

The History, Book 5

II Samuel

The Book of II Samuel records the 40-year period of David's life as King, from his crowning at age 30 until the end of his life at age 70. During this period he established Israel as a unified kingdom, fully conquered all its enemies, conquered the Jebusite fortress at Jerusalem, and established Jerusalem as Israel's permanent capital, both political and spiritual. He established a special Tabernacle on Mt. Zion, and brought there the Ark of the Covenant, from the house of Obed-edom.

The Tabernacle's History

The history of the original Tabernacle, built by Moses, is clear until the time of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines, and the death of Eli; from this point on, its history becomes a bit murky and something of a mystery. And yet, it is important that we have, insofar as it is possible, a summary of what is known of its history, because it remained, until the building of the First Temple, the focal point of sacrificial worship of the LORD, in spite of the ongoing apostasy of the Israelite people. (Actually, after David moved the Ark of the Covenant into the tabernacle that he had built for it on Mount Zion, there would be two focal points of worship: the Ark on Mount Zion, and the Tabernacle with the altar of burnt offering at Gibeon. But we will get to that.)

Upon Eli's death, and prior to the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines, Samuel probably escaped with the Tabernacle (less the Ark of the Covenant)¹. The Tabernacle was never returned to Shiloh; and Shiloh, destroyed by the Philistines, and without the Ark, was never again a place of importance.

During the administration of Samuel, after the destruction of Shiloh, the Tabernacle, with at least some of its original furnishings, appears to have been moved to various places of centralized worship. When David fled from Saul, the Tabernacle was at Nob.

After the senseless destruction of Nob and the slaughter of its innocent inhabitants and priests, the Tabernacle was moved². Its next, and final, destination seems to have been Gibeon, a Levitical city 8 miles northwest of Jerusalem. The Tabernacle was established on the high place at Gibeon, with the altar of burnt offering, where it remained until the time of Solomon and the building of the First Temple. It lacked the Ark of the Covenant, which was in the

¹ If Samuel, as Eli's successor, didn't rescue and remove the Tabernacle, it is difficult to imagine who else would have done it.

² I Samuel 22:9-23.

new tabernacle (tent), built just for the Ark on Mount Zion, with selected priests and Levites to serve it.

When Solomon built the first Temple, the Tabernacle was disassembled and its furnishings were placed in the Temple, with the Ark of the Covenant. The remains of the Tabernacle itself, and of David's special tabernacle, built for the Ark on Mount Zion, may have been stored in a tunnel under the Temple; but, if they were, they have never been found.

***NOTE:** Nob was a Levitical city in Benjamin, situated on high ground near Jerusalem. It is mentioned only seven times in the Bible: five times in I Samuel 21 and 22, all having to do with the insane slaughter of the innocent priests and the innocent people of the city; once in Nehemiah 11:32, stating that, in the return to the Promised Land a group of Benjamites settled there; and in Isaiah 10:32, a prophecy about a holy remnant in an apostate nation. In ancient times Nob simply disappeared without a trace. Jerome (340-420 AD) wrote that in his time there was nothing of its remains to indicate where it had been.*

A. Author. Like I Samuel, the human author is unknown; but, like I Samuel, II Samuel was probably compiled from the writings of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, and put into its finished form by Isaiah. Some of the content may have been taken from the Book of Jasher. Concerning this latter source, see “**Author**” at the beginning of the study guide to I Samuel.

B. Place and Date. Like I Samuel, this book was probably compiled in Jerusalem about 700 BC.

C. Occasion. As with I Samuel, the occasion was to compile the history of the period (remember that I and II Samuel were originally a single book, not separated until about 300 BC).

D. Theme. The theme of II Samuel is the bringing together of all of Israel in political and spiritual unity, under the wise and godly King David. In spite of his one notorious failure concerning Bathsheba and, much later, his unauthorized, incomplete census of Israel, David continued to be God's special leader--the “man after God's own heart.”

E. Highlights. The highlights of II Samuel include the following:

1. David Grieves for Saul and Jonathan. (Chapter 1)

The 3rd day after David's victory over the Amalekites, word reaches David at Ziklag of the death of Saul and Jonathan. The messenger lies, claiming to have killed Saul himself, thinking that he would be rewarded by David; but the man had made a fatal mistake, for he didn't know David's heart. David, wild with grief, has

the man killed on the spot. The rest of Chapter 1 is a song of lamentation over the death of Saul and Jonathan³.

2. David Is Crowned King of Judah. (2:1-7)

Led by the Lord, David and his people leave Ziklag and go to Hebron, which has apparently been abandoned by its citizens for fear of the Philistines, occupied by the conquering Philistines, whose survivors of David's victory then fled in defeat, back to Philistia⁴. There, David is crowned king by the tribe of Judah, and sends word of his gratitude to the men of Jabesh-giliad for recovering the bodies of Saul and his sons. David never forgot those who helped him, or showed kindness to those he loved; it was one of his finest virtues. In Hebron, David will reign over Judah for 7 1/2 years; but his unwanted conflict with Saul's followers is far from over.

3. The Kingdom is Divided and David Loses a General. (2:8-32)

Saul has one surviving son, Ishbosheth; and Abner, Saul's uncle and "captain of the host" (Saul's commanding general), and still loyal to Saul, cannot bring himself to accept David as king⁵. He declares Ishbosheth to be king and the kingdom is thus divided: David is King of Judah only, with his capital at Hebron for seven years and six months; and Ishbosheth is King of Israel (all the rest) with his capitol at Mahanaim, east of the Jordan⁶. Although it is not made clear, it seems that Ishbosheth was the nominal king, yet Abner was the de facto king, in control until his death, and that Ishbosheth was truly king for only the last two years of his life. Abner was a man of great physical strength and strength of will, and Ishbosheth feared him.

Eventually Abner decides to make war on David, and the two armies meet at the pool of Gibeon. Abner proposes a contest in which 12 soldiers of each army meet in a fight (the purpose of which is not made clear) and they kill each other, following which a general battle occurs with David's forces victorious. Abner and his survivors flee; but Asahel, Joab's brother and an extremely swift runner, pursues and overtakes Abner. Abner, reluctant to kill Asahel, asks him to turn back; but Asahel persists and overtakes Abner. Still running, Abner makes a backward thrust with his spear shaft and drives it through Asahel's body "under the

³ The lamentation over the death of Saul and Jonathan references "the book of Jasher" (1:18). The only other reference to this book is in Joshua 10:13, concerning the day when the Sun stood still so Joshua's victory could be finished. In this regard, see **NOTE b.** in the study guide to Joshua 10:1-30.

⁴ I Samuel 31:7.

⁵ It was Abner who conducted young David into the presence of King Saul after David's stunning victory over Goliath.

⁶ The exact location of Mahanaim is unknown, but it was a Levitical city east of the Jordan and north of the Brook Jabbok, in the border area between Gad and Manasseh. The name means "double camp" or "double host," so named by Jacob because it was here that the host of angels joined him as he prepared to meet Esau's wrath (Gen 32:1,2).

fifth rib," killing him. This is an amazing feat of strength, especially for a man who has been fighting all day and has run a great distance. Asahel's death stops the pursuit of Abner's defeated army; but this conflict is not yet finished.

Abner's army has suffered a staggering defeat; David's losses were 19 dead, plus Asahel, and Abner's losses were 360 men dead. David and his men take Asahel's body to Jerusalem and bury him in the tomb of his father. They then return to Hebron, arriving at daybreak.

4. David Gets His Wife Back. (3:6-16)

Ishbosheth, Saul's son, rebukes Abner for lying with Rizpah, the dead Saul's concubine; and Abner, stung by the rebuke, offers to make peace with David. He offers to deliver up the rest of the tribes to David and make him king of all Israel; but David requires one condition: he wants Michal, his first wife whom Saul had given to another man, returned to him. Abner agrees, and forces her husband Phaltiel, the one to whom Saul had given her, to give her up. The poor guy agrees, because he fears Abner; but he grieves at his loss, and is further bullied and humiliated by Abner. So, Michal is back with David, and the taking away of her by Saul, in order to spite David, is now undone⁷.

5. Asahel Is Avenged: The Death of Abner. (3:17-39)

Abner seems to realize that David is God's choice and that it is futile to oppose him (and perhaps his anger at Ishbosheth for rebuking him over his sexual activity with the late Saul's concubine is a factor in his decision). He so declares to the elders of Israel, and goes to see David at Hebron; he is received graciously, and a feast is held in his honor. It is agreed that David will reign over all of Israel, and Abner departs to make it happen.

Joab, David's "captain of the host" (commanding general of David's army), is away and unaware of all this; when he returns he is angry that David had treated an enemy as a friend, and insists that Abner was there only to spy. Without David's knowledge, Joab deceives Abner into returning, pretends to be friendly, and kills him to avenge Abner's killing of his brother, Asahel. Joab is assisted by his brother, Abishai, in some way not explained, in the killing of Abner (verses 29-30).

David is horrified at what Joab has done, declares his own innocence, and seems to pronounce a terrible curse on Joab, his brother, Abishai, and of his family. He commands a time of grieving by all the people, and buries Abner there in Hebron with regal honors. David is a mighty warrior himself, who will kill so many in battle that God will not allow him to build the Temple; yet he is horrified at the capacity for violence of his nephews, Joab, Abishai and the late Asahel.

⁷ We must wonder how, in all this, Michal felt, being moved back and forth between husbands without so much as a by-your-leave; but, in those days, it seems that women didn't have much to say about such matters, and that she accepted it. Maybe she liked the idea of becoming the Queen of all Israel by marrying David.

NOTES:

a. Joab's favorite killing blow, and his solution for most socio-political problems, was a sudden thrust of a short sword (or large knife) "under the 5th rib." Such a strike, for a right-handed assailant, would likely not be deflected by bone, and would hit the heart and/or the great blood vessels along the spine. The victim would be unconscious in less than a minute, and dead shortly thereafter. We shall see more of this.

*b. Here, I believe, is a **miracle**, and one that has gone unnoticed by all the commentators: in the 8th Century BC, when this book was written, such a reference to scientific, descriptive human anatomy would have been impossible without a miracle. Why? Because the science of descriptive human anatomy was not developed until late medieval/early modern time, and was not finalized as it is known today until the 19th Century publication of the classic anatomy text, "Gray's Anatomy." In the 8th Century BC, man did not know, in terms of designation, the 5th rib from the 7th cervical vertebra; but God, of course, did.*

6. David buries Abner with Honors and Grieves. (3:31-39)

David grieves over Abner's death. He commands a time of grieving by all the people, and buries Abner in there Hebron with regal honors, calling Abner "a prince and a great man." David is offered food but refuses to eat until sundown (the end of the Jewish day). David is a mighty warrior himself, who will kill so many in battle that God will not allow him to build the Temple; yet he is horrified at the capacity for violence of his nephews, Joab, Abishai and the late Asahel.

7. The Murder of Ishbosheth. (Chapter 4)

When word of Abner's death reaches Ishbosheth, Saul's son, he and all his people are fearful as to what will happen to them now. Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, lives in the house of Ishbosheth, his uncle. When Saul and his sons had been killed, his nurse had taken him up to flee their supposed danger; and, in the haste of fleeing, Mephibosheth had been dropped and permanently crippled. Mephibosheth is now 12 or 13 years old; we shall see more about him, and his gracious treatment by David, in Chapter 9 and the chapters following.

Meanwhile, realizing that they are on the losing side, two of Ishbosheth's men, Baanah and Rechab, who are brothers and leaders in his army, see an opportunity to turn a bad situation into an opportunity for gain. Thinking that they will gain great favor with David, they murder Ishbosheth and carry his head to David. Like the earlier man who had told David that he had killed King Saul, Ishbosheth's father, these men don't know David at all. He lectures them briefly on the wrongness of their deed, has them killed, and their hands and feet cut off. As a lesson to others who may be thinking of doing something similar, he has the

offending body parts put on public display in Hebron, and he buries the head of Ishbosheth with honors in the tomb of Abner⁸.

8. David Becomes King of All Israel, and Conquers Jerusalem. (5:1-16)

The tribes that had followed Abner and Ishbosheth send representatives to David asking him to be their king. David is crowned king of all Israel in Hebron, where he has been King of Judah for 7 1/2 years. He then conquers the Jebusite fortress at Jerusalem and moves his headquarters there, where he will reign for the next 33 years⁹. David will establish his headquarters in the old Jebusite fortress which will come to be called "the city of David."

NOTES:

a. The wording of v6 is difficult, but probably means something like "Our fortress is so strong that you couldn't take it, even if manned only by blind men and cripples."

b. Verses 14-16 of Chapt 5 represent a problem passage; it names the sons of David born in Jerusalem, and there are 11 of them listed here. However, similar listings in I Chron 3:5-8 and 14:4-7 name a total of 13. Of the apparently extra two in I Chron 3:5-8, Elishama is listed twice; the first listing of this name should probably be instead "Elishua," but the number of sons remains the same¹⁰. The other "extra" son in I Chron 3:5-8 is Nogah (v 7) and, additionally, he is listed in 14:6 (but not here in II Sam 5:14-16).

I cannot explain this apparent discrepancy except to remember that the books of I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, and I and II Chronicles, are a compilation of many records, written by different men, and that many of the men in the OT are referred to by more than one name. Some may have died very young and not been named by all of the chroniclers. Trying to make clear, absolute listings and summaries of such things can be somewhere between difficult and maddening (if not, at times, impossible). The great 17th Century commentator, Matthew Henry, ignores it as if it doesn't exist.

For one attempt to reconcile all of this, I refer the reader to the Dake Annotated Reference Bible, p 713, note i, "5 Lists of the Sons of David." He doesn't explain the discrepancy, but at least he summarizes the facts.

9. A New Leader for Israel and the Philistines Don't Have a Chance. (5:17-25)

⁸ We are not told what was done with the Ishbosheth's headless body. Perhaps his killers had already disposed of it in some irretrievable way. We are also not told whether the bodies and hands and feet of the murderers were hung up as a lesson to onlookers, or just the hands and feet; and the wording of v 12 does not make this clear.

⁹ In the possessing of the Promised Land under Joshua, parts of Jerusalem had been taken, first by Judah and later by Benjamin (Judges 1:8,21); but the fortress part of the city had never before been taken and continued to be possessed by the Jebusites until conquered by David.

¹⁰ See I Chron 14:5.

When news reaches the Philistines that David has been anointed King over all of Israel they mobilize and move against Israel. Hearing of this, David moves to "the hold" (a stronghold--a place not easily attacked, and apparently a favorite of his), and the Philistines set themselves in battle formation in Rephaim. David does the wise thing: he asks the LORD for guidance. The LORD tells him to attack, for He will give David the victory. David advances toward the Philistines, attacks them, kills many and they flee in panic before him; and David gives the LORD the glory¹¹. The Philistines flee so quickly and completely that they leave the images of their pagan gods behind. Again doing the right thing, David has them collected and burned.

The Philistines, apparently slow learners, invade Israel again, and set themselves in battle array in the same place as before, in the valley of Rephaim. Again, doing the wise thing, David asks the Lord for guidance. Again the Lord tells David to attack; but his time it is to be different. David is to move around to a position behind the Philistines, and, when behind them, attack them from the rear. Once in position behind the Philistines, David is to wait until he hears "the sound of a going" in the tops of the mulberry trees¹². David obeys and smites the Philistines, from Geba, north of Jerusalem, westward all the way to Gezer, on the border of Philistia.

***NOTE:** The Hebrew word rendered "burned" in v 21 is "nakah." Its basic meaning is "to lift," but it has more than 40 possible meanings, one of which is "to burn." The modern versions almost without exception render this word "confiscated" or "carried them away." To burn them, however, as David surely did, would be exactly the right thing to do. To confiscate them and carry them away would be exactly the wrong thing to do, and it would be greatly offensive to the LORD. The context, it seems to me, demands the rendering "burned," as the AV (KJV) has it, and as we have it here.*

10. The Breach (Death) of Uzzah. (6:1-11)

David decides to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, where it belongs, and he establishes a tabernacle on Mt. Zion to house the Ark¹³. The Ark has been in the house of Abinadab, at Baale of Judah (also called Kiriath-jearim), all through the 40-year reign of King Saul, and the 7 1/2 years of David's reign in

¹¹ We are not told what the LORD did to make the Philistines break and flee in panic; He only told David that He would deliver them into his hand, and He did.

¹² The Hebrew word rendered "going" here is *taadah*, meaning "a march"; thus, David is to attack when he hears the sound of marching feet in the tops of the mulberry trees.

¹³ David had built a new tent at Jerusalem to house the Ark temporarily, until the Temple was built (I Chron 15:1); presumably, the original Tabernacle, with the furnishings of Moses (less the Ark), had been moved from Nob to Shiloh. Both of these cities had been destroyed, and the wilderness Tabernacle, at this time, had been moved to Gibeon, where it would remain until the Temple was built by Solomon.

Hebron. Now, under King David, Jerusalem will finally become both the spiritual, and the political, capital of Israel.

David has a new ox cart made to carry the Ark to Jerusalem, and gathers 30,000 priests, Levites and other leaders to accompany it¹⁴. Two men, Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinidab, are assigned to drive the oxen. They get part of the way when the oxen stumble, the cart is jolted, and Uzzah puts his hand on the Ark to steady it. Uzzah is struck dead on the spot, and everyone stops. In a rare breach of David's excellent relationship with God, he fails to understand this, is angry with God over Uzzah's death, and names the place "Perez-uzzah (the breach, or destruction, of Uzzah)."

It seems amazing that David, plus all those priests and Levites, didn't understand that they were violating the law in the first place by moving the Ark on a cart. It was only to be moved by 4 selected Levites, carrying the sacred, gold-covered poles on their shoulders. Perhaps they were remembering that the Philistines, when returning the Ark, had returned it on a new cart, for it had not been moved since. At any rate, they halted there and left the Ark in the house of Obed-edom, a Levite, where it will stay for three months. During this time, Obed-edom will greatly prosper, and David will figure out what went wrong¹⁵.

11. The Ark Is Finally Back Where It Belongs. (6:12-23)

On the second try David gets it right. With Levites carrying the ark correctly, with the golden poles on their shoulders, the procession moves toward Jerusalem with trumpets blowing; David, having removed his regal robes and put on a priest's ephod, leads the way, dancing "with all his might¹⁶." The procession stops about every 15 feet to offer sacrifices, and in this way proceeds with great joy to Jerusalem¹⁷. There the Ark is placed in a special tabernacle that David has erected for it¹⁸. At Jerusalem David, acting as a priest in his ephod, offers sacrifices to the Lord, blesses all the people and sends gifts of food and wine to everyone in the kingdom¹⁹. It is a glorious, happy day for all of Israel except for Michal, David's

¹⁴ Here, they are simply called "chosen men"; but in the parallel passage, I Chron 13:1-3, it is made clear that the "chosen men" included all the priests and Levites in the kingdom, plus other leaders.

¹⁵ It seems strange that, among 30,000 priests and Levites, not one of them knew the scriptural directions for moving the Ark. Perhaps, in light of David's obvious joy in recovering the Ark, they were reluctant to correct him.

¹⁶ Here again, wearing the ephod, David is acting as both priest and king, symbolic of the coming Christ.

¹⁷ From Beth-shemesh, where the Ark had remained after being returned by the Philistines, to Jerusalem, is about 15 miles. It is not known how far they traveled in the first attempt to move it to Jerusalem, but it was probably not very far, for they were offending God at every step. At any rate, on the second and successful move, that was a lot of dancing and sacrificing.

¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Tabernacle of Moses, after the massacre of the priests and people at Nob, has been moved to Shiloh, and then to Gibeon. Even though the Ark is now in Jerusalem, the Tabernacle of Moses, less the Ark, will remain at Gibeon until the building of the Temple by Solomon (II Chronicles 1:3).

¹⁹ Although David, as a type of Christ (as both priest and king), wore the ephod on other occasions, this is the only recorded occasion in which he actually offered sacrifices and blessed the people as a priest.



And David danced before the LORD with all his might...

II Sam 6:14

restored wife. She is offended because David had taken off his kingly robes and danced before the public in the ephod of a priest, and rebukes him for it. He replies that he wasn't dancing before the people, but was dancing "before the LORD"; as a result of her attitude, she will die childless.

NOTE: Some believe that Michal was offended because David, in his dancing, had indecently exposed himself; but it is much more likely that it was because he had appeared in public without his kingly robes and she considered this, and his dancing, too undignified. It is not known whether Michal's never having children was because she was punished in this way by God, or whether it was simply the result of a permanent breach in her relationship with David; the text does not explain her future barrenness.

12. David Is Promised an Eternal Throne. (7:1-17)

Established as King of all Israel and, for the moment, living in peace, David begins to have thoughts of building a fine Temple to replace the Tabernacle(s). Through Nathan the prophet, the Lord tells David that He doesn't need David's help; rather, says the Lord, He will make a house for David, and establish his throne forever, continuing after David's death through his descendants.

Rather obliquely, the Lord then speaks of Solomon, David's son and successor, who is yet unborn, and says that if he commits iniquity, he will be chastened, but promises that He will not abandon Solomon as He had abandoned Saul. Here, in v 14, the Lord makes it clear that He uses the human, pagan, enemies of His children ("the rod of men, and...the stripes of the children of men") to chasten and correct them.

13. David at His Humble Best. (7:18-29)

In the last 12 verses of Chapter 7 David enters the Jerusalem Tabernacle and, before the Ark of the Covenant, he "sat before the Lord"; and, in a rare combination of utter humility and unique familiarity, he speaks with the LORD. I know of no other example of this revealing picture of David, nor of anyone else in the Bible, enjoying this close and comfortable--even familiar--relationship with the LORD God, the YAHWEH Elohim of the Universe. We are not told that David was wearing an ephod, but surely he was.

I would not presume to explain this amazing scene, but in my limited understanding the key to this exchange between the Holy LORD of the Universe and his beloved servant David, sitting before the Ark of the Covenant (which, on its face, would be fatal blasphemy under ordinary circumstances), seems to be a combination of the LORD's great love for David, the fact that He looks not upon the outward appearance, but looks upon the heart, and David's pure, utter, almost child-like, humility before Him. It is, I believe, a unique moment, and a picture of David, the man after God's own heart, at his humble and devoted best.

14. David Conquers All of the Promised Land. Chapter 8)

The 18 verses of Chapter 8 sum up the record of David's total conquest of the Promised Land, from the border with Egypt to the Euphrates River. This has never been done before. Under Joshua the majority of the land of promise was conquered and occupied; but much of it in the border areas remained in pagan hands; and much of the time these areas (and some inland areas) were occupied by enemy nations such as the Philistines, who forced the Israelites to pay tribute and robbed them of their harvested crops.

Now the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, Amalekites, and all of the enemies of the people of God, even the Syrians, are conquered and subjugated by David's armies. Although later Israelite leaders will be conquered, or compromised by the pagans around them, throughout the life of David and his imperfect son, Solomon, Israel will reign and there will be peace in the Promised Land.

The promise of God, and the dream of Moses, is at last fulfilled.

NOTE: In the last verse (v 18), "Cherethites and Pelethites" are not members of two tribes. In Hebrew the words are actually adjectives, but with substantive meaning, that is, they were used as nouns. They were the king's bodyguards, comparable to the praetorian guards in Imperial Rome who were responsible for the protection of the emperor, and were comparable to the Secret Service today which guards the White House and protects the president, vice president and their families.

"Chief rulers," as used to describe David's sons in v 18, simply means that they were the chief advisors to the king.

15. David Keeps His Promise to Jonathan. (Chapter 9)

With all of the Promised Land finally conquered and conflicts settled, David's thoughts return to his promise to Jonathan. He enquires and finds that Jonathan has one surviving son, Mephibosheth, who had been dropped as a small child and was crippled. David summons him, and Mephibosheth expects to be murdered²⁰. Instead, David gives him all the land that had been King Saul's personal property, gives him a large and prosperous family to till the land for him, and orders that Mephibosheth will eat at the king's table for the rest of his life. Thus David keeps his promise to Jonathan, his late and beloved friend.

16. The Bitter Fruit of Suspicion. (Chapter 10)

Nahash, King of Ammon, dies and his foolish son, Hanun, succeeds him as king. King Nahash had been kind to David when he was being persecuted by Saul, and

²⁰ In ancient and medieval times, when a king (or queen) assumed the throne, the common practice was to locate all possible claimants to his (or her) throne and have them killed. For this reason Abimelech, son of Gideon, had 70 of his brothers murdered (Judges 9), and wicked Athaliah, daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had her own grandchildren murdered (II Chron 22:10).

David remembers his kindness²¹. He sends an ambassadorial delegation to express his sympathy. Hanun's advisors convince him that David plans to attack him, and that his ambassadors are actually spies. As a result he has them humiliated by shaving half their beards, and cutting off their skirts up to the buttocks, and sends them back home. Hanun soon realizes that he has done a foolish thing, assumes that David will attack him for it, and hires a mercenary army to help him²². When David learns of the mobilization in Ammon, he sends Joab and part of his army to deal with it. Joab easily defeats Ammon and the mercenaries, but the situation escalates; Hanun, who should have left well enough alone, hires the Syrians to come and help him. Now the situation is spiraling out of control; David hears about the involvement of the Syrians and personally leads his entire army against them, defeats them, and makes Syria his vassal state.

And all this bloodshed is completely unnecessary! It occurs only because of irrational suspicion, foolish pride, and escalating assumptions based on earlier, unfounded, assumptions. There are lessons here for all of us.

NOTE: The place name "Ish-tob" ("men of Tob") of vv 6 and 8 refers to a town or city on the Syrian Border. It is synonymous with "the land of Tob" where Jephthah took refuge when fleeing from his half-brothers (Judges 11:3).

15. David's Great Fall. (Chapter 11)

It is Springtime, the season when kings normally return to warfare, and David's army, led by Joab, is besieging Ammon's principal city, Rabbah, east of the Jordan²³. It is unusual for David to remain in Jerusalem when his army is in battle, but the siege probably lasted for as long as two years, and perhaps David had returned to Jerusalem for a rest. His presence in Jerusalem, and absence from the battle is not explained, but is unusual.

At any rate, he rises from his couch and is strolling on the roof of his palace when he sees a beautiful woman bathing on the roof of a house nearby. He is immediately smitten with her beauty, enquires and learns that she is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of his officers. Uriah is in the field with David's army, besieging the rebellious Ammonites. David sends for Bathsheba, lies with her, and subsequently learns that she is with child--his child..

David's solution is to bring Uriah back home for a brief leave, assuming that he will make love to his wife and thus think the child to come is his own. But there is

²¹ One of David's finest traits was that he never forgot those who had helped him when he was in trouble.

²² He had indeed done a foolish thing, for Ammon posed no threat (or even a challenge) to David. If David wanted to attack Ammon he would have no need of spies; he had more than enough force simply to run over them.

²³ We should remember that the tribal kingdom of Ammon was descended from Ammon, Lot's son, born to his younger daughter in incest Gen 19:30-38). The tribe was under a curse (Ezek 25:5, 10; Zeph 2:9). No traces of it and its towns remain today.

a problem: Uriah is a man of unusual integrity. He refuses to sleep at home with his wife while his soldiers are sleeping, without their wives, on the field of battle. Even when David gets Uriah drunk, he still refuses to enjoy comfort and pleasure while his men suffer hardship; he sleeps with David's servants and does not even go home.

Failing in this plan, David descends to a still-lower moral level, and arranges to have Uriah killed; he even has Uriah carry the note that will bring about his death, and Uriah is too honorable to read the note²⁴! Uriah delivers the note, his own death sentence, Joab obediently sends him to the most dangerous place, and Uriah is killed. Bathsheba mourns for her husband, and when the period for mourning is past, David brings her to his palace and makes her his wife; but God is not going to wink at this. There will be consequences.

NOTES:

a. Everything about this dismal episode in David's life is out of character! It was the time when Kings go forth to war, yet he was tarrying in Jerusalem. He was a great personal leader in combat, yet Joab and his army were fighting without him. He was a man of great integrity and selfless leadership, yet he took the wife of one of his men and, to cover his own sin, conspired to have the man killed. Perhaps there is a message here for all of us: that, given the right circumstances, none of us is immune to sinning. As the great 17th Century commentator, Matthew Henry, put it, "Let him that readeth understand what the best of men are, when God leaves them to themselves."²⁵

b. Some commentators, preachers, and Bible teachers contend that "it was Bathsheba's fault," i.e. that she deliberately exposed herself in this way to tempt and seduce David. This, I believe, is completely absurd. In that time and place, what kings wanted, they got; and no one could refuse them. In pagan nations and tribes this is still true today. In the Muslim world it is not only true that women are treated as property by kings and other leaders, but even men in general have this kind of possessive power over women. For a Muslim woman to rebel against this kind of tyranny the result is usually her death, and often in horrible ways.

15. "Thou Art the Man." (12:1-7a)

In one of the most interesting events in the Bible, the prophet Nathan confronts David concerning his sin. He tells a story of a rich man with many sheep who cruelly and selfishly takes the ewe lamb of a poor man, the only sheep he has, and

²⁴ What a great and good man, soldier, and leader of men was this Uriah the Hittite! He should be in Heaven's Hall of Fame.

²⁵ Matthew Henry also calls our attention to the fact that the Bible not only records the great deeds of its heroes, but also their great sins. He sees this as evidence of the authenticity of the Bible, proof that it was written as history, and not one-sided propaganda.

a beloved pet. The rich man kills the lamb and serves it to a guest. David, perfectly in character, reacts with fury at the rich man and declares that he shall make restitution, and that he shall surely die! It is the perfect setup. As David's furious words echo about the palace, Nathan looks him in the eye and says quietly, "Thou art the man."

16. God Forgives, but Consequences Remain. (12:7b-14)

David, immediately broken and repentant, replies, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan goes on to tell David that he is forgiven; however, because of his position as God's chosen leader, his sin has given the enemies of God great cause to blaspheme. Because of this, there will be consequences of his sin, and he prophesies: there will be endless strife in his family ("the sword shall never depart from thine house"); one of his own will rise up against him; his wives will be publicly violated; and the baby will die²⁶.

17. "I Shall Go to Him." (12:15-23)

Nathan goes away, the baby is born (a boy) but is struck with sickness, and David is alone with the problem. He fasts and prays for the baby's healing for seven days, lying on the ground, refusing even to get up, wash, or change his clothes; but, as Nathan had prophesied, the baby dies. To the amazement of David's servants, now that the baby is dead, he bathes, changes his clothes, and sits down to eat. His servants ask him why he has behaved as he has; David replies that while the child lived he had hope that GOD would spare the child. Now that the child is dead, he says, he cannot bring the baby back, but that he can go (someday) to be with the baby. And then, refreshed but still broken, David sits down and writes Psalm 51.

NOTES:

a. David's explanation to his servants of his behavior expresses a great, fundamental fact of life: "...can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." When our loved ones who are redeemed (as certainly babies must be) die, we cannot bring them back; but if we love them enough to grieve, we should love them enough to give our hearts to the Lord and live in such a way as to follow them to Heaven.

b. My statement above brings us, unavoidably, to confront the doctrine of original sin. We are all born spiritually dead and with the fundamental sin nature. As I stated in the Introductory Material to this study guide, I avoid non-vital doctrinal matters when possible. Here, however, I believe that I must say that, in terms of actual sin, nothing can be more innocent than a newborn baby. It is also obvious

²⁶ One of David's virtues was that he was quick to accept responsibility for his own behavior, and did not try to make excuses or place the blame on others. When he had sinned and was confronted with his sin, he immediately repented, and did what he could to make it right.

that such a baby is incapable of understanding sin and redemption. It is my personal belief that such babies, plus all babies who die in miscarriage or are born dead, plus all those who are brutally murdered in the processes of abortion, are immediately with the Lord. To believe otherwise would contradict everything the Bible reveals about the LORD God of the Universe, Who is perfectly just, but also perfectly loving.

18. The Birth of Solomon. (12:24-25)

In time a second son is born to Bathsheba, the baby is especially loved by the LORD, and is named Solomon. The name means "peaceable," and his reign will be the only one in the history of Israel without war. He will become David's successor to the throne, and will become the human author of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. Inspired by the LORD, the prophet Nathan gives the baby a second name, Jedidiah, which means "beloved of God²⁷." He will become uniquely wise and prosperous; yet in the latter part of his life he will violate his own teachings, and live in an extremely unwise and sinful way that will lead to the division and eventual destruction of the kingdom.

19. The Final Conquest of Ammon. (12:26-31)

Joab sends word to David that the defeat of the Ammonites is, for all practical purposes, complete; and that the capital city, Rabbah, is ready to fall²⁸. Joab urges David to bring the rest of the army and lead in the taking of Rabbah, so that the people will not give all the glory for the victory to Joab. In the message he tells David that he has already taken "the city of waters," apparently meaning the protected water source that supplied the capital city, Rabbah. David appears and leads the entire army in conquering Rabbah. He takes the Ammonite king's gold, bejeweled, crown from his head, and puts it on his own head, to symbolize the complete defeat of the Ammonites; and much spoil is taken from the city. With victory complete, David and his army return to Jerusalem.

NOTE: Verse 31 presents difficulties. *On its face it sounds as if David and his soldiers, after they ended the battle in victory, put the defenders of Rabbah to death in horrible, cruel ways, including sawing them asunder, hacking them with axes and burning them in a brick kiln. Commentators are divided concerning the interpretation of the verse. Some, including Matthew Henry, take the verse to mean that the defeated defenders were sawed, chopped and burned as the verse seems to say; others, including Finis Dake, Frances Siewert and Henry Morris, interpret the verse (and its parallel passage, I Chron 20:3) to mean that the people were enslaved and put to hard labor with saws, axes, harrows, and in making*

²⁷ This is the only place in the Bible where this name for Solomon appears.

²⁸ Rabbah, called elsewhere "Rabbath," is today Amman, the capital of Jordan.

bricks. I am inclined to agree with this latter interpretation, for such unnecessary cruelty and butchering of defeated foes was known among pagans, but is foreign to the Israelites and stands in contradiction to every other such situation in the biblical record. And, to allow, let alone command, such barbarity, would have been completely out of character for David.

20. The Rape of Tamar. (13:1-22)

Years pass, children grow up, and Tamar, David's daughter, becomes a beautiful young woman. Amnon, David's first-born son and her half-brother, becomes obsessed with her beauty, tricks her into being alone with him, and rapes her. She even offers to marry him; but that was not what he wanted. Then, after essentially ruining her life, he treats her still more cruelly, and she takes refuge in the house of Absalom, her full brother²⁹. David, learning of the crime of Amnon, is furious, but does nothing about it; his failure here as a father will lead to much greater grief and much bloodshed in the future³⁰. Absalom refuses to speak to Amnon and, for the time being, the matter seems to be forgotten; but Absalom will not forget; in fact, it appears that Absalom already has plans for retribution.

21. Absalom's Revenge. (13:23-39)

Two years pass and Amnon thinks his crime is forgotten, while Absalom plots the serving of justice for what Amnon has done to his sister. This kind of vengeance and the open-ended bloodshed that it sets in motion is the very thing which the law was intended to prevent; but David had allowed the law to be ignored³¹. Absalom tricks Amnon into attending a party with the rest of his brothers, away from the palace where Absalom's servants sheared his sheep. When Amnon is drunk, Absalom has his servants kill him, the party breaks up and the other brothers flee for home on their mules, apparently thinking that Absalom intends to kill them all. In an amazing example of how fast a false rumor can travel (and how it can be exaggerated), before the fleeing sons even reach the palace, David is told that Absalom has killed **all** his brothers; and immediately there is great grieving. The true situation is revealed and David is comforted; but this is only the beginning of sorrows that will flow from David's failure to deal with Amnon himself. Absalom flees to Talmi, King of Geshur, for refuge; and the situation escalates, out of control³². While Absalom remains with Geshur for

²⁹ Amnon may be the most mis-named person in the Bible; his name means "faithful."

³⁰ Like Eli and Samuel before him, David's greatest failure seems to have been his failure as a father; like them, he failed miserably in correcting his sons' wicked behavior.

³¹ Deuteronomy 22:28-29.

³² Talmi, King of Geshur, is the father of Maacah, one of David's wives, and Absalom's mother. Thus Absalom is King Talmi's grandson. Geshur was a Syrian principality on the northeastern border of Israel, a tributary conquered by David but not occupied; and, there, Absalom would be safe.

three years, David ceases to grieve for Amnon and longs to be reunited with Absalom.

22. Absalom Returns (Sort of). (Chapter 14)

After Absalom has been in Geshur for three years, Joab convinces David to let him come home. David, still conflicted over what Absalom had done, allows him to come home but refuses to see him. After two years of this awkward semi-reconciliation, Joab brokers complete reconciliation, Absalom falls on his face before David and David kisses him. All seems well; but trouble lies ahead.

23. Absalom's Subversion. (15:1-6)

The events of the past seven years seem to have changed Absalom; he becomes vain, travels about in great grandeur, and plots to insinuate himself into the affection of the people, and to undermine the people's allegiance to David. While David rides about Jerusalem on a mule, Absalom travels with chariots, an escort on horseback, and 50 footmen to run before him, announcing his presence³³. In this way he appeals to the people's ungodly desire to have a king "who looks like a king" (i.e., like the pagan kings around them).

Samuel had prophesied that kings would do this³⁴. Also, this appears to be another violation of the law; yet David fails to correct Absalom's excesses, and seems unaware of his subversion³⁵.

24. Absalom's Rebellion. (15:7-29)

"After forty years" Absalom asks permission to go to Hebron to pay a vow³⁶. David believes him, and Absalom goes to Hebron; but there, instead of paying a vow, he gathers to himself an army and declares himself king. Hearing of this, and believing that the entire nation has turned against him to follow Absalom, David flees from Jerusalem, eastward, into the wilderness toward Jericho. Initially Zadok the High Priest and the other priests, carrying the Ark of the Covenant, follow David; but David sends them back, with instructions to keep him informed of the situation in Jerusalem. Carrying the Ark, they obey, return to Jerusalem and, apparently, restore the Ark to its place in the Tabernacle.

25. David's Gethsemane. (15:30-16:4)

³³ In this way David is again a type of Christ who, when entering Jerusalem, would come not on a prancing war horse, preceded by liveried footmen, but on a lowly jackass, preceded by children.

³⁴ I Samuel 8:11.

³⁵ Deuteronomy 17:16.

³⁶ We must wonder, "Forty years after what?" but the Scriptures do not tell us. It can't mean 40 years after David's becoming king, for that would mean that he is in the last year of his life. It probably means 40 years after the people demanded a king (I Sam 8), which would mean about 30 years after David became king, and 10 years before his death.

David climbs the Mount of Olives, barefooted and with his head covered³⁷. He seems to be of two minds: (1) he grieves and humbles himself in apparent submission to the punishment prophesied for his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah; (2) yet he sends a friend, Hushai the Archite, back into the city to infiltrate Absalom's advisors and spy for David, sensing that Absalom's rebellion would fail.

Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, rides out of Jerusalem with food and drink for David and his court; and he lies to David, saying that Mephibosheth has betrayed him. Believing himself betrayed by some of those those most dear to him, David continues his ignominious flight.

NOTE: Among the defectors to Absalom was Ahithophel, formerly one of David's chief counselors. We are not told why Ahithophel betrayed David and joined Absalom's revolt; but it may have been Ahithophel's disapproval of David's dealings with Bathsheba and faithful Uriah the Hittite. Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather.

25. The Strange Case of Shimei, the Benjamite Tormentor. (16:5-14)

Word travels fast in such places, and the news of David's flight precedes him. At Bahurin, beyond the Mount of Olives, a Benjamite loyal to the memory of Saul, sees David as defeated and impotent and decides to pile on; he shouts curses and throws stones at David and his party. Abishai, Joab's brother, one of those violent "sons of Zeruah" (David's sister) wants to deal with this impudent irritant by taking his head off. In some way, however, David sees this as the will of God and forbids it, saving Shimei's life. Shimei, who doesn't know how to quit when he is winning, continues to curse and pelt the royal party with stones until they are gone. He probably felt really good about it as David disappeared, but he has bet on the wrong horse. When David returns, victorious, Shimei begs forgiveness and is again spared. He will eventually pay, however, for David remembers him at the time of his death, and leaves instructions for Solomon to deal with him³⁸.

27. Another Prophesied Consequence Fulfilled. (16:15-23)

Absalom arrives in Jerusalem, accompanied by Ahithophel, one of David's counselors who has defected to Absalom³⁹. Absalom finds Hushai there, asks him why he didn't go with David, and seems suspicious; but Hushai convinces Absalom that he is loyal to him.

³⁷ It is interesting that we see David climbing the Mount of Olives in humility and great distress. Here is the place where Jesus will often go for rest from Jerusalem, to be alone with His followers. Near its base is Gethsemane, where He will agonize before his crucifixion; from the mount He will ascend into Heaven (Acts 1); and to it He will return in final triumph (Zech 14)

³⁸ I Kings 2:8-9

³⁹ Part of Ahithophel's reason for defecting may have been resentment of David's sin with Bathsheba, for Ahithophel was her grandfather.

Absalom asks Ahithophel for advice and he recommends that Absalom violate David's concubines who were left behind to take care of the palace, to demonstrate the complete break with David. Absalom thinks this is a good idea, and he not only does what Ahithophel recommends, but he does it publicly ("in the sight of all Israel"), fulfilling that part of Nathan's prophecy⁴⁰. Now the break with David is final, and the scene is set for greater tragedy.

28. David's escape, Ahithophel's Suicide, and the Beginning of the End for Absalom. (17:1-23)

Ahithophel Recommends to Absalom that he be given 12,000 chosen men and that he then lead them immediately to attack David. He will overwhelm David's small army while they are discouraged and weary, and he promises that when he falls upon them the soldiers will flee and that he will kill David alone. Then, he says, he will return to Jerusalem, bringing the rest of the people who had fled with David.

Absalom likes Ahithophel's idea but, as a matter of caution, calls for Hushai to hear his advice, which will be the pivot point for all that follows, redirecting the course of history. Hushai comes, hears Ahithophel's plan and, very diplomatically, says that it is a good plan; but, he says, there is another plan that is even better. He points out that David and his small army will not be sleeping with the people who have followed him from Jerusalem, but instead will be in some hidden stronghold. He and his warriors, smarting from having had to flee Jerusalem, will pounce on Ahithophel's small army and kill many of them. Word of this will quickly get around, will be exaggerated, and there will spread a false belief that Absalom's entire army has been defeated. As a result, support for Absalom will melt away.

Therefore, Hushai advises, Absalom should wait, and gather an unbeatable multitude of soldiers from all of Israel, "even from Dan to Beersheba." Then says Hushai, using colorful exaggeration, Absalom's mighty army will wipe out David and his small army completely. Absalom buys Hushai's idea, and orders that it be implemented. All of this was orchestrated by the LORD, intervening directly in a critical situation.

This delay allows time for Hushai to send a message secretly to David, through Zadok and Abiathar the priests. He advises David not to stay where he is in the valley near Jerusalem, but to take all of his people, immediately, across the Jordan where they will be safe. Two messengers are sent to tell David, but they are seen by "a lad" who reports this to Absalom. Absalom sends men to overtake the messengers and kill them, but a brave woman hides them brilliantly and Absalom's

⁴⁰ II Samuel 12:11-12.

men return to him empty handed. The messengers reach David, bring him the warning of Hushai, and David immediately leads his people toward the river; by daylight they are all safely across the Jordan.

Ahithophel, when he sees that Absalom had not taken his advice, returns to his home, puts his affairs in order, and hangs himself. Thus, God (using some brave men and women) has preserved the future for the coming of the Messiah 1,000 years later. Now the stage is set for the defeat of Absalom and his attempted coup d'etat, and for the final establishment of David's messianic kingdom.

29. The Battle in the Forest and the Death of Absalom. (17:24-18:17)

David crosses the Jordan and heads north to Mahanaim, the city from which Ishbosheth and Abner had reigned over Israel while David reigned over Judah from Hebron. At Mahanaim, David is greeted with food and bedding for his men, and he rests there. He is persuaded to stay at Mahanaim, and not participate in the battle, and Joab leads the army to battle; David's final instruction to his officers is to spare Absalom⁴¹. The battle is fought in a dense forest away from the city, and David's forces quickly put Absalom's army to flight. In their desperate confusion, more of them are killed in the tangled forest than had been killed by David's men ("...and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured."). Absalom runs his mule under a tree, and is left hanging by his head. Absalom, still alive, is finished off by Joab by driving "darts" through Absalom's heart; and his bodyguards make sure that Absalom is dead⁴². Thus the rebellion is ended.

NOTES:

a. It is difficult to understand how the forest could have killed more men than the sword that day. It may mean that in the confusion many were crashed into trees and trampled; and perhaps, in the confused panic, many of them killed one another. In addition, wild beasts of the forest may have killed many more, especially the wounded who were left there, for there were lions and bears in that heavily wooded area. Certainly Absalom himself was a victim of a fatal entanglement with a large oak tree.

The answer, however, may appear in the history of the incident recorded by Josephus. He wrote, "Now David's men were conquerors, as superior in strength and skill in war; so they followed the others as they fled away through the forests

⁴¹ It was out of character for David not to personally lead his soldiers into battle. The text implies that they were concerned only for his safety; actually, however, they surely knew that David would be conflicted by his love for Absalom, and would not be at his best. They knew David very well, and his reaction to Absalom's death is supportive of this thought.

⁴² The "darts" Joab used to kill Absalom were probably arrows or small spears.

and valleys; some they took prisoner, and many they slew- - more in the flight than in the battle⁴³." This explanation makes sense to me.

b. There is a widespread belief that Absalom was caught in the tree because his thick mass of long hair was entangled in it, and this is stated as a fact by such authorities as Merrill Unger ("Unger's Bible Dictionary") and Herbert Lockyer ("All the Men of the Bible"). There seems to be, however, absolutely no basis for this belief in Scripture. Although neither Unger nor Lockyer cites a reference for their positive declarations, the source for their belief seems to be Josephus (Antiquities 7.10.2). The greater probability is that his head was jammed in a crotch of a limb. Under both the OT and NT, to have hair mistakable for a woman was proscribed.

30. "Oh Absalom, My Son, My Son." (18:18-19:10)

When Ahimaaz, a runner known for his speed, reaches David and tells David of the victory, David's first response--the concern uppermost in his mind--is to ask if Absalom is safe. Learning that Absalom is dead, David is overcome with grief, crying out that he wishes he had been killed instead of Absalom. This makes no sense to Joab, who is offended and angry; nor does it make sense to the people, who are confused by David's reaction. Absalom, after all, had died trying to kill David and all of his people. Perhaps David's response was a foretaste of the grace of God to be seen 1,000 years later in the life of Christ, for David's actions frequently were just that. Perhaps, on the other hand, we are simply seeing in this the natural love of a father for his son, regardless of his misdeeds. Probably, we are seeing both.

Joab confronts David with the fact that his grieving response is having a bad effect on the confused people, and urges him to go, sit in the gate, and speak positively to the people. David does, and the people (we may assume) are no longer confused and offended.

The survivors of Absalom's army ("Israel") flee to their homes. And, thinking about it, the survivors are thinking that it would be wise to make peace with David and honor him.

31. Bring back the King! (19:11-30)

David sends a message to the priests, Zadok and Abiathar admonishing them because they have not asked him to return to his rightful home in Jerusalem. And, interestingly, in what seems like a major non sequitur, he takes this occasion to announce to the priests that he is replacing Joab as Captain of the Host (commanding general of his army), with Joab's cousin, Amasa, who had been

⁴³ Josephus, Antiquities, 7.10.2.

Absalom's Captain of the Host, but was apparently forgiven⁴⁴. Word of David's return from Mahanaim to Jerusalem spreads throughout Judah, and there is joy in the land.

David and his household are brought across the Jordan on a ferry and he is met by Shimei the Benjamite, the man who had so cruelly cursed David as he fled from Absalom and had thrown rocks at his company as they had passed. But now the shoe is on the other foot; and Shimei falls on his face, begging David's forgiveness. David, in a joyful, forgiving mood, decrees to Shimei "Thou shalt not die⁴⁵."

32. David Crosses the Jordan in Triumph. (19:31-20:2)

In a barge David crosses the Jordan in triumph, returning to Jerusalem; and he is accompanied by a prominent friend, Barzilai, who had provided him with food while he was in exile at Mahanaim in Giliad. David invites the elderly man to come and live with him in the palace, but Barzilai says that he is too old (he is 80 now), and that he would rather not be a burden for David. He says that after accompanying David over the Jordan he would prefer to return to his home where he can live out the rest of his life and be buried with his family. Instead, Barzilai suggests that Chimham go in his place and become a part of David's court. Chimham is not identified in the text, but he was apparently known to David and David agrees. According to Josephus, Chimham was a son of Barzilai, so David would know him well.⁴⁶

David is escorted triumphantly back to Jerusalem by a crowd consisting of both men of Judah and men of Israel. The men of Israel think that David should move his palace across the river and live among them; but they argue in vain. Then a wicked man named Sheba blows a trumpet and rallies the men of Israel to abandon David's triumphant caravan and they return to the Trans-Jordan; but the men of Judah continue to escort David back to Jerusalem.

***NOTE:** In these chapters we see references to "the men of Israel" and "the men of Judah" as representing two competing areas (as in vv 41-43, where they quarreled over where David should establish his throne). Throughout this episode it appears that "Israel" was a reference to the area occupied by 10 of the tribes, and "Judah" was the area occupied by the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin (v 43). Although this is not explained in the passage, the two groups seem to have thought of themselves as being divided in this way. This is interesting because, after the death of Solomon, the kingdom will be divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, in the very same way.*

⁴⁴ Although this is not explained, the probable reason for Joab's demotion was his killing of Absalom.

⁴⁵ David might have added parenthetically "yet," for on his death bed he tells Solomon to have him killed, settling the matter once and for all.

⁴⁶ Josephus, Antiquities 7.11.4.

33. The Pursuit of Sheba and the Death of Amasa. (20:3-13)

David returns to Jerusalem and, as his first order of business, rules that the 10 concubines whom Absalom had so flagrantly and publicly violated be kept in house arrest for the rest of their lives; they would be provided for, but David would no longer relate to them as concubines. It was more of a permanent separation than punishment; after all, what choice did they have but to submit to Absalom?

David, deciding that he had better eliminate the threat represented by Sheba, orders Amasa, his new Captain of the Host, to assemble the soldiers of Judah within three days. Amasa apparently sends out runners to assemble the army, but Amasa himself is to remain in Jerusalem. The army does not assemble in three days, so David, reluctant to delay, tells Abishai, his nephew and Joab's brother, to assemble Joab and the king's palace guards and go ahead and deal with Sheba before he can become established. This will be a much smaller force, but an elite one, and it is ready.

When Joab and his force reached Gibeon, Amasa (with the rest of the army) joins them and takes command. Joab, never one to forget a grievance, greets his cousin in a friendly way. He seems purposely to have caused his sword to fall out of its sheath, and picks it up with his left hand. Gripping Amasa's beard with his right hand as if to kiss him, he makes his signature move with his left hand. He plunges the sword into Amasa under the 5th rib, eviscerates him, and Amasa falls in the road writhing in his own blood, dying, but not dead. One of Joab's men cries to the shocked onlookers for those who follow David to follow Joab. They are still shocked and immobilized, looking at Amasa; so Amasa is dragged off to the roadside, covered with a cloth, and Joab leads the army after Sheba, adding more volunteers as they go.

NOTE: The text in these 12 verses is somewhat difficult; it requires, for most of us, slow, careful and thoughtful reading. In some places the compiler makes significant statements, but not fully, as if we already know a good deal about what he is telling us. To me it is like rich historical shorthand, leaving out some details which are necessary for easy understanding.

An example is found in verses 4-8. I have studied it carefully, consulted source materials, and attempted to flesh it out with the missing information.

In verse 4 Amasa, the new Captain of the Host, is told to "assemble the men of Judah" (apparently the entire army) in three days and "and be though here present." This seems to say that Amasa is to remain in Jerusalem and assemble the rest of the army, but it isn't accomplished in the time set. In verse 6 David tells Abishai (Joab's brother) that, in order to get things underway quickly, he is to take the elite warriors and the palace guards immediately to pursue Sheba; yet verse 7 tells us that "Joab's men" (not Abishai's) went out to pursue Sheba. And when the

elite force reached Gibeon, we are told that Amasa "went before them," apparently meeting them at Gibeon with the rest of the army, and assumed command of the combined force.

Questions:

(1) Where has Amasa been since verse 4? He had apparently been told by David to remain in Jerusalem; yet he seems to have been able to assemble the rest of the army, and somehow reached the great rock at Gibeon ahead of Joab, joined the two forces, and assumed command.

(2) Who is in charge of the elite force? In verse 6 David tells Abishai, one of the mighty warriors and brother of Joab, to assemble the elite force and pursue Sheba without delay; yet, in verse 7 the elite force is referred to as "Joab's men." It appears that Joab, being Joab, had quickly inserted himself into the command of the force.

(3) In verse 8 we read that, when the elite force reaches Gibeon, Amasa (who has now apparently brought the rest of the army to join the elite force) "went before them." How are we to understand these last three words? The modern versions vary in the wording, but in all versions, the clause describes a meeting, or rendezvous, at Hebron. The key word in the clause means literally "before"; so it appears that Amasa arrived at Gibeon first⁴⁷.

I hope that this is helpful

34. The Ignominious End of Sheba. (20:14-26)

Joab leads the army through the tribes of Israel to Abel and Bethmaacha, a twin city metropolis in the north of Israel; Joab is joined by the Berites⁴⁸. Joab's army lays siege to the city, builds a bank of earth against the wall and begins to break down the wall. A wise woman within the wall, realizing the destruction that was sure to come, called to Joab and reasoned with him to save the cities. Joab replies that he has no interest in destroying the cities, but that he wants only Sheba. The woman agrees and soon the head of Sheba is thrown over the wall to Joab.

Satisfied that the problem is resolved, Joab and his army return to Jerusalem with Sheba's head. Back in Jerusalem peace reigns, and the leadership is again organized. Joab is Captain of the Host; and Benaiah, another of David's mighty men, is in command of the elite palace guards⁴⁹.

34. Justice for Saul's Slaughter of Gibeonites. (21:1-14)

⁴⁷For those readers who have access to Matthew Henry's Commentaries (and you can access them on the Internet at Blue Letter Bible.com), I recommend him for further understanding, on a deeper and more expansive level than would be appropriate here.

⁴⁸ The Berites who joined the army of Judah in pursuing Sheba seem to have been a tribe in northern Israel which had a reason to hate Sheba (Mrs. Siewert translates the clause "also went after [Sheba] ardently." They are mentioned nowhere else in the Bible.

⁴⁹ See in this regard Chapter 23:20-23.

There is, in the latter years of David's reign, a famine of three years. David enquires of the Lord as to its cause, and the Lord tells him that it is punishment for a slaughter that Saul had perpetrated against the Amorite people of Gibeon, one for which restitution had never been made. So David calls before him the Amorite leaders of Gibeon and asks them what he can do to atone for Saul's great transgression. They require that seven sons of Saul be turned over to them to be executed and their bodies hung up on public display, "unto the LORD." David agrees, makes it clear that Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son must be spared, and delivers seven other sons of Saul to the Gibeonites⁵⁰.

The seven are slain, their bodies hung up on public display, and the matter is apparently settled. Rizpah, the mother of two of the sons, spreads sack cloth (burlap) on a rock and guards the bodies from scavenging birds and animals, staying there until the coming of the late rains. When David hears what Aiah had done, he collects the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh Giliad, and the bones of the seven sons of Saul, and buried them properly in the land of Benjamin, in the tomb of Kish, father of Saul. With the matter of the violated covenant settled, God heard the prayers for the land.

To us this harsh justice seems wrong; nevertheless there is obviously more going on here between David and the Lord than we can know, for there is no evidence of God's displeasure; and thus it took place. It is possible--perhaps likely--that the seven sons of Saul had taken part in the slaughter.

NOTE: In the conquest of Canan the Ammorite inhabitants of Gibeon, in order to escape annihilation, had entered into a covenant ("league") with Joshua by deception. Upon the discovery of the deception they were consigned forever to menial labor (as "hewers of wood and carriers of water") to support the functions of the Tabernacle; nevertheless, their lives would be spared, throughout the generations, because of the covenant⁵¹. Apparently Saul, as king, in a fit of anger or for some other reason, had ordered the slaughter of a number of the Amorites of Gibeon, violating the ancient covenant. This act of murder by Saul is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible; but the violation of the ancient covenant was obviously deeply offensive to the LORD.

32. Twilight for David the Warrior. (21:15-17)

The Philistines, conquered but not anihilated, rise up in a revolt against David, and he leads the army of Israel to battle against them. He is doing fine, like the old days, when he is attacked by a giant, about the size of Goliath. David does not

⁵⁰ Although Mephibosheth was actually Saul's grandson--not his son, in ancient Hebrew usage he would still have been considered "a son" of Saul. Interestingly, one of the seven actual sons of Saul, delivered up to pay for their father's transgression, was named Mephibosheth, an uncle to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son.

⁵¹ See in this regard the study guide to Joshua 9, with footnote.

see another giant as a problem and he wades in; but something is different this time. David begins to tire, but the giant is still swinging, and the situation doesn't look good for David. Seeing that David is tiring, and may need help, Abishai, Joab's brother and David's nephew, steps in and finishes the killing of the giant.

A significant point in David's life has been reached: physically, he is no longer the man he once was, and his men plead with him to stay out of the battles, "that he quench not the light of Israel." They can see that age has taken its toll on his strength, and they don't want to lose him. It is an unpleasant milestone, and one that we all will eventually reach if we live long enough.

33. Goliath's Brother Is Slain. (21:18-22)

With David old, and retired from active warfare, his army continues to put down periodic Philistine uprisings, and four more of the giants are slain. One of them, who is huge even by giant standards, has six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Jonathan, David's nephew, kills this giant. David and his men are thinning out the giant population, and one of the four giants they kill is Goliath's brother, slain by Elhanan of Bethlehem.

NOTES:

*a. In each of the last two verses, 18 and 19, there is described a separate battle in which one of the surviving giants is killed at a place called "Gob." This place is mentioned nowhere else in the Bible except in the parallel passage in I Chron 20:4-5, where it is called "Gezer." Because of apparently dishonest scholarship (I don't know what else to call it) in most of the modern versions, in translating v 19, it has become unnecessarily controversial, as we are about to see in **b.** below.*

*b. **Who killed Goliath?** In verse 19, the words "the brother of" are in italics. This means that those three words are not in the Hebrew text, but were added by the AV (KJV) translators for clarity. On this basis most modern versions read here, "Elhanan, son of... slew Goliath"⁵². What? Someone called Elhanan killed Goliath, apparently with a sword, and he did it when David was an old man? Ever since we were children in Sunday school we have been taught that "little David" killed Goliath, when David was just a lad, maybe 16 years old, and that he did it with a rock in a sling. Well, we were taught correctly; little David, just a lad, did indeed kill the giant Goliath with a rock, and then, in triumph, cut off Goliath's head with Goliath's sword.*

Had Goliath been raised from the dead, regained his severed head, and lived another half century to have a second go at killing David? Of course not! Yet

⁵² To my great disappointment, even Mrs. Frances Siewert, in her Amplified Bible, follows the other modern versions here. This is completely out of character for her, and I am at a loss to explain her rendering this verse in this way, while even the New Living Translation and the New International Version follow the AV (KJV) rendering..

*most modern versions declare here that Elhanan, late in David's life, killed Goliath, thus saving David's life, **contradicting their own renderings of I Sam 17** (in which young David kills Goliath with a sling and one smooth stone).*

*This amazing rendering in the modern versions constitutes a clear contradiction of the account of David's killing of Goliath in I Sam 17, and creates confusion in the minds of those not fully familiar with Scripture. It also casts doubt upon the inspiration of Scripture (another "contradiction"). In this rendering, most modern translators were completely, shamefully, intellectually dishonest. How can I say that? Because in the parallel passage, I Chron 20:4-8, it is clearly stated that the giant killed by Elhanan that day was not Goliath, but was **Goliath's brother** a man named **Lahmi** ("Lahmi, the brother of Goliath..."). And, in this parallel passage, there are no italics; it is all there in the Hebrew text. So why, we must wonder, would these modern translators do this, creating confusion and casting doubt on the validity of the Scriptures? Why, indeed! Perhaps it is because they do not believe in the verbal (word-for-word) inspiration of the Bible.*

34. David's Song of Praise to the LORD. (Chapter 22)

Chapter 22, with its 51 verses, is a long and joyful song of praise to the LORD by David, enumerating the wonderful things that the LORD has done for him, his army and his kingdom, and extolling the LORD's many virtues and great power. Many verses in this chapter were often sung in churches and Bible study groups in my early Christian days; and the early verses are very similar to the early part of David's wonderful Psalm 116. Reading this song will bring to mind other passages of beautiful poetic praise; an example of this is verse 34, which is also found in Psalm 18 and Habakkuk 3.

35. David's last Recorded Song of Praise. (23:1-7)

Introduced in the first verse of Chapter 23 as "the last words of David...son of Jesse...and the sweet psalmist [singer] of Israel," verses 2 through 7 are written in beautiful Hebrew poetry, in which David extols the power and goodness of the LORD, and declares that He rewards the faithful, and destroys the wicked ("sons of belial")⁵³.

36. David's "Mighty Men"--His Special Warriors. (23:8-39)

In the rest of Chapter 23 there is a listing of David's 37 bravest and most dependable warriors, his "inner circle" in battle, and some of their exploits. Some of the exploits, such as Adino (verse 8) who faced 800 Philistines alone and killed them all, seem impossible, but we must consider two factors: the remarkable

⁵³ These were obviously not David's last recorded words; his last recorded words were his charge to Solomon, his anointed successor (I Kings 2); but this is the last of his many recorded songs to the LORD.

bravery of these men in facing such apparently impossible odds; and the fact that the LORD, with his unlimited supernatural power, was involved.

In verse 20 we read of a warrior named Benaiah who slew "lion-like men of Moab" and, on another occasion, went down in a pit (lion's den) and killed a lion in Winter snow. Does this mean that in addition to killing a lion in his den he killed in battle two Moabite men who in some way were disfigured and looked like lions? Probably not. The Hebrew word translated "lion-like" is *ariel*, which means "lion of God." It probably means that the two men were unusually brave warriors who fought with the ferocity of lions.

A curious thing about the list is that two brothers of Joab--Abishai (verse 18) and Asahel (verse 24)--are listed among the 37, but Joab is not. Joab was strong, courageous and exceedingly violent; but he was also treacherous and ambitious, murdering those who stood in his way. According to Herbert Lockyer, Joab aspired to take the throne of David⁵⁴. This seems to be the reason that he did not make the list, although at the end of David's life Joab is David's commanding general (Captain of the Host).

And finally, the last listed among David's 37 most trusted warriors, is Uriah the Hittite, one of the most brave and honorable men who ever lived, and who would become the future victim of David's greatest sin.

37. A Memory of David, His Warriors, and Their Mutual Love. (23:13-17)

Here, near the end of the record of David's life, is a beautiful story. It is out of chronological order, for it occurred soon after David had conquered Jerusalem and moved the capital there, from Hebron. It is as if the writer, thinking back over the life of David, remembers one incident that is just too good to leave out; and the ancient scribes did not have the ease of re-arrangement by "cut and paste" as do we today with our computers.

In this setting the Philistines have come into the area to raid, and David sets out to deal with them. David and his troops are in the vicinity of the cave of Adullam, and the Philistines are encamped in the valley of Rephaim, with their base at Bethlehem, David's home town. David, ever the sentimentalist, longs for a drink of water from the Bethlehem town well. Three of his warriors, hearing him say this, make their way through Philistine lines, get the water, and make their way back safely. When they surprise David with their gift, he is so touched by what they have done that he refuses to drink the water. It has been made too precious by their bravery and love for him to drink it, so he pours it out as a sacrifice to the Lord.

38. Numbering Israel: Who Tempted David? (24:1)

⁵⁴ Lockyer, Herbert, *All the Men of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan, 1958) page 190.

The last chapter of II Samuel tells of David's final mistake. In his last days David, tempted and deceived by Satan, decides to number Israel--that is, to conduct another census. The LORD is again angry with the people⁵⁵. The first verse of the chapter constitutes what is called a "problem passage" of Scripture, and in this one the problem is twofold. First, we must wonder why the LORD was angry with the people, for the text does not explain his anger. The reason for his anger is probably their faithlessness in following Absalom and, later, Sheba, in rebelling against David, his anointed king. And, second, we must wonder why God would move David (or anyone else) to sin, and then punish him for sinning. The answer is clear: God would never do such a thing⁵⁶. But how, then, do we explain the verse?

As usual, the Bible explains itself, for the parallel passage, I Chronicles 21:1, clears it up: "And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel." The sequence is: (1) Satan plants the sinful suggestion, and makes it look like a good idea; (2) David accepts the idea and decides to do it; and (3), God, angered by David's willingness to do it, allows David to proceed⁵⁷. In short, God allows the temptation but Satan, as usual, is the tempter. Now, with that matter disposed of, let us get on with this dismal-but-interesting story.

39. David's Last Mistake. (24:2-9)

We must immediately wonder: what was the temptation, and why David would fall for it? The temptation was probably to David's pride, a desire to know just how vast and rich was his domain. Why would he fall for it? Perhaps, in his last days, he was slipping. Normally, before any significant undertaking, David would ask the Lord for guidance; but here he just plunges ahead into his error, without asking, and lives to regret it.

All of this is decidedly uncharacteristic of David; and, not only that, but his decision is so obviously wrong that Joab, the carnal man of violence, in a rare occasion of spirituality, rebukes David for even considering it, and tries to talk him out of it. What a role reversal! This is David's general whose solution to most situations is a short sword under the 5th rib--the man who is too violent even for David⁵⁸. And yet Joab sees clearly that David is making a terrible mistake, and urges against it. Nevertheless David insists, and gives Joab the job. The

⁵⁵ There had been two previous "numberings" of Israel, both ordered by God: one at the beginning of the Exodus; and one at the end of the wandering period.

⁵⁶ The basis for this statement is very clear: "...God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man..." (Jas 1:13); Satan is the tempter of man to sin.

⁵⁷ Herein an important principle is illustrated: it is Satan who tempts us to do wrong; but the sin cannot occur until we **decide** to do the thing. Sin always begins with a decision; and the decision is always ours to make. See also in this regard the study guide to Joshua 6:26-7:26, *Note b*, and I Cor 10:13.

⁵⁸ See in this regard II Samuel 3:39.

numbering is so distasteful to Joab that he finally rebels, and doesn't finish the census, failing to include Levi and Benjamin⁵⁹.

40. David's Punishment: Multiple Choice. (24:10-17)

Finally, David's better nature prevails and he is powerfully convicted of his sinful error ("David's heart smote him"). He finally sees things clearly and repents; but there remain consequences, for him and for the people⁶⁰. The prophet Gad is sent to give him three choices of punishment: seven years of famine; three months fleeing before his enemies in defeat; or three days of pestilence. David chooses to fall into the hands of the LORD with three days of pestilence. Seventy thousand die, from Dan to Beersheba, and David intercedes; he pleads for the LORD to punish him, but to spare the people. Jerusalem is spared by the LORD, and the pestilence is ended. David is allowed to see the mighty angel of death when the angel is stopped, by a threshing floor belonging to a Jebusite.

NOTE: In this incident we see the human weakness of David, the man after God's own heart; but we also see in v 17 that, even in his old age and having deeply offended God, David still has a shepherd's heart, asking God that he be punished, and not the people. Why God had decided to punish the people when it was David's unwise decision to number them is not explained; but we may be certain that He had a reason. Perhaps David's fleshly pride had spread among the people, and we do know that a haughty spirit leads to destruction. God loves humility; but He hates fleshly pride⁶¹.

41. David's Sacrifice on the Threshing Floor of Araunah (Ornan). (24:18-25)

The prophet Gad is sent to tell David to build an altar on a threshing floor belonging to a man named Araunah (Ornan), a Jebusite⁶². It was by this threshing floor that David saw the angel of death cease from the killing. This Araunah appears to have been a chief (king) among the Jebusite remnant, and probably a proselyte to the Jewish religion, because he was allowed to remain in Jerusalem and to own property there. Araunah offers to give the place to David, "as a king, give unto the king," with the oxen and threshing equipment to burn as his sacrifice. But David insists on paying him for it, refusing to offer to the LORD his God "that which doth cost me nothing." In this, I believe, is again illustrated one of David's virtues: his sense of personal responsibility. At any rate, he does buy it all, builds

⁵⁹ See in this regard I Chronicles 21:6, 27:24.

⁶⁰ For reasons not explained, it is clear here, and in the parallel passages in I Chronicles, that the LORD took this occasion to punish the rebellious Israelite people.

⁶¹ Proverbs 16:18; I Pet 5:5-6.

⁶² The parallel passage in I Chron 21 (18f) identifies him by his other name, "Ornan the Jebusite," and it is by this name that he is usually known.

an altar on the threshing floor, offers the oxen as burnt and peace offerings, and the plague is stayed.

***NOTE:** Critical scholars have made much of the fact that here it is recorded that David paid the man “fifty shekels of silver,” while in the parallel passage (I Chron 21:25) it is recorded that David paid the man “six hundred shekels of gold.” The likely explanation is that David paid the man fifty shekels of silver for the oxen and wooden threshing instruments, and six hundred shekels of gold for the valuable threshing floor its self, and the land around it, which would have been of much greater value than an ox and wooden threshing tools. The purchase probably included all of the land (“Temple Mount”) on which, eventually, Solomon’s magnificent Temple would be built.*

* * * * *

A Final, and Wonderful, Note

On this very spot, Mount Moriah, Abraham offered Isaac, David offered the oxen to stop the plague, and here Solomon would later build the Temple, and Herod would build the second Temple, each with the altar of burnt offering **on this very same spot**. It is awesome to see the hand of God at work here, although the men He used to bring it all about knew nothing of his plan to establish and sanctify this very holy place. In spite of the fact that they knew nothing of this plan of God, their obedience made its fulfillment possible.