from east of the Jordan meet him with beds, bowls and food for his hungry people. God answers David's prayer from the Mount of Olives, and He provides for him in the wilderness.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-4 *And Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Please let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night. And I will come upon him while he **is** weary and slack of hands, and I will terrify him, and all the people who **are** with him will flee, and I will strike down the king alone. And I will bring back all the people to you. Like the returning of the whole **is** the man whom you are seeking; all the people will be **at** peace." And the word was right in the eyes of Absalom and in the eyes of all the elders of Israel.*

"Please let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night." Ahithophel wanted to strike fast, before David could rest and regroup. "I will come upon him while he is weary and slack of hands, and I will terrify him, and all the people who are with him will flee, and I will strike down the king alone."

It was a cold and smart plan. Kill one man, and the war is over. "And I will bring back all the people to you." There would be no long civil war, just one death. "All the people will be at peace."

"And the word was right in the eyes of Absalom and in the eyes of all the elders of Israel." Nobody blinked at the plan to kill the king, Absalom's own father. This shows how far Absalom's heart had gone.

Humanly speaking, it would have worked. David was exhausted, across the valley with a small band, and had not yet crossed the Jordan. If Ahithophel had gone that night, David would likely have died. But David had prayed (15:31).

17:5-7 *And Absalom said, "Please call Hushai the Arkite also, and let us hear what **is** in his mouth, he also." And Hushai came to Absalom, and Absalom said to him, saying, "According to this word Ahithophel has spoken. Shall we do his word? If not, you speak." And Hushai said to Absalom, "The counsel that Ahithophel has counseled is not good this time."*

For some reason Absalom wanted a second opinion. "Please call Hushai the Arkite also, and let us hear what is in his mouth, he also." Why? Perhaps pride, wanting to be the one who decides. Perhaps doubt. The writer will tell us in verse 14 who was really behind it.

Absalom told Hushai the plan and asked, "Shall we do his word? If not, you speak." Hushai's whole mission came down to this moment. He started carefully: "The counsel that Ahithophel has counseled is not good this time." Notice "this time." He did not attack Ahithophel's wisdom in general. He only suggested that this once, the great counselor had missed something.

17:8-10 *And Hushai said, "You, you know your father and his men, that they **are** mighty men, and they **are** bitter of soul, like a bear robbed of cubs in the field; and your father **is** a man of war, and he will not spend the night with the people. Look, now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in one of the places; and it will be, when **some** fall among them at the first, then whoever hears will hear and say, 'There has been a slaughter among the people who **are** after Absalom.' And he also, a son of strength whose heart **is** like the heart of the lion, will utterly melt; for all Israel knows that your father **is** a mighty man, and **that** those who **are** with him **are** sons of strength.*

Then Hushai played on Absalom's fears. "You, you know your father and his men, that they are mighty men, and they are bitter of soul, like a bear robbed of cubs in the field." There is nothing more dangerous than a mother bear whose cubs have been taken.

"Your father is a man of war, and he will not spend the night with the people." He was suggesting that David would not be sleeping among his men where Ahithophel could find him. "Now he has hidden himself in one of the pits or in one of the places." Absalom knew the stories of David hiding in caves from Saul. And if any of Absalom's men fell in the first clash, the word would spread, "There has been a slaughter," and even the bravest, "whose heart is like the heart of the lion, will utterly melt."

Hushai did not have to lie much. Everything he said about David's skill was true. He just used the truth to make the right plan look dangerous.

17:11-13 *For I counsel: let all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, like the sand which **is** by the sea for multitude, and your face going into the battle. And we will come against him in one of the places where he is found, and we will light on him as the dew falls on the ground; and there will not be left of him and of all the men who **are** with him even one. And if he is gathered into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it to the wadi until not even a pebble is found there."*

Then he appealed to Absalom's pride. "Let all Israel be surely gathered to you, from Dan even to Beersheba, like the sand which is by the sea for multitude, and your face going into the battle." Dan was the far north and Beersheba the far south. Gather the whole nation, Hushai said, and lead it yourself. Absalom loved to be seen. Hushai pictured him at the head of a vast army.

"We will light on him as the dew falls on the ground," covering every inch, "and there will not be left of him and of all the men who are with him even one." And if David hid in a city, "all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it to the wadi until not even a pebble is found there." It was grand and boastful, and it bought David the one thing he needed most: time.

17:14 *And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The counsel of Hushai the Arkite **is** better than the counsel of Ahithophel." And the LORD had commanded to frustrate the good counsel of Ahithophel, in order that the LORD might bring the evil upon Absalom.*

"And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Arkite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel."

Then comes the key verse of the chapter. "And the LORD had commanded to frustrate the good counsel of Ahithophel, in order that the LORD might bring the evil upon Absalom." This is the answer to David's prayer in 15:31. The writer calls Ahithophel's counsel "good," meaning it would have worked. But the LORD stood behind the scenes, and no plan can stand against Him. "There is no wisdom and no understanding and no counsel opposite the LORD" (Proverbs 21:30).

This is a great comfort. God does not always part the sea. Often He works through ordinary choices: a proud man's vanity, a friend's quick words, a second opinion. He is sovereign over the plans of men. "Many are the plans in the heart of a man, and the counsel of the LORD, it will stand" (Proverbs 19:21).

17:15-16 *And Hushai said to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, "Like this and like that Ahithophel counseled Absalom and the elders of Israel, and like this and like that I, I have counseled. And now send quickly and tell David, saying, 'Do not spend the night tonight at the plains of the wilderness, and also be sure to pass over, lest the king and all the people who **are** with him be swallowed up.'"*

Hushai went straight to the priests. He told them both plans and said, "send quickly and tell David." Hushai did not trust Absalom to stick with his decision. "Do not spend the night tonight at the plains of the wilderness, and also be sure to pass over, lest the king and all the people who are with him be swallowed up." Get across the Jordan now.

Trusting God's sovereignty did not make Hushai careless. He acted as if everything depended on speed, because in a sense it did. God's sovereignty and our responsibility work together.

17:17-20 *And Jonathan and Ahimaaz **were** staying at En-rogel, and the maidservant would go and tell them, and they would go and tell King David; for they could not be seen coming into the city. And a young man saw them and told Absalom; and the two of them went quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim, and he had a well in his courtyard, and they went down there. And the woman took and spread the covering over the face of the well and spread crushed grain on it, and nothing was known. And the servants of Absalom came to the woman, to the house, and said, "Where **are** Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" And the woman said to them, "They have passed over the brook of water." And they sought and did not find **them**, and they returned **to** Jerusalem.*

The plan for getting word to David was already in place. Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of the priests, waited "at En-rogel," a spring just outside the city to the south. A maidservant would bring them the message, since they could not be seen going in and out of the city.

But "a young man saw them and told Absalom." The two ran to Bahurim, the same village where Shimei had cursed David, and a man there had "a well in his courtyard, and they went down there." It was likely a dry cistern. His wife spread a cover over the opening and scattered grain on it, so it looked like grain set out to dry.

When Absalom's servants came asking, she said, "They have passed over the brook of water." They searched, found nothing, and went back. Like Rahab hiding the spies (Joshua 2:4-6), this woman risked her life for the LORD's anointed. God used an unnamed woman in a little village to save the king. Scripture does not stop to judge her words to Absalom's men, and teachers have long discussed whether such deception is right in time of war. What it does show is her courage.

17:21-22 *And it was after they had gone, and they came up from the well and went and told King David; and they said to David, "Arise and pass over the water quickly, for thus Ahithophel has counseled against you." And David arose, and all the people who **were** with him, and they passed over the Jordan; until the light of the morning, not even one was missing who had not passed over the Jordan.*

When the danger passed, the two climbed out and ran to David: "Arise and pass over the water quickly, for thus Ahithophel has counseled against you." David did not wait. "David arose, and all the people who were with him, and they passed over the Jordan." They crossed in the dark, and by morning "not even one was missing who had not passed over the Jordan." God kept every one of them safe.

17:23 *And Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not done, and he saddled the donkey and arose and went to his house, to his city; and he gave command concerning his household, and he hanged himself and died; and he was buried in the tomb of his father.*

"And Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not done." He understood at once what it meant. Absalom had lost his best chance, David would regroup, and Absalom would lose. And Ahithophel, the man who had betrayed David, would be put to death as a traitor. "He saddled the donkey and arose and went to his house, to his city; and he gave command concerning his household, and he hanged himself and died; and he was buried in the tomb of his father."

It is a sad and sober end. The wisest man in Israel had no wisdom for himself. He set his house in order, but he did not set his soul in order with God. Like Judas after him, who betrayed the Son of David and "hanged himself" (Matthew 27:5), Ahithophel's betrayal led to despair. Pride and bitterness can carry a person far down a dark road.

If you are struggling with despair, or thoughts of ending your life, please hear this: there is a better way than Ahithophel's. Talk to someone today, a pastor, a friend, a doctor, or a crisis line. God has not given up on you. "The LORD is near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18), and there is no failure so great that Christ cannot forgive it and no darkness so deep that He cannot bring you through it.

17:24-26 *And David had come to Mahanaim, and Absalom had passed over the Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. And Absalom had set Amasa in place of Joab over the army; and Amasa* ***was*** *the son of a man, and his name* ***was*** *Ithra the Israelite, who had gone in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, the sister of Zeruiah, the mother of Joab. And Israel and Absalom encamped* ***in*** *the land of Gilead.*

"And David had come to Mahanaim," a fortified town east of the Jordan in Gilead. It was the same place where Saul's son Ish-bosheth had set up his capital (2:8). It was a good place to gather an army.

Absalom crossed the Jordan with all Israel, just as Hushai had advised. "And Absalom had set Amasa in place of Joab over the army." Amasa was David's nephew and Joab's cousin. His mother Abigail was the sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. This was a family war through and through, with cousins leading the armies on both sides. "And Israel and Absalom encamped in the land of Gilead."

17:27-29 *And it was, when David came to Mahanaim, and Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, beds and basins and vessels of a potter, and wheat and barley and flour and roasted grain, and beans and lentils and roasted grain, and honey and curds and sheep and cheese of the herd, they brought for David and for the people who* ***were*** *with him to eat; for they said, "The people* ***are*** *hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."*

Then, when David reached Mahanaim, help came from three unexpected men. "Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the sons of Ammon." Nahash had been king of the Ammonites, and David had fought his son Hanun (chapter 10). Now another son of Nahash came to help David. "And Machir the son of Ammiel from Lo-debar." Machir had cared for Mephibosheth before David took him in (9:4-5). David's kindness to Jonathan's son had not been forgotten. "And Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim," a very old and wealthy man (19:32).

They brought "beds and basins and vessels of a potter, and wheat and barley and flour and roasted grain, and beans and lentils and roasted grain, and honey and curds and sheep and cheese of the herd." It is a long list, and the writer enjoys every item. "For they said, The people are hungry and weary and thirsty in the wilderness."

David had left Jerusalem with nothing. He was cursed, chased and betrayed. And God met him in the wilderness with beds and food from people he might never have expected. That is how God provides. David wrote, "You arrange a table before me in front of my adversaries" (Psalm 23:5). David knew from experience that it was true.

Chapter 17 Summary

Ahithophel advised Absalom to let him take twelve thousand men that night, catch David weary, scatter his people and kill only the king, and Absalom and the elders approved. But Absalom called Hushai, who said the advice was not good this time: David and his men were fierce like a bear robbed of cubs and skilled in war, David would be hiding, and any early loss would melt the army's courage. Hushai urged Absalom to gather all Israel from Dan to Beersheba and lead it himself. Absalom and the men of Israel chose Hushai's counsel, because the LORD had ordained to defeat Ahithophel's good counsel and bring disaster on Absalom. Hushai sent word through the priests' sons, who hid from Absalom's servants in a well at Bahurim, then told David to cross the Jordan at once. David and all his people crossed by morning. Ahithophel went home, set his house in order and hanged himself. David came to Mahanaim, Absalom crossed the Jordan with Amasa leading his army, and Shobi, Machir and Barzillai brought David's hungry people beds, bowls and food.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. What was Ahithophel's plan, and why would it likely have worked? (17:1-3)

2. How did Hushai use the truth about David to make Ahithophel's plan look dangerous? (17:8-10)

3. How did Hushai appeal to Absalom's pride? (17:11-13)

4. According to 17:14, why did Absalom choose Hushai's counsel, and what prayer did this answer? (15:31)

5. How were the priests' sons kept safe at Bahurim? (17:17-20)

6. What did Ahithophel do when his counsel was not followed, and how is he like Judas? (17:23; Matthew 27:5)

7. Who came to help David at Mahanaim, and what is surprising about each of them? (17:27-29)

8. God worked through ordinary choices to defeat Ahithophel's plan. Where have you seen God at work behind the scenes in your life? (Proverbs 19:21)

9. Hushai trusted God and still moved fast. How do you hold together trusting God and doing your part?

10. Ahithophel was wise in every way but one. What would it mean for you to set your soul in order with God, not just your house?

Chapter 18: The Death of Absalom

Scripture

18:1-18 And David mustered the people who ***were*** with him, and he set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. And David sent out the people, the third in the hand of Joab, and the third in the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, and the third in the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you." And the people said, "You shall not go out; for if we indeed flee, they will not set ***their*** heart on us; and if half of us die, they will not set ***their*** heart on us; for now ***you are*** like ten thousand of us. And now ***it is*** good that you be for us from the city to help." And the king said to them, "What is good in your eyes I will do." And the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands. And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, "***Deal*** gently for my sake with the young man, with Absalom." And all the people heard when the king commanded all the commanders concerning the matter of Absalom. And the people went out into the field to meet Israel, and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim. And the people of Israel were defeated there before the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand. And the battle there was spread out over the face of all the land, and the forest devoured more among the people than the sword devoured on that day. And Absalom happened ***to be*** before the servants of David. And Absalom ***was*** riding on the mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of the great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was put between the heavens and the earth, and the mule that ***was*** under him passed on. And a certain man saw ***it*** and told Joab, and he said, "Look, I saw Absalom hanging in the oak." And Joab said to the man who told him, "And look, you saw ***him***! And why did you not strike him down there to the earth? And ***it would have been*** on me to give you ten ***pieces of*** silver and one belt." And the man said to Joab, "Even if I were weighing on my hands a thousand ***pieces of*** silver, I would not stretch out my hand against the son of the king; for in our ears the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Guard, whoever ***you are***, the young man, Absalom.' Or ***if*** I had done falsehood against my life (and nothing is hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof." And Joab said, "Not thus will I wait before you." And he took three spears in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he ***was*** still alive in the heart of the oak. And ten young men, the bearers of the armor of Joab, surrounded ***him*** and struck Absalom and killed him. And Joab blew the ram's horn, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel, for Joab restrained the people. And they took Absalom and threw him in the forest into the great pit, and they set up over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled, each man to his tents. And Absalom in his life had taken and set up for himself the pillar which ***is*** in the valley of the king, for he said, "I have no son in order to cause my name to be remembered." And he called the pillar by his own name, and it is called "the Monument of Absalom" to this day.

18:19-33 And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Please let me run and bear news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him from the hand of his enemies." And Joab said to him, "You ***are*** not a man of news this day; and you shall bear news on another day, and this day you shall not bear news, for since the son of the king has died." And Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." And the Cushite bowed down to Joab and ran. And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok

again further said to Joab, "And whatever may be, please let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why ***is*** it ***that*** you are running, my son, and you have no news that finds ***reward***?" "And whatever may be, I will run." And he said to him, "Run." And Ahimaaz ran ***by*** the way of the plain and passed the Cushite. And David ***was*** sitting between the two gates; and the watchman went to the roof of the gate, to the wall, and lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, a man running by himself. And the watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If ***he is*** by himself, ***there is*** news in his mouth." And he came on, coming and drawing near. And the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "Look, a man running by himself!" And the king said, "This one also ***is*** bearing news." And the watchman said, "I see the running of the first ***is*** like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "This ***is*** a good man, and he comes with good news." And Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "Peace!" And he bowed down to the king on his face to the earth and said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted up their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "***Is there*** peace for the young man, for Absalom?" And Ahimaaz said, "I saw the great tumult at the sending of the servant of the king, Joab, and your servant, and I do not know what ***it was***." And the king said, "Turn aside, stand here." And he turned aside and stood. And look, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king receive news, for the LORD has vindicated you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." And the king said to the Cushite, "***Is there*** peace for the young man, for Absalom?" And the Cushite said, "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who have risen up against you for evil, be like the young man." And the king was shaken, and he went up to the upper room of the gate and wept; and thus he said as he went, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died, I myself, in your place! Absalom, my son, my son!"

Chapter 18 Preview

David organizes his army at Mahanaim in three divisions under Joab, Abishai and Ittai. He wants to go out with them, but the people will not let him risk his life. As the troops march out past him at the gate, David gives one order that everyone hears: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, with Absalom." The battle is fought in the forest of Ephraim, and Absalom's army is crushed. Absalom, riding his mule under a great oak, is caught by the head in the branches and left hanging. A soldier refuses to touch him because of the king's command. Joab does not hesitate. He thrusts three spears into Absalom's heart, his armor-bearers finish him, and they throw him in a pit under a heap of stones.

Then comes one of the most moving scenes in the Bible. Two runners race to bring David the news. David sits between the gates and asks each one the same question: is it well with the young man Absalom? When the second runner tells him, David goes up to the room over the gate weeping: "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died, I myself, in your place!" The war is won, and the king's heart is broken.

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-4 *And David mustered the people who **were** with him, and he set over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. And David sent out the people, the third in the hand of Joab, and the third in the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, and the third in the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said to the people, "I also will surely go out with you." And the people said, "You shall not go out; for if we indeed flee, they will not set **their** heart on us; and if half of us die, they will not set **their** heart on us; for now **you are** like ten thousand of us. And now **it is** good that you be for us from the city to help." And the king said to them, "What is good in your eyes I will do." And the king stood beside the gate, and all the people went out by hundreds and by thousands.*

"And David mustered the people who were with him." His army had grown at Mahanaim. He divided it in three: a third under Joab, a third under Abishai, "and the third in the hand of Ittai the Gittite." The foreigner who swore loyalty in the darkest hour (15:21) was now trusted with a third of the army.

"And the king said to the people, I also will surely go out with you." David was ready to lead again. But the people said no: "for now you are like ten thousand of us." If David died, the cause was lost. He was worth more to them alive in the city, ready to send help. Back in 11:1, David should have gone to war and stayed home. Now he wants to go, and his people wisely keep him back.

"What is good in your eyes I will do." David listened. He "stood beside the gate, and all the people went 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, with Absalom." And all the people heard when the king commanded all the commanders concerning the matter of Absalom.*

"And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, with Absalom." Absalom was leading an army to kill his father, and David still called him "the young man" and asked for mercy. "And all the people heard when the king commanded all the commanders concerning the matter of Absalom." No one could later claim he did not know.

What father's heart does not understand this? A son can break his father's heart, and the father will still love him. This is a small picture of God's heart toward rebels. "The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some consider slowness, but is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

18:6-8 *And the people went out into the field to meet Israel, and the battle was in the forest of Ephraim. And the people of Israel were defeated there before the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand. And the battle there was spread out over the face of all the land, and the forest devoured more among the people than the sword devoured on that day.*

"The battle was in the forest of Ephraim." This forest was east of the Jordan in Gilead, rough, wooded hill country. "And the people of Israel were defeated there before the servants of David, and the slaughter there was great on that day, twenty thousand."

Then an unusual line: "the forest devoured more among the people than the sword devoured on that day." Ravines, thick woods, rocks and pits took more lives than the fighting did. Hushai's advice to bring a huge army had been a trap. A great crowd of untrained men was helpless in that ground against David's tested soldiers. The LORD was bringing disaster on Absalom, as 17:14 said He would.

18:9-10 *And Absalom happened **to be** before the servants of David. And Absalom **was** riding on the mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of the great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was put between the heavens and the earth, and the mule that **was** under him passed on. And a certain man saw **it** and told Joab, and he said, "Look, I saw Absalom hanging in the oak."*

"And Absalom happened to be before the servants of David." He was fleeing, "riding on the mule," which was the mount of the king's sons (13:29). "The mule went under the thick branches of the great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was put between the heavens and the earth, and the mule that was under him passed on."

Many think it was his famous hair that caught him (14:26), though the text only says "his head." The thing he was proudest of may have been the thing that trapped him. And the mule, the sign of his royal rank, walked out from under him. He hung "between the heavens and the earth," rejected by both. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18).

"And a certain man saw it and told Joab, and he said, Look, I saw Absalom hanging in the oak."

18:11-13 *And Joab said to the man who told him, "And look, you saw **him**! And why did you not strike him down there to the earth? And **it would have been** on me to give you ten **pieces of** silver and one belt." And the man said to Joab, "Even if I were weighing on my hands a thousand **pieces of** silver, I would not stretch out my hand against the son of the king; for in our ears the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, saying, 'Guard, whoever **you are**, the young man, Absalom.' Or **if** I had done falsehood against my life (and nothing is hidden from the king), then you yourself would have stood aloof."*

Joab was angry. "And why did you not strike him down there to the earth?" He would have paid "ten pieces of silver and one belt," a fine reward.

The soldier's answer shows real integrity. Even for "a thousand pieces of silver, I would not stretch out my hand against the son of the king." He had heard the king's command with his own

ears: "Guard, whoever you are, the young man, Absalom." And he saw through Joab. If he had killed Absalom, he said, "nothing is hidden from the king," and Joab "would have stood aloof," leaving the soldier to take the blame. This nameless man understood both his king and his commander better than Joab expected.

18:14-15 *And Joab said, "Not thus will I wait before you." And he took three spears in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he **was** still alive in the heart of the oak. And ten young men, the bearers of the armor of Joab, surrounded **him** and struck Absalom and killed him.*

"And Joab said, Not thus will I wait before you." He had no more time for talk. "He took three spears in his hand and thrust them into the heart of Absalom, while he was still alive in the heart of the oak." Then "ten young men, the bearers of the armor of Joab, surrounded him and struck Absalom and killed him."

Was Joab right? Absalom was guilty. He had murdered his brother, taken his father's concubines and led a war to kill the king. Under the Law, he deserved death (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Joab may have believed that as long as Absalom lived, the kingdom would never have peace, and that David would only forgive him again. Humanly, Joab may have saved the kingdom.

But Joab disobeyed a direct order from his king, given in front of the whole army. He decided he knew better than the LORD's anointed. This was the same Joab who killed Abner (3:27) and who would soon kill Amasa (20:10). Joab got results, but he always did it his own way. David never forgot it, and at the end of his life he told Solomon to deal with Joab (1 Kings 2:5-6).

18:16-18 *And Joab blew the ram's horn, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel, for Joab restrained the people. And they took Absalom and threw him in the forest into the great pit, and they set up over him a very great heap of stones. And all Israel fled, each man to his tents. And Absalom in his life had taken and set up for himself the pillar which **is** in the valley of the king, for he said, "I have no son in order to cause my name to be remembered." And he called the pillar by his own name, and it is called "the Monument of Absalom" to this day.*

"And Joab blew the ram's horn, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel." With Absalom dead, the rebellion was over. Joab stopped the killing. There was no reason for more of Israel to die.

"And they took Absalom and threw him in the forest into the great pit, and they set up over him a very great heap of stones." A heap of stones over a body was a mark of shame, given to the cursed (Joshua 7:26; 8:29). The handsomest man in Israel, who wanted to be king, was buried in a hole in the woods.

The writer then reminds us of a monument Absalom had built for himself. "Absalom in his life had taken and set up for himself the pillar which is in the valley of the king, for he said, I have no son in order to cause my name to be remembered." It was "called the Monument of Absalom to this day." He had built himself a grand memorial. He ended up under a pile of rocks. That is the difference between the honor we try to give ourselves and the honor God gives. "The pride of a man will bring him low, and one lowly of spirit will lay hold of honor" (Proverbs 29:23).

18:19-23 *And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, "Please let me run and bear news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him from the hand of his enemies." And Joab said to him, "You **are** not a man of news this day; and you shall bear news on another day, and this day you shall not bear news, for since the son of the king has died." And Joab said to the Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." And the Cushite bowed down to Joab and ran. And Ahimaaz the son of Zadok again further said to Joab, "And whatever may be, please let me also run after the Cushite." And Joab said, "Why **is** it **that** you are running, my son, and you have no news that finds **reward**?" "And whatever may be, I will run." And he said to him, "Run." And Ahimaaz ran **by** the way of the plain and passed the Cushite.*

Now the news had to reach David. "Ahimaaz the son of Zadok said, Please let me run and bear news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him from the hand of his enemies." Ahimaaz was one of the two young men who had hidden in the well (17:18-21). He was eager, loyal and fast.

But Joab said no. "You are not a man of news this day." Joab knew how David would take the news of his son's death, and he seems to have wanted to protect the young man from the king's reaction. Joab sent "the Cushite" instead, a foreign servant from Cush, the land south of Egypt.

Ahimaaz kept begging. "Whatever may be, please let me also run after the Cushite." Joab gave in: "Run." Ahimaaz took "the way of the plain," a longer but easier road through the Jordan valley, "and passed the Cushite."

18:24-27 *And David **was** sitting between the two gates; and the watchman went to the roof of the gate, to the wall, and lifted up his eyes and saw, and look, a man running by himself. And the watchman called out and told the king. And the king said, "If **he is** by himself, **there is** news in his mouth." And he came on, coming and drawing near. And the watchman saw another man running, and the watchman called to the gatekeeper and said, "Look, a man running by himself!" And the king said, "This one also **is** bearing news." And the watchman said, "I see the running of the first **is** like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." And the king said, "This **is** a good man, and he comes with good news."*

"And David was sitting between the two gates," the inner and outer gates of Mahanaim's walled entry, waiting. The watchman on the wall saw "a man running by himself." David said, "If he is by himself, there is news in his mouth." A crowd of men running meant a rout. A single runner meant a messenger.

Then a second runner appeared. "This one also is bearing news." The watchman said the first ran "like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok." David said, "This is a good man, and he comes with good news." David was hoping. But notice what he was waiting for. Not the battle report. News of his son.

18:28-30 *And Ahimaaz called out and said to the king, "Peace!" And he bowed down to the king on his face to the earth and said, "Blessed **be** the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted up their hand against my lord the king." And the king said, "**Is there** peace for the young man, for Absalom?" And Ahimaaz said, "I saw the great tumult at the sending of the servant of the king, Joab, and your servant, and I do not know what **it was**." And the king said, "Turn aside, stand here." And he turned aside and stood.*

Ahimaaz arrived and called out, "Peace!" He bowed and said, "Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delivered up the men who lifted up their hand against my lord the king."

David asked one thing. "Is there peace for the young man, for Absalom?" Ahimaaz lost his nerve. "I saw the great tumult at the sending of the servant of the king, Joab, and your servant, and I do not know what it was." He knew. He could not bring himself to say it. David told him, "Turn aside, stand here."

18:31-32 *And look, the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king receive news, for the LORD has vindicated you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." And the king said to the Cushite, "**Is there** peace for the young man, for Absalom?" And the Cushite said, "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who have risen up against you for evil, be like the young man."*

"And look, the Cushite came." He gave the good news first: "the LORD has vindicated you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." And again David asked, "Is there peace for the young man, for Absalom?"

The Cushite answered as gently as a soldier could. "Let the enemies of my lord the king, and all who have risen up against you for evil, be like the young man." He did not say Absalom is dead. He did not have to.

18:33 *And the king was shaken, and he went up to the upper room of the gate and wept; and thus he said as he went, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died, I myself, in your place! Absalom, my son, my son!"*

"And the king was shaken." The word means trembling, shaking all through. "And he went up to the upper room of the gate and wept." He went up to be alone, and he could not hold it in long enough to get there: "and thus he said as he went, My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died, I myself, in your place! Absalom, my son, my son!"

Read it slowly. Five times David says "my son." There is no sentence here about the throne, the battle or the victory. There is only a father and the son he lost. Absalom had hated him, plotted against him, shamed him, and tried to kill him. And David loved him still. He would have given his own life for him.

There is so much in his grief. There is a father's love that does not die even when it is thrown back in his face. There is guilt, because David knew this was the sword Nathan promised, the harvest of his own sin (12:10). There is regret over all the years he did not act: when Tamar was wronged, when Amnon went unpunished, when Absalom came home and was kept at a distance for two

years. And there is the pain of a death that came before any repentance, any reconciliation, any last word between them.

Some of you know this grief. You have a son or a daughter who turned away, who broke your heart, and you love them still. Some of you have lost a child who was not walking with God, and that is a heavy sorrow. Scripture does not tell you to stop grieving. David wept, and God did not rebuke him for it. Jesus wept too (John 11:35). Bring your grief to the God who knows what it is to lose a Son. "The LORD is near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18). If your child is still living, do not stop praying. God's patience is longer than ours.

"Would that I had died, I myself, in your place!" David could not do it. Even if he had died, he could not have paid for Absalom's sin, and he could not have changed Absalom's heart. But that cry points us to the One who could. God the Father did not merely wish it. He sent His Son to die in the place of rebels. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). We were Absalom. We turned against our King. And the Son of David died in our place, so that rebels like us could come home.

Chapter 18 Summary

David divided his army into three parts under Joab, Abishai and Ittai, and wanted to go out with them, but the people persuaded him to stay in the city. As they went out, he commanded the commanders in everyone's hearing to deal gently with the young man Absalom. In the forest of Ephraim, Israel was defeated by David's servants, with twenty thousand killed, and the forest took more lives than the sword. Absalom's head caught in a great oak while his mule went on. A soldier who saw him refused to strike him because of the king's command, but Joab thrust three spears into his heart, and Joab's armor-bearers killed him. They threw him into a pit in the forest under a great heap of stones, while the pillar he had set up for himself stood in the King's Valley. Ahimaaz begged to run with the news, and Joab sent a Cushite instead, but Ahimaaz ran by the plain and arrived first. David asked each runner if it was well with Absalom. Ahimaaz would not say, but the Cushite answered that he wished all the king's enemies were like the young man. David trembled, went up to the room over the gate and wept: "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died, I myself, in your place!"

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. Why did the people not want David to go out to the battle? (18:3)

2. What did David command concerning Absalom, and who heard it? (18:5)

3. How did Absalom's pride and position end up trapping him? (18:9; 14:25-26)

4. Why did the soldier refuse to kill Absalom, and what did he understand about Joab? (18:12-13)

5. Was Joab right to kill Absalom? What does his act show about him? (18:14; 3:27; 1 Kings 2:5)

6. Compare Absalom's monument to his burial. What does this teach about pride? (18:17-18; Proverbs 29:23)

7. What one question did David ask both runners, and how did each answer? (18:29-32)

8. What did David cry out in 18:33, and how does it point to what Christ did for us? (Romans 5:8)

9. If you carry grief over a child or loved one who turned away, how can you bring that grief to God? (Psalm 34:18; John 11:35)

10. David loved a son who hated him. How does that help you understand God's love for you when you were His enemy?

Chapter 19: David Returns to Jerusalem

Scripture

19:1-15 And it was told to Joab, "Look, the king is weeping, and he has mourned over Absalom." And the deliverance on that day became mourning for all the people, for the people heard on that day, saying, "The king is grieved over his son." And the people stole away on that day to enter the city, just as the people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in the battle. And the king covered his face, and the king cried out ***with*** a loud voice, "My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!" And Joab came to the king ***into*** the house and said, "You have put to shame today the faces of all your servants who rescued your life today, and the life of your sons and your daughters, and the life of your wives, and the life of your concubines, by loving those who hate you and by hating those who love you. For you have made known today that commanders and servants ***are*** nothing to you; for I know today that if Absalom ***were*** alive and all of us ***were*** dead today, then ***it would be*** right in your eyes. And now, arise, go out and speak to the heart of your servants; for by the LORD I swear that ***if*** you are not going out, not a man will lodge with you this night. And this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come on you from your youth until now." And the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "Look, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king. And Israel had fled, each to his tents. And all the people were quarreling in all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies, and he rescued us from the hand of ***the*** Philistines; and now he has fled from the land, away from Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in the battle. And now, why are you keeping silent ***about*** bringing back the king?" And King David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, "Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why will you be the last to bring back the king to his house? And the word of all Israel has come to the king, to his house. You ***are*** my brothers; you ***are*** my bone and my flesh. And why will you be the last to bring back the king?' And to Amasa you shall say, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if you will not be commander of the army before me all the days in place of Joab.'" And he turned the heart of every man of Judah like one man. And they sent to the king, "Return, you and all your servants." And the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal to go to meet the king, to bring the king over the Jordan.

19:16-30 And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, who ***was*** from Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet King David. And a thousand men from Benjamin ***were*** with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they rushed ***into*** the Jordan before the king. And the ferry passed over to bring over the household of the king and to do what ***was*** good in his eyes. And Shimei the son of Gera fell before the king when he passed over at the Jordan. And he said to the king, "Let not my lord reckon iniquity to me, and do not remember what your servant did perversely on the day when my lord the king went out from Jerusalem, for the king to set ***it*** to his heart. For your servant knows that I have sinned. And look, I have come today, first of all the house of Joseph, to come down to meet my lord the king." And Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the anointed of the LORD?" And David said, "What ***is there*** to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah, that you should become an adversary to me today? Shall anyone

be put to death in Israel today? For do I not know that today I ***am*** king over Israel?" And the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king swore to him. And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not tended his feet, and he had not tended his mustache, and his garments he had not washed, from the day the king went until the day when he came ***back*** in peace. And it was, when he came ***to*** Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" And he said, "My lord the king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said, 'Let me saddle the donkey for myself, and let me ride on it and go with the king,' for your servant ***is*** lame. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. And my lord the king ***is*** like the angel of God; so do what ***is*** good in your eyes. For all the house of my father were nothing but men of death to my lord the king; and you set your servant among those who eat at your table. And what righteousness ***is there*** still for me, even to cry out still to the king?" And the king said to him, "Why do you still speak your words? I have said, 'You and Ziba shall divide the field.'" And Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let him take even the whole, after my lord the king has come in peace to his house."

19:31-43 And Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he passed over the Jordan with the king to send him off ***at*** the Jordan. And Barzillai was very old, a son of eighty years; and he had supplied the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he ***was*** a very great man. And the king said to Barzillai, "You pass over with me, and I will supply you with me in Jerusalem." And Barzillai said to the king, "How many ***are*** the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king ***to*** Jerusalem? I ***am*** a son of eighty years today. Do I know between good and evil? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I still listen to the voice of male singers and female singers? And why should your servant still be a burden to my lord the king? Your servant would pass over the Jordan with the king ***only*** a little ***way***; and why should the king reward me ***with*** this reward? Let your servant return, please, that I may die in my ***own*** city, near the grave of my father and my mother. And look, your servant Chimham; let him pass over with my lord the king, and do for him what ***is*** good in your eyes." And the king said, "Chimham shall pass over with me, and I will do for him what ***is*** good in your eyes; and all that you choose ***to ask*** of me I will do for you." And all the people passed over the Jordan, and the king passed over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his place. And the king passed over to Gilgal, and Chimham passed over with him. And all the people of Judah brought the king over, and also half of the people of Israel. And look, all the men of Israel were coming to the king, and they said to the king, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all the men of David with him?" And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king ***is*** near to me. And why ***is*** this, ***that*** it has burned you over this matter? Have we eaten at all from the king? Or has ***anything*** really been carried off for us?" And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah and said, "I ***have*** ten shares in the king, and also in David I ***have more*** than you. And why did you treat me with contempt? And was not my word first for me to bring back my king?" And the word of the men of Judah was harder than the word of the men of Israel.

Chapter 19 Preview

The victory day turns into a day of mourning. David's soldiers creep back into Mahanaim like an army that lost, because the king is weeping for Absalom. Joab confronts David sharply: you have

shamed the men who saved your life; get up and speak to them, or by tonight you will have no one left. David pulls himself together and sits in the gate. Then the slow work of bringing the king home begins. The northern tribes argue about it. David appeals to Judah, his own tribe, and offers Amasa, Absalom's general, the command of the army in place of Joab.

On the way back to the Jordan, David meets the people of chapters 16 and 17 again. Shimei, who cursed him, falls at his feet and begs for mercy, and David spares him. Mephibosheth comes out unwashed and unkempt and says that Ziba lied about him. Old Barzillai, who fed David in Mahanaim, escorts him to the river and sends his son on with the king. But the chapter ends with a bitter quarrel between the men of Judah and the men of Israel over who has the bigger claim on the king. The kingdom is restored, but it is cracked.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-4 *And it was told to Joab, "Look, the king is weeping, and he has mourned over Absalom." And the deliverance on that day became mourning for all the people, for the people heard on that day, saying, "The king is grieved over his son." And the people stole away on that day to enter the city, just as the people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in the battle. And the king covered his face, and the king cried out **with** a loud voice, "My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!"*

"Look, the king is weeping, and he has mourned over Absalom." The word reached Joab and spread through the army. "And the deliverance on that day became mourning for all the people." The soldiers who had risked their lives "stole away on that day to enter the city, just as the people who are humiliated steal away when they flee in the battle." They had won, but they slipped back in as if they had lost.

"And the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!" David's grief was real and right. But he was not only a father. He was the king, and his men needed him.

19:5-7 *And Joab came to the king **into** the house and said, "You have put to shame today the faces of all your servants who rescued your life today, and the life of your sons and your daughters, and the life of your wives, and the life of your concubines, by loving those who hate you and by hating those who love you. For you have made known today that commanders and servants **are** nothing to you; for I know today that if Absalom **were** alive and all of us **were** dead today, then **it would be** right in your eyes. And now, arise, go out and speak to the heart of your servants; for by the LORD I swear that **if** you are not going out, not a man will lodge with you this night. And this will be worse for you than all the evil that has come on you from your youth until now."*

Joab came in and spoke bluntly. "You have put to shame today the faces of all your servants who rescued your life today, and the life of your sons and your daughters, and the life of your wives." He said David was "loving those who hate you and by hating those who love you." He went further: "if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then it would be right in your eyes."

Then a warning: "arise, go out and speak to the heart of your servants." If you do not, "not a man will lodge with you this night." The army would melt away, and David would lose the kingdom he had just won back.

Joab was harsh, and this was the man who had just killed Absalom against orders. It is hard to hear from him. But he was right. Leaders do not get to grieve only in private. There are times when we must set our own pain aside for a while for the sake of those depending on us. Faithful wounds from a friend can be better than kisses (Proverbs 27:6), even when the friend is a hard man like Joab.

19:8-10 *And the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "Look, the king is sitting in the gate." And all the people came before the king. And Israel had fled, each to his tents. And all the people were quarreling in all the tribes of Israel, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies, and he rescued us from the hand of* ***the*** *Philistines; and now he has fled from the land, away from Absalom. And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in the battle. And now, why are you keeping silent* ***about*** *bringing back the king?"*

"And the king arose and sat in the gate." The gate was where the king was seen and where business was done. When "they told all the people, saying, Look, the king is sitting in the gate," they "came before the king." David did what he had to do.

Meanwhile, across the tribes, "all the people were quarreling." They remembered: "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies, and he rescued us from the hand of the Philistines." And now "Absalom, whom we anointed over us, has died in the battle. And now, why are you keeping silent about bringing back the king?" Their new king was dead. They needed their old one back, and no one was taking the lead.

19:11-15 *And King David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, "Speak to the elders of Judah, saying, 'Why will you be the last to bring back the king to his house? And the word of all Israel has come to the king, to his house. You* ***are*** *my brothers; you* ***are*** *my bone and my flesh. And why will you be the last to bring back the king?' And to Amasa you shall say, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if you will not be commander of the army before me all the days in place of Joab.'" And he turned the heart of every man of Judah like one man. And they sent to the king, "Return, you and all your servants." And the king returned and came to the Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal to go to meet the king, to bring the king over the Jordan.*

David sent word to Zadok and Abiathar to speak to the elders of Judah. "Why will you be the last to bring back the king to his house?" The northern tribes were already talking about it. Judah, David's own tribe, had backed Absalom at Hebron and seemed slow and perhaps ashamed. David reminded them, "You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh."

Then he made a startling offer to Amasa, Absalom's commander: "Are you not my bone and my flesh?" Amasa was his nephew. "Thus may God do to me, and thus may He add, if you will not be commander of the army before me all the days in place of Joab." David was giving the top military post to the general of the rebel army.

Why? It was a political move to win over Judah and those who had followed Absalom. It said there would be no revenge. It was also David's way of dealing with Joab, who had killed Absalom against orders. But it was a risky move, and it set up the bloodshed of chapter 20.

It worked with Judah: "he turned the heart of every man of Judah like one man." They sent word, "Return, you and all your servants." David came to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal, near the river on the west side, to bring him over.

19:16-20 *And Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, who **was** from Bahurim, hurried and came down with the men of Judah to meet King David. And a thousand men from Benjamin **were** with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they rushed **into** the Jordan before the king. And the ferry passed over to bring over the household of the king and to do what **was** good in his eyes. And Shimei the son of Gera fell before the king when he passed over at the Jordan. And he said to the king, "Let not my lord reckon iniquity to me, and do not remember what your servant did perversely on the day when my lord the king went out from Jerusalem, for the king to set **it** to his heart. For your servant knows that I have sinned. And look, I have come today, first of all the house of Joseph, to come down to meet my lord the king."*

The first to meet David at the river was the last man he might have expected. "Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, who was from Bahurim, hurried and came down." He brought "a thousand men from Benjamin." Ziba came too, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants, rushing into the Jordan to help the king's household across.

Shimei "fell before the king." He did not make excuses. "Let not my lord reckon iniquity to me, and do not remember what your servant did perversely on the day when my lord the king went out from Jerusalem." "For your servant knows that I have sinned." He said he had come "first of all the house of Joseph," meaning first of the northern tribes.

Was he sorry, or just afraid? Probably both. He had cursed the king when he thought David was finished, and now David was coming back. But he did confess plainly.

19:21-23 *And Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the anointed of the LORD?" And David said, "What **is there** to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah, that you should become an adversary to me today? Shall anyone be put to death in Israel today? For do I not know that today I **am** king over Israel?" And the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king swore to him.*

Abishai was ready again. "Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the anointed of the LORD?" Under the Law, cursing a ruler of the people was a serious sin (Exodus 22:28).

David answered as he had before. "What is there to me and to you, sons of Zeruiah, that you should become an adversary to me today?" The word adversary in Hebrew is satan, one who opposes. Abishai was standing in the way of David's mercy. "Shall anyone be put to death in Israel

today? For do I not know that today I am king over Israel?" This was a day for mercy, not executions. The king's return was a day of amnesty.

"And the king said to Shimei, You shall not die. And the king swore to him." David kept that oath. At the end of his life he told Solomon to deal wisely with Shimei, and Solomon later put him to death when he broke the terms Solomon set (1 Kings 2:8-9, 36-46).

19:24-28 *And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king. And he had not tended his feet, and he had not tended his mustache, and his garments he had not washed, from the day the king went until the day when he came* ***back*** *in peace. And it was, when he came* ***to*** *Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" And he said, "My lord the king, my servant deceived me; for your servant said, 'Let me saddle the donkey for myself, and let me ride on it and go with the king,' for your servant* ***is*** *lame. And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. And my lord the king* ***is*** *like the angel of God; so do what* ***is*** *good in your eyes. For all the house of my father were nothing but men of death to my lord the king; and you set your servant among those who eat at your table. And what righteousness* ***is there*** *still for me, even to cry out still to the king?"*

Next came Mephibosheth. "He had not tended his feet, and he had not tended his mustache, and his garments he had not washed, from the day the king went until the day when he came back in peace." For all the weeks David was gone, he had lived as a man in mourning.

"Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?" He explained. "My lord the king, my servant deceived me." He had told Ziba to saddle a donkey so he could go with the king, "for your servant is lame," and Ziba left without him. "And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king."

Then he threw himself on David's mercy. "All the house of my father were nothing but men of death to my lord the king; and you set your servant among those who eat at your table." Saul's family deserved nothing, and David had given him a seat at his own table (9:7-13). "And what righteousness is there still for me, even to cry out still to the king?"

Who was telling the truth, Ziba or Mephibosheth? Many teachers believe the evidence points to Mephibosheth. His long mourning was not something you fake for weeks. Ziba's story that a lame grandson of Saul expected Absalom to give him the throne made little sense (16:3). And Mephibosheth's words that follow show a heart that did not care about property. Others think Mephibosheth stayed behind to see which way things would go, and spoke well once David had won. Scripture does not settle it in so many words, and teachers have differed.

19:29-30 *And the king said to him, "Why do you still speak your words? I have said, 'You and Ziba shall divide the field.'" And Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let him take even the whole, after my lord the king has come in peace to his house."*

David's answer was short and a little impatient. "Why do you still speak your words?" He had already decided: "You and Ziba shall divide the field." David seems not to have wanted to sort it out. Perhaps he could not tell who was lying. Perhaps he did not want to make an enemy of Ziba

on a day of peace. Either way, splitting the land was not full justice, if Mephibosheth was telling the truth.

But Mephibosheth's answer is beautiful. "Let him take even the whole, after my lord the king has come in peace to his house." He did not want land. He wanted the king. That is the heart God looks for in us. The gifts are good, but the Giver is better. Can you say to the Lord, You are enough, even if I lose everything else?

19:31-35 *And Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim, and he passed over the Jordan with the king to send him off **at** the Jordan. And Barzillai was very old, a son of eighty years; and he had supplied the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he **was** a very great man. And the king said to Barzillai, "You pass over with me, and I will supply you with me in Jerusalem." And Barzillai said to the king, "How many **are** the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king **to** Jerusalem? I **am** a son of eighty years today. Do I know between good and evil? Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I still listen to the voice of male singers and female singers? And why should your servant still be a burden to my lord the king?*

"And Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim." He was "very old, a son of eighty years," and he had fed the king at Mahanaim (17:27-29), "for he was a very great man," meaning very wealthy.

David wanted to reward him. "You pass over with me, and I will supply you with me in Jerusalem." A place at court, a seat at the king's table for the rest of his life.

Barzillai's answer is honest and gentle. "How many are the days of the years of my life, that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?" He was too old for court life. "Can your servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I still listen to the voice of male singers and female singers?" The feasts and music would be wasted on him. "And why should your servant still be a burden to my lord the king?"

19:36-40 *Your servant would pass over the Jordan with the king **only** a little **way**; and why should the king reward me **with** this reward? Let your servant return, please, that I may die in my **own** city, near the grave of my father and my mother. And look, your servant Chimham; let him pass over with my lord the king, and do for him what **is** good in your eyes." And the king said, "Chimham shall pass over with me, and I will do for him what **is** good in your eyes; and all that you choose **to ask** of me I will do for you." And all the people passed over the Jordan, and the king passed over. And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his place. And the king passed over to Gilgal, and Chimham passed over with him. And all the people of Judah brought the king over, and also half of the people of Israel.*

"Let your servant return, please, that I may die in my own city, near the grave of my father and my mother." There is wisdom in knowing your season of life. Barzillai had done his part, and he wanted to finish well at home.

But he asked a favor for another. "Look, your servant Chimham; let him pass over with my lord the king." Chimham was probably his son. David said, "Chimham shall pass over with me, and I

will do for him what is good in your eyes." Many years later, a place near Bethlehem was still called by Chimham's name (Jeremiah 41:17), so it seems David gave him land there.

"And the king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and he returned to his place." Barzillai gave when David had nothing, and he asked for nothing for himself. Jesus said that even a cup of cold water given to one of His own will not lose its reward (Matthew 10:42).

"And all the people of Judah brought the king over, and also half of the people of Israel." Notice "half." The north was not fully on board.

19:41-43 *And look, all the men of Israel were coming to the king, and they said to the king, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan, and all the men of David with him?" And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "Because the king **is** near to me. And why **is** this, **that** it has burned you over this matter? Have we eaten at all from the king? Or has **anything** really been carried off for us?" And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah and said, "I **have** ten shares in the king, and also in David I **have more** than you. And why did you treat me with contempt? And was not my word first for me to bring back my king?" And the word of the men of Judah was harder than the word of the men of Israel.*

Then the trouble started. "All the men of Israel were coming to the king," and they were angry. "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, stolen you away and brought the king and his household over the Jordan?" They felt left out of the welcome.

Judah answered, "Because the king is near to me." David was one of their own. "Have we eaten at all from the king? Or has anything really been carried off for us?" They said they had gotten no special favors.

Israel shot back, "I have ten shares in the king." Ten tribes against Judah's one. "And why did you treat me with contempt? And was not my word first for me to bring back my king?" They had spoken first (19:9-11).

"And the word of the men of Judah was harder than the word of the men of Israel." Judah spoke more harshly, and the quarrel grew bitter. Both sides claimed to love the king, and both were really fighting about pride and position. It is sad how quickly a day of reconciliation turned into a fight over who gets the credit. This old rivalry between north and south will tear the kingdom in two after Solomon (1 Kings 12:16). And it lights the fire of the very next chapter.

In churches, too, we can claim to love the King while we fight over who matters most. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Chapter 19 Summary

Joab was told that the king was mourning for Absalom, and the victory became mourning as the soldiers slipped into the city like men ashamed. Joab rebuked David for loving those who hated him and shaming those who saved his life, and warned that the army would leave him that night unless he spoke kindly to them. David sat in the gate, and the people came before him.

Throughout Israel the tribes argued about bringing back the king. David sent Zadok and Abiathar to urge the elders of Judah not to be last, and promised Amasa command of the army in place of Joab, and Judah invited him back. At the Jordan, Shimei came with a thousand Benjaminites, confessed his sin and begged for mercy. Abishai wanted him put to death, but David swore Shimei would not die. Mephibosheth, who had not cared for himself since the king left, said Ziba deceived and slandered him. David told him he and Ziba would divide the land, and Mephibosheth said Ziba could have it all since the king had come home in peace. Barzillai, eighty years old, escorted David over the Jordan, refused to go to Jerusalem, and sent Chimham instead, and David kissed and blessed him. The men of Israel complained that Judah had taken the king without them, Judah answered that the king was their kin, and Judah's words were harsher than Israel's.

Someone has told me a hard truth I needed to hear. I listened, and I worked toward obeying God's voice. It did not feel good at the time. Looking back, it was one of the kindest things anyone did for me.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. Why did the army's victory turn into mourning? (19:1-4)

2. What did Joab say to David, and was he right? (19:5-7)

3. How did David win back the tribe of Judah, and what did he offer Amasa? (19:11-14)

4. What did Shimei say when he met David, and how did David answer Abishai? (19:19-23)

5. What did Mephibosheth say about Ziba, and what evidence supports his story? (19:24-28; 16:3)

6. What did Mephibosheth's answer in 19:30 show about his heart?

7. Why did Barzillai turn down David's offer, and what did he ask instead? (19:34-37)

8. What were Judah and Israel quarreling about, and what does that show? (19:41-43)

9. Joab told David a hard truth. Has someone told you a hard truth you needed to hear? How did you respond? (Proverbs 27:6)

10. Mephibosheth wanted the king more than the land. Is Jesus more precious to you than His gifts?

Chapter 20: The Revolt of Sheba

Scripture

20:1-13 And there happened to be there a man of worthlessness, and his name ***was*** Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, "***There is*** no portion for us in David, and no inheritance for us in the son of Jesse. Each to his tents, O Israel!" And every man of Israel went up from after David, after Sheba the son of Bichri. And the men of Judah clung to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem. And David came to his house ***at*** Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and he put them ***in*** a house of confinement and sustained them, and he did not go in to them. And they were shut up until the day of their death, ***in*** widowhood of life. And the king said to Amasa, "Summon to me the men of Judah ***within*** three days, and you, stand here." And Amasa went to summon Judah, and he delayed beyond the appointed time which he had appointed him. And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will be worse for us than Absalom. You, take the servants of your lord and pursue after him, lest he find for himself fortified cities and snatch ***himself away from*** our eye." And the men of Joab went out after him, and the Kerethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. They ***were*** at the great stone which ***is*** in Gibeon, and Amasa came before them. And Joab ***was*** girded ***with*** his robe, his clothing, and over it a belt ***with*** a sword fastened on his loins in its sheath; and he went forward, and it fell ***out***. And Joab said to Amasa, "***Are*** you ***at*** peace, my brother?" And the right hand of Joab took hold of the beard of Amasa to kiss him. And Amasa did not take heed of the sword which ***was*** in the hand of Joab; and he struck him with it in the belly and poured out his bowels to the ground, and he did not repeat ***it*** to him, and he died. And Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri. And a man from the young men of Joab stood over him and said, "Whoever delights in Joab, and whoever ***is*** for David, ***let him go*** after Joab!" And Amasa ***was*** wallowing in the blood in the middle of the highway. And the man saw that all the people stopped, and he brought Amasa around from the highway ***into*** the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that everyone who came on him stopped. When he had removed ***him*** from the highway, every man passed on after Joab to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.

20:14-26 And he passed through all the tribes of Israel toward Abel and Beth-maacah, and all the Berites; and they assembled and went in also after him. And they came and besieged him in Abel-beth-maacah, and they poured out a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who ***were*** with Joab were destroying, to make the wall fall. And a wise woman called out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Say, please, to Joab, 'Draw near to here, and let me speak to you.'" And he drew near to her. And the woman said, "***Are*** you Joab?" And he said, "I ***am***." And she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he said, "I am listening." And she spoke, saying, "They surely used to speak in former ***times***, saying, 'They shall surely ask at Abel,' and so they finished. I ***am one of*** the peaceable of the faithful of Israel. You are seeking to kill a city and a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?" And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or that I should destroy! The matter ***is*** not so. For a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri ***is*** his name, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Give him ***up***, him alone, and let me go

away from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Look, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." And the woman went to all the people in her wisdom, and they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw ***it*** to Joab. And he blew the trumpet, and they were scattered from the city, each to his tents. And Joab returned ***to*** Jerusalem to the king. And Joab ***was*** over all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada ***was*** over the Kerethites and over the Pelethites; and Adoram ***was*** over the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud ***was*** the recorder; and Sheva ***was*** scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar ***were*** priests; and also Ira the Jairite was a priest to David.

Chapter 20 Preview

The quarrel at the end of chapter 19 boils over. A troublemaker from Benjamin named Sheba blows a trumpet and shouts that Israel has no share in David, and the northern tribes follow him away. Judah stays with the king. David comes home to Jerusalem and puts away the ten concubines Absalom had taken. Then he orders Amasa, his new commander, to call up Judah in three days. Amasa is late, so David sends Abishai with the royal guard, and Joab goes along.

At the great stone in Gibeon, Joab meets Amasa, greets him as a brother, takes his beard to kiss him, and stabs him with his other hand. Joab takes command again and chases Sheba to the far north, to the walled town of Abel-beth-maacah. As Joab's men batter the wall, a wise woman calls from the city and asks why he wants to destroy a mother in Israel. Joab says he wants only one man. The townspeople throw Sheba's head over the wall, and the revolt is over. The chapter ends with a list of David's officials.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-2 *And there happened to be there a man of worthlessness, and his name **was** Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, "**There is** no portion for us in David, and no inheritance for us in the son of Jesse. Each to his tents, O Israel!" And every man of Israel went up from after David, after Sheba the son of Bichri. And the men of Judah clung to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem.*

"And there happened to be there a man of worthlessness, and his name was Sheba the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite." A man of worthlessness is a scoundrel, a troublemaker. Like Shimei, he was from Benjamin, Saul's tribe, and he had no love for David.

He saw his chance in the quarrel between Israel and Judah. "He blew the trumpet and said, There is no portion for us in David, and no inheritance for us in the son of Jesse. Each to his tents, O Israel!" To go to your tents meant to go home, to break up the assembly. Calling David "the son of Jesse" was an insult, as if he were just a farmer's boy from Bethlehem. These very words would be shouted again when the kingdom split after Solomon (1 Kings 12:16).

"And every man of Israel went up from after David," following Sheba. Only hours before, the men of Israel had argued that they had "ten shares in the king" (19:43). Now they walked away from him. Hurt pride had turned into rebellion. "And the men of Judah clung to their king, from the Jordan even to Jerusalem."

20:3 *And David came to his house **at** Jerusalem. And the king took the ten women, concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and he put them **in** a house of confinement and sustained them, and he did not go in to them. And they were shut up until the day of their death, **in** widowhood of life.*

"And David came to his house at Jerusalem." The first thing the writer tells us is what he did about the ten concubines he had left to keep the house (15:16), the women Absalom had taken publicly on the roof (16:22). "He put them in a house of confinement and sustained them, and he did not go in to them. And they were shut up until the day of their death, in widowhood of life."

This is a sad verse. These women had done nothing wrong. They were left behind by the king, taken against their will by his son, and then shut away for the rest of their lives. David provided for them, but he could not treat them as his wives again, and they could not marry anyone else. In the customs of that day, Absalom's act had put them in a place where no good way out seemed possible. They are some of the quiet victims of David's sin and his son's rebellion. Sin always hurts more people than the sinner intends. God saw these women, even if history forgot their names.

20:4-7 *And the king said to Amasa, "Summon to me the men of Judah **within** three days, and you, stand here." And Amasa went to summon Judah, and he delayed beyond the appointed time which he had appointed him. And David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will be worse for us than Absalom. You, take the servants of your lord and pursue after him, lest he find for himself fortified cities and snatch **himself away from** our eye." And the men of Joab went out after him, and the Kerethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men; and they went out from Jerusalem to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.*

"Summon to me the men of Judah within three days, and you, stand here." This was Amasa's first assignment as commander (19:13). "And Amasa went to summon Judah, and he delayed beyond the appointed time." Scripture does not say why. Perhaps the men of Judah did not trust Absalom's general. Perhaps he was simply not up to the job.

David could not wait. "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will be worse for us than Absalom." If Sheba reached a walled city, rooting him out would be long and costly. So David turned to Abishai. He would not turn to Joab, but he could not keep Joab out. "The men of Joab went out after him, and the Kerethites and the Pelethites and all the mighty men." They marched north from Jerusalem after Sheba.

20:8-10 *They **were** at the great stone which **is** in Gibeon, and Amasa came before them. And Joab **was** girded **with** his robe, his clothing, and over it a belt **with** a sword fastened on his loins in its sheath; and he went forward, and it fell **out**. And Joab said to Amasa, "**Are** you **at** peace, my brother?" And the right hand of Joab took hold of the beard of Amasa to kiss him. And Amasa did not take heed of the sword which **was** in the hand of Joab; and he struck him with it in the belly and poured out his bowels to the ground, and he did not repeat **it** to him, and he died. And Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.*

"They were at the great stone which is in Gibeon," a few miles north of Jerusalem, "and Amasa came before them." Joab was dressed in his soldier's clothing, with a sword in its sheath on his

belt, "and he went forward, and it fell out." He seems to have arranged it so that the sword slipped out and he could pick it up in his left hand without alarm.

"Are you at peace, my brother?" Joab asked. "And the right hand of Joab took hold of the beard of Amasa to kiss him." This was a normal greeting between relatives. Amasa was looking at Joab's right hand and his smile. "And Amasa did not take heed of the sword which was in the hand of Joab." Joab struck him once, and Amasa died.

This was cold murder. Joab killed Abner the same way, taking him aside to speak with him quietly and then stabbing him (3:27). Both times it was a man who had been on the other side and whom David had welcomed, and both times it removed a rival for Joab's place. David named both murders at the end of his life: Joab "put the blood of war in a time of peace" (1 Kings 2:5). A greeting of peace with a hidden sword is one of the ugliest pictures of betrayal in Scripture. It brings to mind another kiss, in a garden, when Judas greeted Jesus (Matthew 26:49).

"And Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri." Joab simply stepped back into command as if nothing had happened.

20:11-13 *And a man from the young men of Joab stood over him and said, "Whoever delights in Joab, and whoever **is** for David, **let him go** after Joab!" And Amasa **was** wallowing in the blood in the middle of the highway. And the man saw that all the people stopped, and he brought Amasa around from the highway **into** the field and threw a garment over him, when he saw that everyone who came on him stopped. When he had removed **him** from the highway, every man passed on after Joab to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.*

One of Joab's young men stood over the body and called, "Whoever delights in Joab, and whoever is for David, let him go after Joab!" He tied loyalty to David with loyalty to Joab. But the army stalled. "Amasa was wallowing in the blood in the middle of the highway," and every man who came up stopped and stared.

So the man dragged the body off the road "into the field and threw a garment over him." Then "every man passed on after Joab." Out of sight, out of mind. It is a grim picture of how easily people move on from an injustice once it is covered up. Joab got away with it, for now.

20:14-15 *And he passed through all the tribes of Israel toward Abel and Beth-maacah, and all the Berites; and they assembled and went in also after him. And they came and besieged him in Abel-beth-maacah, and they poured out a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who **were** with Joab were destroying, to make the wall fall.*

Sheba "passed through all the tribes of Israel toward Abel and Beth-maacah," This town was in the far north of Israel, near Dan, at the foot of Mount Hermon. Few followed him that far, mostly his own clan, "all the Berites." His revolt was shrinking.

Joab's army arrived "and besieged him in Abel-beth-maacah, and they poured out a siege mound against the city." A siege mound was a ramp of earth piled against the wall so attackers could reach the top. "And all the people who were with Joab were destroying, to make the wall fall." They were battering the wall to bring it down. A whole town was about to pay for one rebel.

20:16-19 *And a wise woman called out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Say, please, to Joab, 'Draw near to here, and let me speak to you.'" And he drew near to her. And the woman said, "**Are** you Joab?" And he said, "I **am**." And she said to him, "Listen to the words of your maidservant." And he said, "I am listening." And she spoke, saying, "They surely used to speak in former **times**, saying, 'They shall surely ask at Abel,' and so they finished. I **am one of** the peaceable of the faithful of Israel. You are seeking to kill a city and a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?"*

"And a wise woman called out from the city." Like the woman of Tekoa in chapter 14, she is called wise. But this woman spoke for herself, and she spoke the truth. "Listen! Listen!" She asked for Joab, and he came near.

"They surely used to speak in former times," she said, and the saying was, "They shall surely ask at Abel." Abel was famous for its wisdom. People settled disputes by going there for counsel. In other words, you should have asked us first before attacking us.

Then: "I am one of the peaceable of the faithful of Israel. You are seeking to kill a city and a mother in Israel." A mother city was a leading town with villages around it, like a mother with her children. "Why will you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?" The town was part of the land God gave Israel. Was Joab going to destroy it over one man?

20:20-22 *And Joab answered and said, "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or that I should destroy! The matter **is** not so. For a man from the hill country of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri **is** his name, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Give him **up**, him alone, and let me go away from the city." And the woman said to Joab, "Look, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." And the woman went to all the people in her wisdom, and they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri and threw **it** to Joab. And he blew the trumpet, and they were scattered from the city, each to his tents. And Joab returned **to** Jerusalem to the king.*

Joab's answer was quick. "Far be it, far be it from me that I should swallow up or that I should destroy!" Coming from the man who had just murdered his cousin, it sounds strange. But Joab was a practical man. He did not want a siege if he could avoid one. "Give him up, him alone, and let me go away from the city."

The woman answered, "Look, his head will be thrown to you over the wall." She went to the people "in her wisdom," and they did it. "And he blew the trumpet, and they were scattered from the city, each to his tents." The revolt that began with a trumpet (20:1) ended with one.

One wise woman saved a whole city by speaking up and seeking peace. Her courage and her sense stand out in a chapter full of violence. "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). Sometimes one voice of wisdom at the right moment can stop a great deal of bloodshed.

20:23-26 *And Joab **was** over all the army of Israel; and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada **was** over the Kerethites and over the Pelethites; and Adoram **was** over the forced labor; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud **was** the recorder; and Sheva **was** scribe; and Zadok and Abiathar **were** priests; and also Ira the Jairite was a priest to David.*

The chapter closes with a list of David's officials, like the list in 8:15-18. "Joab was over all the army of Israel." He had taken back his post by murder, and David let it stand. "Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and over the Pelethites," the royal bodyguard. "Adoram was over the forced labor," a new office, the men drafted to work on the king's building projects. "Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder," who kept the royal records. "Sheva was scribe," the royal secretary, a different man from the rebel. "Zadok and Abiathar were priests; and also Ira the Jairite was a priest to David." Ira may have been a personal priest or chief official to the king; the same word is used of David's sons in 8:18.

Why put a list here? It tells us that after all the turmoil, the kingdom was set back in order. The government ran again. But the list also has a shadow over it. Joab is at the top. David had tried to replace him and could not. Even a restored king lives with the results of his compromises.

Chapter 20 Summary

A scoundrel named Sheba son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, blew the trumpet and said Israel had no share in David, and the men of Israel left David to follow him, while Judah stayed with its king from the Jordan to Jerusalem. David came home and put the ten concubines in a house under guard, providing for them but not going in to them, and they lived as widows until they died. David told Amasa to call up Judah in three days, but Amasa was late, so David sent Abishai with the guard and mighty men, and Joab went with them. At the great stone in Gibeon, Joab greeted Amasa as his brother, took his beard to kiss him and stabbed him with the sword in his other hand. A young man urged the troops to follow Joab, and once Amasa's body was moved off the road, they did. Sheba went through the tribes to Abel-beth-maacah, and Joab besieged it and began to batter the wall. A wise woman called to Joab, reminded him that Abel was a city of counsel and a mother in Israel, and asked why he would destroy the LORD's inheritance. Joab said he wanted only Sheba, and the people cut off his head and threw it over the wall. Joab blew the trumpet and returned to the king. The chapter ends with David's officials: Joab over the army, Benaiah over the guard, Adoram over forced labor, Jehoshaphat the recorder, Sheva the scribe, Zadok and Abiathar priests, and Ira a priest to David.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. What did Sheba shout, and why did the men of Israel follow him? (20:1-2; 19:41-43)

2. What happened to the ten concubines, and why is it so sad? (20:3; 16:22)

3. Why did David send Abishai after Sheba, and who went along? (20:4-7)

4. How did Joab kill Amasa, and how was it like his killing of Abner? (20:8-10; 3:27)

5. How did the army respond to Amasa's body, and what does that say about people and injustice? (20:11-13)

6. What did the wise woman of Abel say to Joab, and how did she save her city? (20:16-22)

7. What does the list of officials at the end tell us about David's kingdom? (20:23-26)

8. Sheba's revolt started with hurt pride. Where can hurt pride lead you if you do not deal with it?

9. The concubines suffered for others' sins. Who in your world gets hurt by sins they did not commit, and how can you help them?

10. The wise woman's words stopped a war. Where could you be a peacemaker this week? (Matthew 5:9)

Chapter 21: The Gibeonites Avenged and the Philistine Giants

Scripture

21:1-14 And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "***It is*** because of Saul and because of ***his*** house of blood, because he put to death the Gibeonites." And the king called the Gibeonites and said to them. And the Gibeonites ***were*** not of the sons of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the sons of Israel had sworn to them, and Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement? And bless the inheritance of the LORD." And the Gibeonites said to him, "***It is*** not silver and gold ***that is*** for us with Saul and with his house, and ***it is*** not for us to put to death a man in Israel." And he said, "What you are saying, I will do for you." And they said to the king, "The man who consumed us, and who planned against us ***that*** we should be destroyed from standing in all the territory of Israel, let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will impale them to the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give ***them***." And the king had compassion on Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath of the LORD which ***was*** between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. And the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she had borne to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. And he gave them into the hand of the Gibeonites, and they impaled them on the mountain before the LORD. And the seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first ***days***, at the beginning of the barley harvest. And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took the sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water was poured out on them from the heavens. And she did not permit the birds of the heavens to rest on them by day, or the living things of the field by night. And it was told to David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the open square of Beth-shean, where the Philistines had hung them on the day the Philistines struck down Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of the impaled ***men***. And they buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the land of Benjamin, in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And God was entreated for the land after this.

21:15-22 And the Philistines again had war with Israel. And David went down, and his servants with him, and they fought with the Philistines. And David was weary. And Ishbi-benob, who ***was*** among the descendants of the Rapha, the weight of whose spear ***was*** approximately 7.5 pounds (three hundred ***shekels*** weight) of bronze, and he ***was*** girded ***with*** a new ***sword***, he spoke of striking down David. And Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and he struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to the battle, and you shall not quench the lamp of Israel." And it was after this, and the war was again at Gob with the Philistines. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who ***was*** among the

descendants of the Rapha. And the war was again at Gob with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite struck down Goliath the Gittite; and the shaft of his spear ***was*** like a beam of weavers. And there was again war at Gath. And there was a man of stature, and the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet ***were*** six and six, twenty-four in number; and he also was born to the Rapha. And he taunted Israel, and Jonathan the son of Shimeah, the brother of David, struck him down. These four were born to the Rapha in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.

Chapter 21 Preview

With chapter 21 the book changes its pace. Chapters 21 to 24 are not in time order. They are a closing collection of records from different times in David's reign: a famine and a plague, two lists of mighty men, and two songs. The first record is one of the hardest passages in the book. For three years there is famine, and when David seeks the LORD, He says it is because Saul broke Israel's ancient oath to the Gibeonites and put many of them to death. David asks the Gibeonites what would make it right. They ask for seven of Saul's descendants, and David hands them over, sparing Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. The seven are put to death and exposed on a hill. Then Rizpah, the mother of two of them, keeps watch over their bodies for months, and her love moves David to give Saul's whole family an honorable burial. After that, God hears prayer for the land.

The second record is lighter: four short battle reports about Philistine giants, descendants of the Rapha, killed by David's men. In one of them David nearly dies, and his men swear he will never go into battle again, "you shall not quench the lamp of Israel." This chapter asks us to take God's covenant promises seriously, and it reminds us that God protects His anointed king.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1 *And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year. And David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "**It is** because of Saul and because of **his** house of blood, because he put to death the Gibeonites."*

"And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year." One bad harvest can happen to anyone. Three in a row made David ask why. "And David sought the face of the LORD." This was the right thing to do. When trouble lingers, we should ask God whether He is trying to tell us something.

"And the LORD said, It is because of Saul and because of his house of blood, because he put to death the Gibeonites." We are not told when this famine came. Since Mephibosheth is already at David's table (21:7; chapter 9), it was likely in the middle years of David's reign. And we are not told anywhere else what Saul did to the Gibeonites. This verse is the only record of it. Saul's crime had gone unpunished, and the blood cried out from the ground.

21:2-3 *And the king called the Gibeonites and said to them. And the Gibeonites **were** not of the sons of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the sons of Israel had sworn to them, and Saul had sought to strike them down in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah. And David said to the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement? And bless the inheritance of the LORD."*

The writer explains who the Gibeonites were. They "were not of the sons of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites." In Joshua's day they tricked Israel into making a peace treaty by pretending to come from far away (Joshua 9). Even after the trick was discovered, Israel kept its word, because "the leaders of the congregation swore to them" by the LORD (Joshua 9:15). For about four hundred years that oath had stood.

Then Saul, "in his zeal for the sons of Israel and Judah," tried to wipe them out. He may have thought he was being a patriot, clearing the land of foreigners. But he broke an oath made in God's name. God takes our promises seriously, especially promises made in His name, even old ones, even ones made to outsiders, even ones made after being tricked. The godly man "swears to his own harm and does not change" (Psalm 15:4).

David asked the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? And with what shall I make atonement?" To make atonement is to cover a wrong and make peace, so that the wrong no longer stands between the two sides. Then they would "bless the inheritance of the LORD," that is, pray for Israel instead of crying out against it.

21:4-6 *And the Gibeonites said to him, "**It is** not silver and gold **that is** for us with Saul and with his house, and **it is** not for us to put to death a man in Israel." And he said, "What you are saying, I will do for you." And they said to the king, "The man who consumed us, and who planned against us **that** we should be destroyed from standing in all the territory of Israel, let seven men from his sons be given to us, and we will impale them to the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the LORD." And the king said, "I will give **them**."*

The Gibeonites answered carefully. "It is not silver and gold that is for us with Saul and with his house." They did not want money. Blood money was not allowed for murder under the Law (Numbers 35:31). "And it is not for us to put to death a man in Israel." As foreigners living under Israel's protection, they had no right to take revenge on their own.

"What you are saying, I will do for you," David said. They asked for "seven men from his sons," that is, from Saul's descendants, "and we will impale them to the LORD at Gibeah of Saul." Gibeah was Saul's hometown, and the punishment would happen where Saul had ruled. To impale here means to put to death and expose the bodies publicly, a sign that they died under a curse. Seven was a number of completeness.

"The chosen of the LORD" is a bitter phrase in their mouth. Saul had been the LORD's chosen king, and he had used that position to break the LORD's oath.

"And the king said, I will give them."

21:7-9 *And the king had compassion on Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath of the LORD which **was** between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. And the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she had borne to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite. And he gave them into the hand of the Gibeonites, and they impaled them on the mountain before the LORD. And the seven of them fell together; and they were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first **days**, at the beginning of the barley harvest.*

"And the king had compassion on Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath of the LORD which was between them, between David and Jonathan." David also had sworn an oath, to Jonathan, that he would never cut off his kindness from Jonathan's house (1 Samuel 20:14-17, 42). So the chapter turns on two oaths. Saul broke his people's oath and brought judgment. David kept his own oath and spared a life.

David took "the two sons of Rizpah," Saul's concubine (3:7), one of them also named Mephibosheth, and "the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel." Michal had no children (6:23), and it was her sister Merab who married Adriel (1 Samuel 18:19). Most teachers think the name should read Merab here, as two Hebrew manuscripts and some ancient translations have it, or that Michal raised her sister's sons.

"And he gave them into the hand of the Gibeonites, and they impaled them on the mountain before the LORD." They died "in the days of harvest, in the first days, at the beginning of the barley harvest," in the spring, about April.

21:10 *And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took the sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water was poured out on them from the heavens. And she did not permit the birds of the heavens to rest on them by day, or the living things of the field by night.*

"And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took the sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water was poured out on them from the heavens." Sackcloth was rough cloth worn in mourning. Rizpah made a little camp on the rock beside the bodies of her sons and kept watch, "from the beginning of harvest" until the rains came, perhaps months later in the autumn.

"And she did not permit the birds of the heavens to rest on them by day, or the living things of the field by night." Day and night she drove off the vultures and the jackals. She could not save her sons' lives, but she would not let their bodies be shamed. Rizpah is one of the most moving figures in the Old Testament. She had no power, no voice at court and no way to change what had happened. She had only her love and her presence, and she gave them, for months, in the open.

If you are grieving a loss you could not stop, Rizpah shows that faithful love still matters, even when it can change nothing. And God saw it, because He had it written down.

21:11-14 *And it was told to David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the open square of Beth-shean, where the Philistines had hung them on the day the Philistines struck down Saul on Gilboa. And he brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of the impaled* ***men****. And they buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the land of Benjamin, in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father. And they did all that the king commanded. And God was entreated for the land after this.*

"And it was told to David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done." Her quiet vigil reached the king, and it moved him to act.

David went and got "the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead." The men of Jabesh had rescued the bodies from the wall of Beth-shean after the Philistines hung them there (1 Samuel 31:11-13). Now David brought them home "and they gathered the bones of the impaled men." He gave all of Saul's family an honorable burial together "in the land of Benjamin, in Zela, in the tomb of Kish his father." Saul's line had suffered for Saul's sin, but David did not leave it in disgrace. He honored the dead.

"And God was entreated for the land after this." To be entreated means God heard prayer and answered it. Notice when. Not right after the executions, but after the burial. The rains came, and the famine ended.

How do we understand this hard passage? Let me say a few things plainly. First, this was not a pagan human sacrifice to buy off an angry god. God had named a real crime: Saul had murdered people protected by a sworn covenant made in God's name. Under the Law, bloodshed polluted the land, and "atonement shall not be made for the blood which is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it" (Numbers 35:33). Saul was dead, so his "house of blood" bore it. The phrase suggests Saul's family shared in the killing, though we are not told how.

Second, the Law says that "sons shall not be put to death for fathers" (Deuteronomy 24:16), and Ezekiel says a son will not bear the iniquity of the father (Ezekiel 18:20). That law governed Israel's courts. Here the LORD Himself named the guilt, and the case involved an oath sworn to another people. I do not think we are meant to take this as a pattern for our own justice. Third, Scripture does not tell us everything we would like to know, and I do not want to pretend that it does. It is a hard chapter, and it is right to feel its weight.

What it teaches clearly is that God keeps His word and expects His people to keep theirs. Broken promises have consequences that can reach far beyond the one who broke them. And this passage points to something greater. The Law said "one who is hanged is a curse of God" (Deuteronomy 21:23). Paul says that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). Saul's sons died under the curse of their father's sin. Jesus, who had no sin, took the curse of ours, so that the guilt that stood between us and God could be taken away for good.

21:15-17 *And the Philistines again had war with Israel. And David went down, and his servants with him, and they fought with the Philistines. And David was weary. And Ishbi-benob, who **was** among the descendants of the Rapha, the weight of whose spear **was** approximately 7.5 pounds (three hundred **shekels** weight) of bronze, and he **was** girded **with** a new **sword**, he spoke of striking down David. And Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and he struck the Philistine and killed him. Then the men of David swore to him, saying, "You shall not go out again with us to the battle, and you shall not quench the lamp of Israel."*

Now come four short records of battles with the Philistines. "And the Philistines again had war with Israel. And David went down, and his servants with him." This was likely earlier in his reign, when he still went to battle. "And David was weary." The giant-killer was older now and worn out.

"Ishbi-benob, who was among the descendants of the Rapha," came after him. The Rapha were a race of very tall warriors, sometimes called the Rephaim, who once lived in Canaan (Deuteronomy 2:10-11). His spear point weighed about seven and a half pounds, and he had "a new sword," and he meant to kill David.

"And Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped him, and he struck the Philistine and killed him." Abishai saved the king's life. Then David's men made him swear, "You shall not go out again with us to the battle, and you shall not quench the lamp of Israel." A lamp is a picture of life and hope. As long as David lived, Israel's light burned. Later God promised that David would always have "a lamp" before Him in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:36), and that promise led all the way to Jesus, "the light of the world" (John 8:12).

21:18-19 *And it was after this, and the war was again at Gob with the Philistines. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who **was** among the descendants of the Rapha. And the war was again at Gob with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite struck down Goliath the Gittite; and the shaft of his spear **was** like a beam of weavers.*

"And it was after this, and the war was again at Gob with the Philistines. Then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck down Saph, who was among the descendants of the Rapha." Sibbecai was one of David's mighty men (1 Chronicles 11:29).

"And the war was again at Gob with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite struck down Goliath the Gittite; and the shaft of his spear was like a beam of weavers." Wait, didn't David kill Goliath (1 Samuel 17)? This is a well-known difficulty. First Chronicles 20:5 tells the same event and says that Elhanan "struck down Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite." Most conservative teachers believe the Chronicles text keeps the original wording, and that the text in Samuel was miscopied at some point, since the Hebrew words for "Lahmi the brother of" and "the Bethlehemite" look much alike. Others think "Goliath" may have been a family name or title carried by more than one giant from Gath. Either way, Scripture is not saying that someone else killed the Goliath David faced. David killed Goliath with a sling and a stone in the Valley of Elah when he was a youth. Elhanan killed a giant of the same family, with the same kind of huge spear, years later.

21:20-22 *And there was again war at Gath. And there was a man of stature, and the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet **were** six and six, twenty-four in number; and he also was born to the Rapha. And he taunted Israel, and Jonathan the son of Shimeah, the brother of David, struck him down. These four were born to the Rapha in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.*

"And there was again war at Gath. And there was a man of stature, and the fingers of his hands and the toes of his feet were six and six, twenty-four in number; and he also was born to the Rapha." Six fingers and six toes is a rare condition that still occurs. This giant "taunted Israel," just as Goliath had defied the battle lines of Israel (1 Samuel 17:10). "And Jonathan the son of Shimeah, the brother of David, struck him down." This Jonathan was David's nephew, the brother of the crafty Jonadab of chapter 13.

"These four were born to the Rapha in Gath, and they fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants." David had faced the first giant alone as a boy. Now his men faced these giants for him. A good leader raises up others who can fight. David's faith had become their faith. That is what discipleship looks like: the courage of one generation passed on to the next.

What giants are you facing? The same God who gave David and his men the victory is with you. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Chapter 21 Summary

In David's days there was a famine for three years, and when David sought the LORD, He said it was because Saul and his bloodstained house had killed the Gibeonites, whom Israel had sworn to protect since Joshua's day. David asked the Gibeonites how he could make atonement. They refused silver and gold and asked for seven of Saul's descendants to put to death before the LORD at Gibeah. David spared Mephibosheth because of his oath to Jonathan, and gave up Rizpah's two sons and the five sons borne to Adriel. They were put to death at the start of the barley harvest. Rizpah spread sackcloth on the rock and kept the birds and beasts from the bodies until the rains came. When David heard, he brought the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh-gilead and buried them with the bones of the seven in the tomb of Kish in Benjamin, and after that God answered prayer for the land. Then in war with the Philistines, David grew weary, and Abishai killed the giant Ishbi-benob, who meant to kill him, and David's men swore he would no longer go to battle, so as not to quench the lamp of Israel. Sibbecai killed Saph, Elhanan killed Goliath the Gittite, and Jonathan son of Shimeah killed a giant with six fingers and six toes who taunted Israel. These four descendants of the Rapha fell by the hands of David and his servants.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. What did David do when the famine lasted three years, and what did the LORD tell him? (21:1)

2. Who were the Gibeonites, and what oath had Israel made to them? (21:2; Joshua 9:15)

3. Why did David spare Mephibosheth? (21:7; 1 Samuel 20:14-17)

4. What did Rizpah do, and how did it move David to act? (21:10-14)

5. When did God answer prayer for the land, and why might that matter? (21:14)

6. Why did David's men say he must not go out to battle again? (21:15-17)

7. How does 1 Chronicles 20:5 help explain 21:19?

8. Saul broke an old promise and others paid for it. Is there a promise you have made that you need to keep, even if it costs you?

9. Rizpah could change nothing, but she kept faithful watch. How can you show faithful love in a situation you cannot fix?

10. David's men faced giants because they had seen David's faith. Who is learning faith by watching you?

Chapter 22: David's Song of Deliverance

Scripture

22:1-20 And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day ***that*** the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said, "The LORD ***is*** my crag and my stronghold, and a rescuer for me; the God of my rock, I take refuge in Him; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge and my place of escape; my savior, from violence You save me. ***One*** to be praised, I call ***on*** the LORD, and from my enemies I am saved. For the breakers of death surrounded me; the torrents of worthlessness overwhelmed me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called ***on*** the LORD, and to my God I called; and He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help ***was*** in His ears. And the earth shook back and forth and quaked; the foundations of the heavens trembled, and they shook back and forth, for it burned ***within*** Him. Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed; coals burned from Him. And He bowed ***the*** heavens and came down, and thick darkness ***was*** under His feet. And He rode on a cherub and flew, and He was seen on the wings of ***the*** wind. And He set darkness around Him ***as*** shelters, a gathering of waters, thick clouds of ***the*** skies. From the brightness before Him coals of fire burned. The LORD thundered from ***the*** heavens, and the Most High gave His voice. And He sent arrows and scattered them; lightning, and He routed ***them***. And the channels of ***the*** sea were seen; the foundations of ***the*** world were uncovered at the rebuke of the LORD, at the breath of the wind of His nose. He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD was a support for me. And He brought me out to the broad place; He freed me, for He delighted in me.

22:21-37 The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He repaid me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and I have not acted wickedly ***departing*** from my God. For all His judgments ***were*** before me, and ***as for*** His statutes, I did not turn aside from them. And I was blameless toward Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. And the LORD repaid me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness before His eyes. With the loyal You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless mighty man You show Yourself blameless; with the one who purifies himself You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd. And the afflicted people You save, and Your eyes ***are*** on the haughty, ***whom*** You bring low. For You ***are*** my lamp, O LORD; and the LORD lights up my darkness. For by You I run ***against*** a band; by my God I leap over a wall. ***As for*** God, His way ***is*** blameless; the word of the LORD ***is*** refined; He ***is*** a shield to all who take refuge in Him. For who ***is*** God except the LORD? And who ***is*** a rock except our God? God ***is*** my refuge ***of*** strength, and He loosed my way ***to be*** blameless, making my feet like the does, and on my high places He makes me stand, training my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze. And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your answering makes me great. You enlarge my step under me, and my ankles have not slipped.

22:38-51 I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and I did not turn back until I had consumed them. And I consumed them and shattered them, and they do not rise, and they fell

under my feet. And You girded me ***with*** strength for the battle; You make those who rise against me bow down under me. And my enemies, You have given me ***their*** neck; those who hate me, and I destroyed them. They looked, and ***there was*** no savior; to the LORD, and He did not answer them. And I ground them like the dust of the earth; like the mud of the streets I crushed them, I beat them flat. And You rescued me from the strivings of my people; You kept me for head of ***the*** nations; a people ***whom*** I did not know serve me. Sons of foreignness cringe before me; at the hearing of an ear they obey me. Sons of foreignness wither, and they gird themselves ***and come*** from their strongholds. The LORD lives, and blessed ***be*** my rock; and may the God of the rock of my salvation be exalted, the God who gives vengeances for me and brings down peoples under me, and brings me out from my enemies; and above those who rise against me You lift me up; from a man of violence You deliver me. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations, and to Your name I will sing praise. ***He is*** a tower of salvations ***for*** His king, and He does steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever."

Chapter 22 Preview

After the hard chapter of the famine and the giants, the book stops for a song. David sang it "on the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." This same song appears in the book of Psalms as Psalm 18, with only small differences in wording. It looks back over David's whole life: the years of running from Saul, the wars with the nations, the times he thought he would die. And it gives the glory to God. The LORD is his rock, his fortress, his shield and his savior.

The song moves in stanzas. David praises God as his rock, remembers how death nearly swallowed him, and pictures God coming down from heaven in storm and fire to pull him out of deep waters. He speaks of keeping God's ways, of how God deals with the faithful and the crooked, of God training his hands for war and giving him victory, and of God making him head of the nations. It ends with a promise that looks far past David: God shows "steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever." Paul quotes this song about Christ (Romans 15:9).

Chapter 22 Study

22:1 *And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day **that** the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*

"And David spoke to the LORD the words of this song on the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." The song likely came from the years after David became king, when God had given him rest from his enemies (7:1). It is placed here, near the end of the book, as a look back over his whole life.

Notice that David "spoke to the LORD." This is not a song about God sung to an audience. It is a song sung to God. Before it was ever written in a book, it was prayer.

Hebrew poetry works a little differently from English poetry. It does not rhyme sounds. It rhymes thoughts. A line says something, and the next line says it again in other words, or adds to it, or sets an opposite beside it. This is called parallelism. "The breakers of death surrounded me; the

torrents of worthlessness overwhelmed me" (22:5) is one thought said twice. When you see the pairs, the poetry opens up.

22:2-4 *And he said, "The LORD **is** my crag and my stronghold, and a rescuer for me; the God of my rock, I take refuge in Him; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge and my place of escape; my savior, from violence You save me. **One** to be praised, I call **on** the LORD, and from my enemies I am saved.*

"The LORD is my crag and my stronghold, and a rescuer for me." David piles up pictures of safety. A crag is a high rock cliff. A stronghold is a fortress in the mountains. David had hidden in such places from Saul, at the cave of Adullam and the strongholds of En-gedi (1 Samuel 22:1; 23:29). But he knew the rocks had not saved him. The LORD had.

"The God of my rock, I take refuge in Him; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my high refuge and my place of escape; my savior, from violence You save me." A horn is a picture of strength, like the horns of a wild ox. "The horn of my salvation" means the strong one who saves me. Zechariah used the same picture of Jesus: God "raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant" (Luke 1:69). Hebrews puts the words "I will be trusting in Him" in the mouth of Christ (Hebrews 2:13), the same trust David speaks here.

"One to be praised, I call on the LORD, and from my enemies I am saved." That is the theme of the whole song. Call on the LORD, and He saves.

22:5-7 *For the breakers of death surrounded me; the torrents of worthlessness overwhelmed me. The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called **on** the LORD, and to my God I called; and He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help **was** in His ears.*

"For the breakers of death surrounded me; the torrents of worthlessness overwhelmed me." David pictures himself drowning, with waves crashing over him. "The cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me." Sheol is the Hebrew word for the grave, the place of the dead. Death was like a hunter with ropes and traps, closing in. David had known that feeling many times, with Saul's spear flying at his head, with the Philistines at Gath, with Absalom's army behind him.

"In my distress I called on the LORD, and to my God I called." He had nowhere else to go. "And He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help was in His ears." God's temple here is His dwelling in heaven. The God who rules the universe heard one man's cry. He hears yours too.

22:8-16 *And the earth shook back and forth and quaked; the foundations of the heavens trembled, and they shook back and forth, for it burned **within** Him. Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed; coals burned from Him. And He bowed **the** heavens and came down, and thick darkness **was** under His feet. And He rode on a cherub and flew, and He was seen on the wings of **the** wind. And He set darkness around Him **as** shelters, a gathering of waters, thick clouds of **the** skies. From the brightness before Him coals of fire burned. The LORD thundered from **the** heavens, and the Most High gave His voice. And He sent arrows and scattered them; lightning, and He routed **them**. And the channels of **the** sea were seen; the foundations of **the** world were uncovered at the rebuke of the LORD, at the breath of the wind of His nose.*

Then the song explodes. God answers like a thunderstorm. "And the earth shook back and forth and quaked; the foundations of the heavens trembled." Why? "For it burned within Him." God was angry at those attacking His servant.

"Smoke went up in His nose, and fire from His mouth consumed." God is pictured like a mighty warrior breathing fire. "And He bowed the heavens and came down, and thick darkness was under His feet." He bent the sky down like a curtain and came. "And He rode on a cherub and flew, and He was seen on the wings of the wind." A cherub is a mighty angel, like those on the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:18-22), pictured here as God's chariot.

He wrapped Himself in dark storm clouds. "The LORD thundered from the heavens, and the Most High gave His voice." Lightning flashed like arrows, and the enemies scattered. Even the sea and the earth were laid bare: "the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were uncovered at the rebuke of the LORD, at the breath of the wind of His nose." This reminds us of the parting of the Red Sea, when the waters stood up at the blast of God's nostrils (Exodus 15:8).

Did all this really happen in a storm on the day God rescued David? The language is poetry. David is not describing one weather report. He is using the greatest pictures he knows, Sinai, the Red Sea, the thunderstorm, to show what it felt like when God stepped in. When God rescues His people, all of heaven moves. We should never think our prayers are small to Him.

22:17-20 *He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD was a support for me. And He brought me out to the broad place; He freed me, for He delighted in me.*

And now the point of the storm. "He sent from on high; He took me; He drew me out of many waters." The great God came down for one reason: to pull David out. The word "drew out" is the same word used when Moses was drawn out of the Nile (Exodus 2:10).

"He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hate me, for they were stronger than I." David was honest. His enemies were stronger. Saul had an army. David had a few hundred outlaws. But God was stronger than all of them. "They confronted me in the day of my calamity, and the LORD was a support for me."

"And He brought me out to the broad place; He freed me, for He delighted in me." A broad place is open ground, room to breathe, the opposite of being trapped in a narrow canyon. And why did God do it? Not because David was strong, but "for He delighted in me." God saves His people because He loves them. That is grace.

22:21-25 *The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He repaid me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and I have not acted wickedly* ***departing*** *from my God. For all His judgments* ***were*** *before me, and* ***as for*** *His statutes, I did not turn aside from them. And I was blameless toward Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity. And the LORD repaid me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness before His eyes.*

"The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He repaid me." This section can surprise us. How can David, the man of chapter 11, talk about his righteousness and clean hands?

First, this song was likely written before David's sin with Bathsheba. Verse 1 ties it to his rescue from Saul. Second, David is not claiming to be sinless. He is saying that in the conflict with Saul and his enemies, he had been in the right. He had refused to lay a hand on the LORD's anointed (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:9-11). He had not been the aggressor. "For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and I have not acted wickedly departing from my God." "For all His judgments were before me." "And I was blameless toward Him, and I kept myself from my iniquity." Blameless means whole, sincere, with an undivided heart toward God, not perfect.

A believer can speak this way. When we are falsely accused, we can say before God, I did not do this, my hands are clean in this matter. And when we do sin, as David later did, we come back as he did in Psalm 51. Our righteousness before God, finally, is not our own. Like Abraham and like David, we are counted righteous by faith (Romans 4:3-8). And the One who was truly blameless in every way is Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is credited to all who trust Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

22:26-28 *With the loyal You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless mighty man You show Yourself blameless; with the one who purifies himself You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd. And the afflicted people You save, and Your eyes* ***are*** *on the haughty,* ***whom*** *You bring low.*

Now a general truth about how God deals with people. "With the loyal You show Yourself loyal; with the blameless mighty man You show Yourself blameless; with the one who purifies himself You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You show Yourself shrewd."

God meets people where they stand. To those who are faithful to Him, He shows Himself faithful. To those who twist and scheme, He outwits them. That does not mean God becomes crooked. It means the crooked find that God turns their schemes back on them. We saw this with Ahithophel. His brilliant plan was turned to foolishness (17:14).

"And the afflicted people You save, and Your eyes are on the haughty, whom You bring low." God lifts the humble and humbles the proud. Mary sang the same truth when she was carrying the Son of David: He brought down rulers and lifted up the humble (Luke 1:52).

22:29-31 *For You **are** my lamp, O LORD; and the LORD lights up my darkness. For by You I run **against** a band; by my God I leap over a wall. **As for** God, His way **is** blameless; the word of the LORD **is** refined; He **is** a shield to all who take refuge in Him.*

"For You are my lamp, O LORD; and the LORD lights up my darkness." In 21:17, David's men called him "the lamp of Israel." Here David says the LORD is his lamp. David was Israel's light only because God was David's light.

"For by You I run against a band; by my God I leap over a wall." With God, David could charge an enemy troop or scale a city wall. It is the language of a warrior who has seen God give him strength beyond his own.

"As for God, His way is blameless; the word of the LORD is refined; He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him." Refined means tested by fire, like silver with all impurity burned out. God's word has no flaw. You can stake your life on it. And "all who take refuge in Him" means this shield is not just for kings. It is for anyone who runs to Him.

22:32-37 *For who **is** God except the LORD? And who **is** a rock except our God? God **is** my refuge **of** strength, and He loosed my way **to be** blameless, making my feet like the does, and on my high places He makes me stand, training my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze. And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your answering makes me great. You enlarge my step under me, and my ankles have not slipped.*

"For who is God except the LORD? And who is a rock except our God?" There is only one. The gods of the nations were nothing. Israel's God alone is the solid rock.

David then thanks God for his skill and strength in battle. "God is my refuge of strength." He made "my feet like the does," sure-footed as a mountain deer on the rocks, "and on my high places He makes me stand." He was "training my hands for the battle, and my arms bend a bow of bronze." David did not credit himself for his skill as a warrior. He credited God for training him.

"And You have given me the shield of Your salvation, and Your answering makes me great." The SLB reads "Your answering," God answering David's prayers. Psalm 18:35 reads, "Your humility has made me great." Both are true. God's greatness stooped down to lift David up. "You enlarge my step under me, and my ankles have not slipped." God made room for his feet.

Whatever gifts and skills you have, they came from God. Use them for Him, and give Him the credit.

22:38-43 *I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and I did not turn back until I had consumed them. And I consumed them and shattered them, and they do not rise, and they fell under my feet. And You girded me **with** strength for the battle; You make those who rise against me bow down under me. And my enemies, You have given me **their** neck; those who hate me, and I destroyed them. They looked, and **there was** no savior; to the LORD, and He did not answer them. And I ground them like the dust of the earth; like the mud of the streets I crushed them, I beat them flat.*

"I pursued my enemies and destroyed them, and I did not turn back until I had consumed them." This is the language of a warrior king in a hard age. David's enemies were nations that attacked Israel again and again, and God had appointed David to give Israel rest from them (7:1, 9-11).

"You girded me with strength for the battle; You make those who rise against me bow down under me." "My enemies, You have given me their neck," meaning God made them turn and run. "They looked, and there was no savior; to the LORD, and He did not answer them." At the end, even his enemies cried out to the LORD, but too late, and not from the heart.

"I ground them like the dust of the earth; like the mud of the streets I crushed them, I beat them flat." It is strong language, and we should not soften it. But we also should not use it to make war on people today. We do not fight with swords against flesh and blood. Our battle is spiritual (Ephesians 6:12). And one day the Son of David will come as a warrior King to put down every enemy of God (Revelation 19:11-16). Until then, we are called to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

22:44-46 *And You rescued me from the strivings of my people; You kept me for head of **the** nations; a people **whom** I did not know serve me. Sons of foreignness cringe before me; at the hearing of an ear they obey me. Sons of foreignness wither, and they gird themselves **and come** from their strongholds.*

"And You rescued me from the strivings of my people." Not only foreign enemies but his own people had turned on him, Saul's house, Absalom, Sheba. God kept him through it all. "You kept me for head of the nations; a people whom I did not know serve me." Under David, Moab, Edom, Ammon and Syria all came under Israel's rule (8:1-14).

"Sons of foreignness cringe before me; at the hearing of an ear they obey me." Foreigners came trembling out of their strongholds to make peace with him.

This is more than David's history. David was the first king in a line that would end with a King who will rule all the nations. "Of the increase of the dominion and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over His kingdom" (Isaiah 9:7). What David saw in part, Jesus will fulfill in full.

22:47-51 *The LORD lives, and blessed **be** my rock; and may the God of the rock of my salvation be exalted, the God who gives vengeances for me and brings down peoples under me, and brings me out from my enemies; and above those who rise against me You lift me up; from a man of violence You deliver me. Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations, and to Your name I will sing praise. **He is** a tower of salvations **for** His king, and He does steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever."*

The song ends where it began, with praise. "The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock; and may the God of the rock of my salvation be exalted." The God of the nations' idols is dead. The LORD lives.

"The God who gives vengeances for me." David did not take his own revenge on Saul. He left it to God, and God dealt with Saul in His own time.

"Therefore I will give thanks to You, O LORD, among the nations, and to Your name I will sing praise." Paul quotes this line in Romans 15:9 to show that God always meant for the Gentiles, the nations, to praise Him through the Messiah: "Because of this I will praise You among the Gentiles, and I will sing praise to Your name." Paul puts the words in the mouth of Christ. The Son of David leads the nations in praise of His Father.

And the last verse: "He is a tower of salvations for His king, and He does steadfast love to His anointed, to David and to his offspring forever." This looks straight back to God's covenant in chapter 7. "His anointed" in Hebrew is mashiach, Messiah. God's steadfast love, hesed, His loyal covenant love, would rest on David and on his offspring forever. That promise reaches its full answer in Jesus, the anointed King, the offspring of David, "the root and the offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16). David ended his song looking forward to Him. So should we.

Chapter 22 Summary

David sang this song to the LORD when God delivered him from all his enemies and from Saul. He praised the LORD as his crag, stronghold, rock, shield, horn of salvation and savior, who saves those who call on Him. He told how the waves of death and the cords of Sheol surrounded him, how he cried to God, and how God heard from His temple. The earth shook as God came down in fire, cloud and lightning, riding on a cherub, laying bare the sea's channels, and drew David out of many waters because He delighted in him. David said the LORD rewarded him for his righteousness and clean hands, for he had kept God's ways. God shows Himself loyal to the loyal and shrewd to the crooked, saves the humble and brings down the proud. The LORD is David's lamp, by whom he charges troops and leaps walls. God's way is blameless and His word refined. There is no rock but our God, who trained David's hands for war, made his feet sure, and gave him the shield of salvation. David pursued and crushed his enemies, was rescued from the strife of his own people and made head of the nations. The song ends with praise to the living LORD, a vow to praise Him among the nations, and the promise of steadfast love to His anointed, to David and his offspring forever.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. When did David sing this song, and where else in the Bible is it found? (22:1; Psalm 18)

2. What names and pictures does David use for God in 22:2-3, and what do they have in common?

3. How does David describe his danger in 22:5-7, and what did he do about it?

4. What does the storm in 22:8-16 tell us about how God responds to the cry of His servant?

5. Why did God rescue David, according to 22:20?

6. How can David speak of his righteousness and clean hands in 22:21-25?

7. How does God deal with the loyal and with the crooked? (22:26-28)

8. How do Romans 15:9 and 22:51 show that this song points to Christ?

9. David said God trained his hands for battle. What skills has God given you, and are you giving Him the credit? (22:35)

10. Write your own short list of times God has drawn you out of deep waters. How can you thank Him for them this week?

Chapter 23: David's Last Words and His Mighty Men

Scripture

23:1-7 And these ***are*** the last words of David: the declaration of David the son of Jesse, and the declaration of the man ***who*** was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the pleasant ***one*** of the songs of Israel: The Spirit of the LORD has spoken by me, and His speech ***is*** on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: One who rules over mankind ***is*** righteous, one who rules ***in*** the fear of God, and ***he is*** like the light of morning ***when*** the sun rises, a morning ***with*** no clouds, from brightness, from rain, vegetation from the earth. For ***is*** not my house so with God? For He has made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged in everything and preserved; for all my salvation and every desire, will He not make ***it*** grow? And worthlessness, like thorns chased away ***are*** all of them, for they do not take ***them*** with a hand; and the man ***who*** touches them arms himself ***with*** iron and the shaft of a spear, and with fire they will surely be burned at the dwelling.

23:8-23 These ***are*** the names of the mighty men who ***belonged*** to David: Josheb-basshebeth a Tachkemonite, chief of the officers; he ***was*** Adino the Eznite, against eight hundred slain at one time. And after him ***was*** Eleazar the son of Dodo the son of an Ahohite, among the three mighty men with David when they taunted the Philistines ***who*** were gathered there for the battle, and the men of Israel went up. He arose and struck down among the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clung to the sword. And the LORD worked a great deliverance on that day; and the people returned after him only to strip ***the slain***. And after him ***was*** Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered into a troop, and there was a portion of the field there full of lentils; and the people fled from before ***the*** Philistines. And he took his stand in the middle of the portion and delivered it and struck down the Philistines. And the LORD worked a great deliverance. And three of the thirty chiefs went down and came at harvest to David, to the cave of Adullam; and a troop of Philistines ***was*** encamped in the valley of Rephaim. And David ***was*** then in the stronghold, and a garrison of Philistines ***was*** then ***in*** Bethlehem. And David craved and said, "Who will give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem, which ***is*** at the gate?" And the three mighty men broke through the camp of ***the*** Philistines and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which ***was*** at the gate, and they carried ***it*** and brought ***it*** to David. And he was not willing to drink it, and he poured it out to the LORD. And he said, "Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! ***Is it*** the blood of the men who went with their lives?" And he was not willing to drink it. These ***things*** the three mighty men did. And Abishai the brother of Joab the son of Zeruiah, he ***was*** chief of the three. And he wielded his spear against three hundred slain, and he ***had*** a name among the three. Was he ***not*** honored more than the three? And he became a commander to them; and to the three he did not come. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada ***was*** the son of a man of strength, great of deeds, from Kabzeel. He struck down the two Ariel of Moab. And he went down and struck down the lion in the midst of the pit on the day of the snow. And he struck down an Egyptian man, a man of appearance; and in the hand of the Egyptian ***was*** a spear. And he went down to him with the staff and seized the spear from the hand of the Egyptian and killed him with his ***own*** spear. These ***things*** Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did, and he ***had*** a name

among the three mighty men. He was honored more than the thirty, and to the three he did not come. And David appointed him over his bodyguard.

23:24-39 Asahel the brother of Joab ***was*** among the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem; Shammah the Harodite; Elika the Harodite; Helez the Paltite; Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite; Abiezer the Anathothite; Mebunnai the Hushathite; Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai the Netophathite; Heleb the son of Baanah the Netophathite; Ittai the son of Ribai from Gibeah of the sons of Benjamin; Benaiah the Pirathonite; Hiddai from the wadis of Gaash; Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Barhumite; Eliahba the Shaalbonite; the sons of Jashen; Jonathan; Shammah the Hararite; Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite; Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maacathite; Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; Hezrai the Carmelite; Paarai the Arbite; Igal the son of Nathan from Zobah; Bani the Gadite; Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai the Beerothite, the bearer of the armor of Joab the son of Zeruiah; Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; Uriah the Hittite: all ***of them***, thirty-seven.

Chapter 23 Preview

Chapter 22 was David's song from the middle of his life. Chapter 23 opens with his "last words," a short poem from near the end. In it David says plainly that the Spirit of the LORD spoke through him. God had told him what a true king looks like: one who rules over people in righteousness and in the fear of God, like sunrise on a cloudless morning, like grass after rain. David knew he had not always been that king. But he rested on God's everlasting covenant with his house. The poem looks beyond David to the righteous King God would raise up from his line.

The rest of the chapter is a roll of honor: David's mighty men, the warriors who stood with him. First come the Three, whose deeds are told in short, vivid scenes: one man who killed eight hundred, one who fought until his hand stuck to his sword, one who stood alone in a field of lentils. Then the story of three men who broke through the Philistine lines to bring David a drink from the well of Bethlehem, and David poured it out to the LORD. Then Abishai and Benaiah, and a list of the Thirty. The last name on the list is Uriah the Hittite.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1 *And these **are** the last words of David: the declaration of David the son of Jesse, and the declaration of the man **who** was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the pleasant **one** of the songs of Israel:*

"And these are the last words of David." They are not necessarily the very last things he ever said (1 Kings 2:1-9 records his charge to Solomon), but his last formal words, his final song or testament.

David describes himself in four ways. He is "the son of Jesse," a reminder of his humble start as a shepherd boy. He is "the man who was raised up on high," lifted by God, not by himself. He is "the anointed of the God of Jacob," chosen and set apart by God as king. And he is "the pleasant one of the songs of Israel," Israel's sweet singer, the writer of many of the psalms.

The word "declaration" is the word the prophets used for a message from God. David is about to speak as a prophet.

23:2-4 *The Spirit of the LORD has spoken by me, and His speech **is** on my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: One who rules over mankind **is** righteous, one who rules **in** the fear of God, and **he is** like the light of morning **when** the sun rises, a morning **with** no clouds, from brightness, from rain, vegetation from the earth.*

"The Spirit of the LORD has spoken by me, and His speech is on my tongue." This is a clear claim of inspiration. David says his words came from God's Spirit. Jesus agreed. He said David spoke "in the Spirit" when he wrote Psalm 110 (Matthew 22:43). Peter called David "a prophet" (Acts 2:30). This is how all Scripture came to us: "Every Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16).

"The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spoke to me: One who rules over mankind is righteous, one who rules in the fear of God." God gave David a picture of the ideal king. He rules justly, and he rules in the fear of God, knowing he answers to Someone higher.

"And he is like the light of morning when the sun rises, a morning with no clouds." A just ruler is like dawn after a dark night. "From brightness, from rain, vegetation from the earth." He is like sunshine after rain that makes the grass spring up green. Good leadership brings life and growth to a people.

Who is this king? It was the standard for David and every son of David. Most of them failed it, and David himself did not always meet it. Only one King meets it perfectly. Jeremiah promised that God would "raise up for David a righteous Branch," who would "do justice and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 23:5). Malachi spoke of "the sun of righteousness" rising, and "healing is in its wings" (Malachi 4:2). I believe David's last words point to Jesus Christ, the righteous King who will one day rule the whole earth in the fear of God.

23:5 *For **is** not my house so with God? For He has made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged in everything and preserved; for all my salvation and every desire, will He not make **it** grow?*

"For is not my house so with God?" The Hebrew can be read as a question, as the SLB has it, expecting yes. David is saying, isn't this what God has promised for my house? "For He has made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged in everything and preserved."

This is the covenant of chapter 7, where God promised that David's house, kingdom and throne would be established forever (7:16). Here David calls it "an everlasting covenant." It was "arranged in everything," every detail ordered by God, and "preserved," made secure. David's hope did not rest on his own record, which had serious failures. It rested on God's promise.

"For all my salvation and every desire, will He not make it grow?" Everything David longed for, God would bring to pass. And He did, in Jesus, the Son of David, of whose kingdom "there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

That is our hope too. Our security before God does not rest on how well we have done. It rests on what God has promised and on the King He has given.

23:6-7 *And worthlessness, like thorns chased away **are** all of them, for they do not take **them** with a hand; and the man **who** touches them arms himself **with** iron and the shaft of a spear, and with fire they will surely be burned at the dwelling.*

The poem ends with the other side. "And worthlessness, like thorns chased away are all of them, for they do not take them with a hand." The worthless, the wicked, are like thorn bushes. No one picks them up with bare hands.

"And the man who touches them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear, and with fire they will surely be burned at the dwelling." You handle thorns with tools, and in the end you burn them. The righteous King will bring life to those who fear God and judgment on those who oppose Him. Jesus said the same about the weeds at the end of the age (Matthew 13:40-43). The same King who is sunrise to His people is fire to His enemies.

23:8 *These **are** the names of the mighty men who **belonged** to David: Josheb-basshebeth a Tachkemonite, chief of the officers; he **was** Adino the Eznite, against eight hundred slain at one time.*

Now the list of "the names of the mighty men who belonged to David." These were his elite warriors, many of whom had been with him since his outlaw days. Their names were remembered because they were faithful.

First, "Josheb-basshebeth a Tachkemonite, chief of the officers." He killed "eight hundred slain at one time." First Chronicles 11:11 calls him Jashobeam and gives the number as three hundred. Names and numbers are among the easiest things to miscopy in an ancient text, and that is the most likely explanation.

23:9-12 *And after him **was** Eleazar the son of Dodo the son of an Ahohite, among the three mighty men with David when they taunted the Philistines **who** were gathered there for the battle, and the men of Israel went up. He arose and struck down among the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clung to the sword. And the LORD worked a great deliverance on that day; and the people returned after him only to strip **the slain**. And after him **was** Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered into a troop, and there was a portion of the field there full of lentils; and the people fled from before **the** Philistines. And he took his stand in the middle of the portion and delivered it and struck down the Philistines. And the LORD worked a great deliverance.*

"And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo." He stood with David when the Philistines gathered for battle "and the men of Israel went up," that is, pulled back. Eleazar did not. "He arose and struck down among the Philistines until his hand was weary and his hand clung to the sword." He gripped the sword so long and so hard that his hand cramped around it.

"And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite." The Philistines came against "a portion of the field there full of lentils; and the people fled." Shammah did not run. "He took his stand in the middle of the portion and delivered it." One man defended one field of beans.

Twice the writer says the same thing: "the LORD worked a great deliverance." The men fought, but God won. Shammah's field may seem small. But faithfulness in small places matters to God. Sometimes the battle God gives us is not for a city but for one small patch of ground: a marriage, a child, a conscience, a church. Stand your ground.

23:13-17 *And three of the thirty chiefs went down and came at harvest to David, to the cave of Adullam; and a troop of Philistines **was** encamped in the valley of Rephaim. And David **was** then in the stronghold, and a garrison of Philistines **was** then **in** Bethlehem. And David craved and said, "Who will give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem, which **is** at the gate?" And the three mighty men broke through the camp of **the** Philistines and drew water from the well of Bethlehem which **was** at the gate, and they carried **it** and brought **it** to David. And he was not willing to drink it, and he poured it out to the LORD. And he said, "Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! **Is it** the blood of the men who went with their lives?" And he was not willing to drink it. These **things** the three mighty men did.*

Next is a scene from David's outlaw years. "Three of the thirty chiefs went down and came at harvest to David, to the cave of Adullam." The Philistines held the Valley of Rephaim and even had a garrison in Bethlehem, David's hometown.

David was homesick. "Who will give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem, which is at the gate?" He was not giving an order. He was remembering the water of his boyhood.

"And the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water from the well of Bethlehem." They risked their lives for a wish.

But David "was not willing to drink it, and he poured it out to the LORD." Why? "Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this! Is it the blood of the men who went with their lives?" The water had cost too much. It was like their blood. It was too precious for him to drink, so he gave it to God as a drink offering, an offering poured out on the ground before the LORD.

This is a beautiful picture of leadership and of worship. David honored his men by refusing to treat their sacrifice as an ordinary thing. And he gave the best he had to God. Paul spoke of his own life being "poured out as a drink offering" (Philippians 2:17). Some things are too costly to spend on ourselves. They belong to God.

23:18-23 *And Abishai the brother of Joab the son of Zeruiah, he **was** chief of the three. And he wielded his spear against three hundred slain, and he **had** a name among the three. Was he **not** honored more than the three? And he became a commander to them; and to the three he did not come. And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada **was** the son of a man of strength, great of deeds, from Kabzeel. He struck down the two Ariel of Moab. And he went down and struck down the lion in the midst of the pit on the day of the snow. And he struck down an Egyptian man, a man of appearance; and in the hand of the Egyptian **was** a spear. And he went down to him with the staff and seized the spear from the hand of the Egyptian and killed him with his **own** spear. These **things** Benaiah the son of Jehoiada did, and he **had** a name among the three mighty men. He was honored more than the thirty, and to the three he did not come. And David appointed him over his bodyguard.*

"And Abishai the brother of Joab the son of Zeruiah, he was chief of the three." Abishai killed three hundred with his spear. He was the most honored of a second group of three, "and to the three he did not come," that is, he did not rank with the first Three. Abishai was fierce, often too quick to kill (16:9; 19:21), but he had also saved David's life (21:17).

"And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was the son of a man of strength, great of deeds, from Kabzeel." Three of his deeds are told. "He struck down the two Ariel of Moab," two champions of Moab. "And he went down and struck down the lion in the midst of the pit on the day of the snow." A lion in a pit on a snowy day: a trapped, angry animal in slippery, cold ground. Benaiah went down in after it. And he killed "an Egyptian man, a man of appearance," a giant of a man with a spear. Benaiah had only a staff. He took the spear out of the Egyptian's hand "and killed him with his own spear."

"And David appointed him over his bodyguard." Benaiah was loyal and steady. Later he would be Solomon's commander in place of Joab (1 Kings 2:35).

23:24-39 *Asahel the brother of Joab **was** among the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem; Shammah the Harodite; Elika the Harodite; Helez the Paltite; Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite; Abiezer the Anathothite; Mebunnai the Hushathite; Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai the Netophathite; Heleb the son of Baanah the Netophathite; Ittai the son of Ribai from Gibeah of the sons of Benjamin; Benaiah the Pirathonite; Hiddai from the wadis of Gaash; Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Barhumite; Eliahba the Shaalbonite; the sons of Jashen; Jonathan; Shammah the Hararite; Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite; Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maacathite; Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; Hezrai the Carmelite; Paarai the Arbite; Igal the son of Nathan from Zobah; Bani the Gadite; Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai the Beerothite, the bearer of the armor of Joab the son of Zeruiah; Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; Uriah the Hittite: all **of them**, thirty-seven.*

Then comes the list of "the thirty," the wider circle of David's mighty men. Most are only names to us now. But they were real men who stood with David, and God had their names written down. A few stand out.

"Asahel the brother of Joab" is first. He was killed by Abner early in David's reign (2:23), so this list includes men from many years. "Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem" may be the same

Elhanan of 21:19. "Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite" came from Tekoa, the town of the wise woman (14:2). "Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite" (23:34) was probably the father of Bathsheba (11:3), which would make Ahithophel her grandfather.

There were foreigners among them too: "Zelek the Ammonite," "Igal the son of Nathan from Zobah" in Syria. Faith in Israel's God and loyalty to His king made them part of David's band.

And the last name on the list: "Uriah the Hittite." The writer saved him for last. He could have left him off. He did not. Uriah was one of David's mighty men, faithful to the end, and David had him killed (chapter 11). His name stands in the roll of honor as a quiet, permanent reminder. God does not forget the faithful. And He does not hide the sins of His servants.

"All of them, thirty-seven." The number is more than thirty, because the list counts the Three, Abishai, Benaiah and the Thirty, with names added as men died and were replaced. Notice also whose name is not here: Joab. He was commander of the whole army, but he is not in the list of honor.

Jesus has His mighty men and women too. Their names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27). Most of them the world never heard of. But the King knows every one, and He will not forget what was done for Him.

Chapter 23 Summary

David's last words declare that the Spirit of the LORD spoke through him, and that the Rock of Israel told him that one who rules justly in the fear of God is like the morning sun on a cloudless day and like grass after rain. David rested on the everlasting covenant God had made with his house, ordered and secure, and said the worthless are like thorns that are handled with iron and burned. Then comes the list of David's mighty men. Josheb-basshebeth killed eight hundred at one time. Eleazar fought until his hand clung to his sword, and Shammah stood in a field of lentils and defended it, and each time the LORD worked a great deliverance. Three of the thirty broke through the Philistine camp to bring David water from the well of Bethlehem, but David would not drink what had cost their lives and poured it out to the LORD. Abishai killed three hundred and led the second three. Benaiah killed two champions of Moab, a lion in a pit on a snowy day and an Egyptian with his own spear, and David put him over his bodyguard. The chapter ends with the names of the thirty, beginning with Asahel and ending with Uriah the Hittite, thirty-seven in all.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. How does David describe himself in 23:1, and what does each description tell us?

2. What does David claim about his words in 23:2, and how does the New Testament agree? (Matthew 22:43; Acts 2:30)

3. What picture of a righteous ruler did God give David, and who fulfills it perfectly? (23:3-4; Jeremiah 23:5)

4. What did David rest his hope on in 23:5?

5. What did Eleazar and Shammah do, and who does the writer say worked the deliverance? (23:9-12)

6. Why did David pour out the water from Bethlehem instead of drinking it? (23:15-17)

7. Whose name comes last in the list of mighty men, and why is that significant? (23:39; 11:3, 17)

8. Shammah defended one small field. What small patch of ground has God given you to stand and defend?

9. David would not spend his men's sacrifice on himself. Is there something costly in your life that you should pour out to God? (Philippians 2:17)

10. Most of the mighty men are just names to us, but God remembered them. How does it encourage you that God sees faithful service no one else notices?

Chapter 24: David's Census and the Threshing Floor of Araunah

Scripture

24:1-14 And the anger of the LORD again burned against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying, "Go, count Israel and Judah." And the king said to Joab, the commander of the army who ***was*** with him, "Go about, please, in all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and enroll the people, that I may know the number of the people." And Joab said to the king, "And may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they ***are***, while the eyes of my lord the king are seeing ***it***. And my lord the king, why does he delight in this thing?" And the word of the king prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. And Joab and the commanders of the army went out from before the king to enroll the people, Israel. And they passed over the Jordan and encamped in Aroer, south of the city that ***is*** in the middle of the wadi of Gad, and toward Jazer. And they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon. And they came ***to*** the fortress of Tyre and all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites, and they went out to the Negeb of Judah, ***to*** Beersheba. And they went about in all the land, and they came ***to*** Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. And Joab gave the number of the muster of the people to the king. And Israel was eight hundred thousand men of strength who drew the sword, and the men of Judah ***were*** five hundred thousand men. And the heart of David struck him after he had counted the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned exceedingly in what I have done. And now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted exceedingly foolishly." And David arose in the morning, and the word of the LORD came to Gad the prophet, the seer of David, saying, "Go, and you shall speak to David, 'Thus says the LORD: Three ***things*** I am laying on you; choose for yourself one of them, and I will do ***it*** to you.'" And Gad came to David and told him and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or three months of your fleeing before your opponents while he pursues you? Or that there be three days of pestilence in your land? Now know and see what word I shall bring back to Him who sent me." And David said to Gad, "***There is*** distress to me exceedingly. Let us fall, please, into the hand of the LORD, for His compassions ***are*** many; and into the hand of man let me not fall."

24:15-25 And the LORD gave pestilence in Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And seventy thousand men of the people died, from Dan even to Beersheba. And the angel stretched out his hand ***toward*** Jerusalem to destroy it, and the LORD relented concerning the evil, and He said to the angel who was destroying among the people, "***It is*** enough! Now let your hand drop." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down among the people, and he said, "Look, I have sinned, and I have done wrong; and these, the sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand be, please, on me and on the house of my father." And Gad came to David on that day and said to him, "Go up, raise up an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." And David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. And Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants passing on toward him. And Araunah went out and bowed down to the king ***with*** his face to the ground. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the

king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be restrained from the people." And Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what ***is*** good in his eyes. See, the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the equipment of the oxen for the wood. The whole, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you." And the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy ***it*** from you for a price, and I will not offer up to the LORD my God burnt offerings without cost." And David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for silver, approximately 1.25 pounds (fifty shekels). And David built an altar to the LORD there and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the LORD was entreated for the land, and the plague was restrained from Israel.

Chapter 24 Preview

The book of 2 Samuel ends with one more failure and one more mercy. The anger of the LORD burns against Israel, and David is moved to count his fighting men. Joab warns him not to do it, but David insists. For nearly ten months the census takers travel the land, and they bring back a total of one million three hundred thousand men. Then David's conscience strikes him. He confesses that he has sinned greatly and acted foolishly. The prophet Gad brings him a choice of three judgments, and David chooses to fall into the hand of the LORD, "for His compassions are many." A plague sweeps through Israel, and seventy thousand die.

As the destroying angel stretches out his hand over Jerusalem, the LORD says, "It is enough!" The angel stands by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David begs God to strike him and his family instead of the people, "these, the sheep." Gad tells David to build an altar on that threshing floor. Araunah offers it as a gift, but David insists on paying, saying he will not offer to the LORD what costs him nothing. He builds the altar, offers sacrifices, and the plague stops. That threshing floor would become the place where Solomon built the temple, on Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1). The book that began with the death of a king ends at an altar, with God's anger turned away by sacrifice.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1 *And the anger of the LORD again burned against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying, "Go, count Israel and Judah."*

"And the anger of the LORD again burned against Israel." The word "again" points back to the famine of chapter 21, another time God's anger was against the land. We are not told what Israel had done. Perhaps it was the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, when the people turned against the king God had chosen. Scripture does not say, and we should not guess too far. But it is clear that the problem began with the nation's sin, not only David's.

"And He incited David against them, saying, Go, count Israel and Judah." This is a hard sentence. Did God make David sin? First Chronicles 21:1 tells the same event and says, "Satan stood up against Israel, and he incited David to count Israel." How do we put these together?

Both are true. Satan was the one who tempted David, wanting to harm Israel. But Satan can do nothing without God's permission, as the book of Job shows (Job 1:12). God allowed Satan to tempt David, and He used it to bring judgment on Israel's sin. God is not the author of sin. "God is unable to be tempted by evils, and He Himself tempts no one" (James 1:13). David chose what he did, and he owned it as his own sin (24:10). But God is sovereign even over temptation, and He can use even the devil's work to carry out His purposes. We saw the same truth with Joseph's brothers: "you planned evil against me; God planned it for good" (Genesis 50:20).

24:2-4 *And the king said to Joab, the commander of the army who **was** with him, "Go about, please, in all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and enroll the people, that I may know the number of the people." And Joab said to the king, "And may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they **are**, while the eyes of my lord the king are seeing **it**. And my lord the king, why does he delight in this thing?" And the word of the king prevailed against Joab and against the commanders of the army. And Joab and the commanders of the army went out from before the king to enroll the people, Israel.*

David told Joab, "Go about, please, in all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and enroll the people, that I may know the number of the people."

Why was it wrong to count? Moses had counted Israel at God's command (Numbers 1 and 26). The census itself was not the sin. The sin was in the heart behind it. "That I may know the number" suggests pride, trust in the size of his army, wanting to measure his own strength. For years David had trusted the LORD, not numbers. He once wrote, "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7). Now he wanted to count his swords. The Law also said that whenever Israel was counted, each man was to pay a ransom "and there shall not be a plague among them when enrolling them" (Exodus 30:12). We are not told whether that was done.

Even Joab saw the danger. "May the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are, while the eyes of my lord the king are seeing it. And my lord the king, why does he delight in this thing?" Joab was a hard man with blood on his hands, but on this he had better sense than the king. "And the word of the king prevailed against Joab." When even your Joab is telling you not to do something, stop and listen.

24:5-8 *And they passed over the Jordan and encamped in Aroer, south of the city that **is** in the middle of the wadi of Gad, and toward Jazer. And they came to Gilead and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi, and they came to Dan Jaan and around to Sidon. And they came **to** the fortress of Tyre and all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites, and they went out to the Negeb of Judah, **to** Beersheba. And they went about in all the land, and they came **to** Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.*

The census route is traced in detail. The officers crossed the Jordan and started in the southeast at Aroer, then went north through Gad and Gilead, up to Dan in the far north, "and around to Sidon," then to "the fortress of Tyre and all the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites," and finally south "to the Negeb of Judah, to Beersheba." It was a great circle around the whole land.

"They came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days." Almost ten months of work. All that time David had to reconsider, and he did not.

24:9 *And Joab gave the number of the muster of the people to the king. And Israel was eight hundred thousand men of strength who drew the sword, and the men of Judah **were** five hundred thousand men.*

"And Joab gave the number of the muster of the people to the king. And Israel was eight hundred thousand men of strength who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men."

First Chronicles 21:5 gives different totals: a million one hundred thousand for Israel and four hundred seventy thousand for Judah. Chronicles also says that Joab did not count Levi and Benjamin because the king's word was abhorrent to him (1 Chronicles 21:6). The numbers may have been counted in different ways, such as including or leaving out standing troops, or some numbers may have been miscopied over the centuries. Some scholars also read the Hebrew word for thousand as a military unit or clan. I take the numbers as written, while being honest that the two books report them differently.

24:10 *And the heart of David struck him after he had counted the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned exceedingly in what I have done. And now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted exceedingly foolishly."*

"And the heart of David struck him after he had counted the people." His conscience hit him hard, as it did when he cut the edge of Saul's robe (1 Samuel 24:5). He did not wait for a prophet this time. "And David said to the LORD, I have sinned exceedingly in what I have done. And now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted exceedingly foolishly."

This is the David we have seen before. When he sins, he comes back. He does not blame Joab, or Satan, or the pressures of the job. "I have sinned." This is why David was a man after God's heart. Not that he never sinned, but that he confessed it when he did. Can you say those words to God as quickly and plainly?

24:11-14 *And David arose in the morning, and the word of the LORD came to Gad the prophet, the seer of David, saying, "Go, and you shall speak to David, 'Thus says the LORD: Three **things** I am laying on you; choose for yourself one of them, and I will do **it** to you.'" And Gad came to David and told him and said to him, "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or three months of your fleeing before your opponents while he pursues you? Or that there be three days of pestilence in your land? Now know and see what word I shall bring back to Him who sent me." And David said to Gad, "**There is** distress to me exceedingly. Let us fall, please, into the hand of the LORD, for His compassions **are** many; and into the hand of man let me not fall."*

"The word of the LORD came to Gad the prophet, the seer of David." Gad had been with David since his days as an outlaw (1 Samuel 22:5). God sent him with a choice of three judgments. "Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or three months of your fleeing before your opponents while he pursues you? Or that there be three days of pestilence in your land?"

First Chronicles 21:12 says "three years" of famine instead of seven, which fits the three-three-three pattern. The difference is most likely a copying error in one of the texts. Some suggest the seven years counts the three-year famine of chapter 21 plus the year of the census and three more.

"Now know and see what word I shall bring back to Him who sent me." David answered, "There is distress to me exceedingly. Let us fall, please, into the hand of the LORD, for His compassions are many; and into the hand of man let me not fall."

David chose wisely. He would rather be in God's hands, even in judgment, than at the mercy of men. He knew God's heart. Men can be cruel without limit. God, even when He disciplines, is full of compassion. "The steadfast loves of the LORD, for we are not finished, for His compassions do not come to an end" (Lamentations 3:22).

24:15 *And the LORD gave pestilence in Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And seventy thousand men of the people died, from Dan even to Beersheba.*

"And the LORD gave pestilence in Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And seventy thousand men of the people died, from Dan even to Beersheba."

This is a terrible verse, and we should not rush past it. Seventy thousand men died. David wanted to know how many men he had. Now he knew how many he had lost. The very strength he had counted was cut down.

Why did the people suffer for David's sin? Remember 24:1. God's anger was already against Israel. The people were not innocent bystanders. The plague was God's judgment on the nation as well as on the king. And a king's sins always fall on his people. That is a sober warning to anyone who leads. Scripture does not tell us all of God's reasons here, and I will not pretend to know more than it says. But it does show us that sin is deadly serious, and that God's judgment is real.

24:16-17 *And the angel stretched out his hand **toward** Jerusalem to destroy it, and the LORD relented concerning the evil, and He said to the angel who was destroying among the people, "**It is** enough! Now let your hand drop." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. And David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking down among the people, and he said, "Look, I have sinned, and I have done wrong; and these, the sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand be, please, on me and on the house of my father."*

"And the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, and the LORD relented concerning the evil." The plague came to the gates of the capital, and then God stopped it. "It is enough! Now let your hand drop." God had said three days, but He cut it short. He relented, meaning He turned from the judgment in compassion. David had trusted that God's "compassions are many," and they were.

"And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." A threshing floor was a flat area of hard ground or rock, usually on a high place where the wind blew, where grain was beaten out and the chaff blown away. Araunah was a Jebusite, one of the old people of Jerusalem before David took it (5:6-9).

David saw the angel. Chronicles says he stood "between the earth and the heavens," with "his sword drawn in his hand, stretched out over Jerusalem" (1 Chronicles 21:16). And David cried out, "Look, I have sinned, and I have done wrong; and these, the sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand be, please, on me and on the house of my father."

Here David is a true shepherd again. He calls his people "the sheep," and he offers himself in their place. He wanted the judgment to fall on him. David could not take the people's punishment, because he was a sinner himself, and he had his own sin to answer for. But his cry points us to the Good Shepherd who could. "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus, the Son of David, had no sin of His own. He let the hand of judgment fall on Himself so that the sheep would go free. "All of us like the sheep have gone astray; each to his own way we have turned; and the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us" (Isaiah 53:6).

24:18-21 *And Gad came to David on that day and said to him, "Go up, raise up an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." And David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded. And Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants passing on toward him. And Araunah went out and bowed down to the king* ***with*** *his face to the ground. And Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" And David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be restrained from the people."*

"And Gad came to David on that day and said to him, Go up, raise up an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." The place where the judgment stopped would be the place of sacrifice. "And David went up according to the word of Gad, just as the LORD had commanded."

Araunah saw the king and his servants coming up the hill toward him. He "went out and bowed down to the king with his face to the ground." He asked, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David said, "To buy the threshing floor from you, to build an altar to the LORD, that the plague may be restrained from the people."

24:22-23 *And Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take and offer up what* ***is*** *good in his eyes. See, the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the equipment of the oxen for the wood. The whole, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And Araunah said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you."*

Araunah offered everything as a gift. "Let my lord the king take and offer up what is good in his eyes. See, the oxen for the burnt offering, and the threshing sledges and the equipment of the oxen for the wood." A burnt offering was a sacrifice wholly burned on the altar, given completely to God, a picture of full surrender and of atonement for sin. Araunah would give the oxen for the sacrifice, and their wooden yokes and his threshing sledges for the fire. "The whole, O king, Araunah gives to the king." And he added a blessing: "May the LORD your God accept you." It was a generous offer.

24:24-25 *And the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy **it** from you for a price, and I will not offer up to the LORD my God burnt offerings without cost." And David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for silver, approximately 1.25 pounds (fifty shekels). And David built an altar to the LORD there and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the LORD was entreated for the land, and the plague was restrained from Israel.*

But David said, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price, and I will not offer up to the LORD my God burnt offerings without cost."

That sentence is one of the best-known in the book, and it should shape our worship. Worship that costs us nothing is worth little. David would not give God someone else's sacrifice. It had to be his own. This does not mean we can buy God's favor. We cannot. But real love gives, and gives what costs. Jesus praised the poor widow who gave two small coins, because "she out of her poverty cast in all that she had" (Mark 12:44). Paul calls us to present our bodies "as a living, holy sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). What does your worship cost you?

"And David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for silver," fifty shekels, about a pound and a quarter. First Chronicles 21:25 says he paid six hundred shekels of gold, about fifteen pounds, "for the place." Most teachers understand that the fifty shekels of silver bought the threshing floor and the oxen, while the six hundred shekels of gold bought the whole site around it, the hilltop where the temple would later stand.

"And David built an altar to the LORD there and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings." A peace offering was a sacrifice shared in a meal, a sign of fellowship restored with God. Chronicles adds that God answered David "with fire from the heavens on the altar" (1 Chronicles 21:26). "And the LORD was entreated for the land, and the plague was restrained from Israel."

That threshing floor became holy ground. Second Chronicles 3:1 says that Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, "where He had appeared to David his father," on "the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." Ornan is another form of the name Araunah. And Mount Moriah is where, a thousand years before, Abraham had gone to offer Isaac, and God provided a ram in his place (Genesis 22:2, 14). On that same ridge the temple would stand, and its altar would burn for centuries.

And just outside the walls of that same city, about a thousand years after David, God provided the final sacrifice. Jesus "suffered outside the gate" so that He might make His people holy "through His own blood" (Hebrews 13:12). David's altar stopped one plague for a time. The cross of Christ took away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The book of 2 Samuel ends with God's anger turned away by a sacrifice on a hill in Jerusalem. The whole Bible points to the same place.

Chapter 24 Summary

The anger of the LORD burned against Israel again, and He incited David to count Israel and Judah; 1 Chronicles 21:1 says Satan incited him. Joab objected, but the king's word prevailed, and after nine months and twenty days around the whole land, Joab reported eight hundred thousand swordsmen in Israel and five hundred thousand in Judah. David's heart struck him, and he

confessed that he had sinned greatly and acted very foolishly. The LORD sent Gad the seer to offer him seven years of famine, three months of fleeing from his enemies, or three days of pestilence. David chose to fall into the hand of the LORD, whose compassions are many, and seventy thousand men died from Dan to Beersheba. When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented and said, "It is enough," and the angel was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David asked that the hand fall on him and his father's house and not on the sheep. Gad told him to build an altar on that threshing floor. Araunah offered the floor, oxen and wood as a gift, but David insisted on paying, refusing to offer the LORD burnt offerings that cost him nothing. He bought it for fifty shekels of silver, built an altar, offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and the LORD answered prayer for the land, and the plague was stopped.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. What does 24:1 say moved David to count the people, and how does 1 Chronicles 21:1 add to it? (James 1:13)

2. Why was David's census a sin, and what did Joab say about it? (24:2-3; Psalm 20:7)

3. What did David do when his heart struck him? (24:10)

4. What three choices did Gad give David, and why did David choose as he did? (24:12-14)

5. How did God show mercy in the middle of the judgment? (24:16)

6. What did David ask of God when he saw the angel, and how does that point to Jesus? (24:17; John 10:11)

7. Why did David refuse Araunah's gift? (24:24)

8. What later happened on Araunah's threshing floor, and what earlier event happened on the same mountain? (2 Chronicles 3:1; Genesis 22:2)

9. David counted his strength instead of trusting God. Where are you tempted to measure your security by what you have?

10. David would not give God what cost him nothing. What would it look like for your worship this week to cost you something real? (Romans 12:1)

Conclusion

Second Samuel begins with David weeping over a fallen king, and it ends with David on his knees at an altar on a threshing floor in Jerusalem. In between, we watched God keep His word. He made the shepherd from Bethlehem king over Judah and then over all Israel. He gave him Jerusalem, brought the ark into the city, and gave him rest from his enemies. And He made him a promise that still stands: "And your house and your kingdom will be established forever before you; your throne will be established forever" (7:16).

We also watched the man after God's own heart fall. One evening on a palace roof led to adultery, deceit and murder, and the second half of the book showed the sword that would not depart from David's house: Tamar wronged, Amnon killed, Absalom's rebellion and death, the revolts and the quarrels, the famine and the plague. Second Samuel does not hide any of it. But it also shows us what David did when he was confronted with his sin. He did not make excuses. He said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (12:13), and God forgave him. Grace and discipline both run through this book, and we need both.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, 2 Samuel is not only the story of a great king with deep flaws. It is the story of a promise. David knew he was not the king God's people finally needed. In his last words he rested his hope on God's covenant: "For He has made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged in everything and preserved" (23:5). The righteous King who rules in the fear of God, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, is David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He crossed the Kidron and climbed the Mount of Olives on the night He was betrayed, as David did. He laid down His life for the sheep, as David only wished he could. He rose again, and one day He will return to that same Mount of Olives and sit on the throne of David His father, and "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and give you confidence that the God who kept His promise to David will keep every promise He has made to you. Whatever you have done, the God who forgave David will forgive you when you come to Him honestly. And whatever you have suffered at the hands of others, the God who saw Tamar and Rizpah sees you. The book ends at an altar where God's anger was turned away by a sacrifice. The Bible ends at the cross and the empty tomb, where Jesus took away our sin once for all. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show

others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and follow Jesus, the Son of David, as your King (Luke 1:32-33).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.