

2 Samuel 1:1-16

The Transfer of Power

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead." Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until 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 told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite." David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.'" – 2 Samuel 1:1-16 ESV

The Bible is full of irony, and this story is a prime example. Having taken his own life by falling on his own sword, Saul was left on the field of battle, his body unprotected and easy pickings for the Philistines soldiers to find. However, according to this story, an Amalekite found Saul before the Philistines did. He took Saul's crown and armlet and made his way to Ziklag, having concocted a false version of the events surrounding Saul's death, in hopes that David would reward him for having killed Saul. But the irony in all of this is that this man, who falsely took credit for Saul's death and stole his crown and armlet, was an Amalekite.

Back in 1 Samuel 13, Saul was commanded by God to destroy the Amalekites, completely wiping out every man, woman, and child. But Saul was disobedient to God. He failed to do what God commanded and, as a result, the Amalekites were alive and well. In fact, the second point of irony is that this man made his way to David, proudly proclaiming his Amalekite ethnicity, totally unaware that David had just defeated and plundered his countrymen for having raided

his city and captured its inhabitants. In other words, this young man picked a bad time to be an Amalekite and to brag about killing the king of Israel with his own hands.

The fact that the account of chapter one of 2 Samuel differs slightly from that of chapter 31 of 1 Samuel has caused some consternation over the years. But it is not a case of a discrepancy in the biblical text. It is simply a matter of the facts related to the events. Chapter 31 of 1 Samuel records what actually happened as it relates to Saul's death and the aftermath. Nowhere does it mention his crown or armlet. Only his head, decapitated body, and armor were taken by the Philistines. Had they found something as significant as his crown, it would have been mentioned. But according to the story in chapter one of 2 Samuel, the crown was taken by an Amalekite who was plundering the bodies of the fallen. He was not mentioned in the closing chapter of 1 Samuel because it was a record of Saul's death, not David's reaction to it. The author reserved the events surrounding the Amalekite and his plundering of Saul's crown and amulet until later.

And the Amalekite mercenary's arrival in David's camp and his news of Saul's death were not received with the joy and gratitude he had imagined.

David and his men tore their clothes in sorrow when they heard the news. They mourned and wept and fasted all day for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the Lord's army and the nation of Israel, because they had died by the sword that day. – 2 Samuel 1:11-12
NLT

This was not what the young man had expected. Instead of David reacting with joy and offering the Amalekite a reward for having killed David's archenemy, he went into mourning, weeping over the death of the Lord's anointed. There was no celebration, no gloating, no dance of victory over Saul's well-deserved death. And the idea that an Amalekite had been the one to take the king's life was too much for David to handle. Based on the young man's bold claim, David had him executed. Not exactly the reward he had been seeking.

This story reveals the sovereign hand of God at work. These two chapters provide a turning point in the story of David's life. Between them, they reveal a transition of power taking place between Saul and David. It is fascinating to consider that God used this unsuspecting Amalekite to bring the crown of Saul and hand it to the man whom God had appointed and anointed to be the next king of Israel. It was a tangible symbol of what was taking place within the story, and all part of God's strategic plan for David's rise to the throne of Israel.

David's path to the throne had been a long and arduous one. From the day he was anointed by Samuel the prophet until the moment Saul fell on his sword, taking his own life, David had experienced a lengthy, pain-filled journey filled with ups and downs, twists and turns, and moments of doubt and despair. David's faith had been tested. He was often confused by the events surrounding his life, and didn't always understand what was going on or enjoy the way God chose to direct his life. But he kept trusting. He kept waiting. And while he had been given two different opportunities to take Saul's life, he refused to do so. In both cases, he considered

Saul the Lord's anointed and was unwilling to raise his hand against him. Until the very end, David had shown honor and respect for the Lord's anointed, even mourning the death of the man who had dedicated years of his life to David's destruction.

The Philistines defeated Saul, then he took his own life. An Amalekite plundered the crown from his dead body and claimed responsibility for his death. He expected a reward from David, but David mourned and gave the Amalekite a death sentence. Saul's crown, the symbol of his power, had been handed over to David by an unlikely source and in an unexpected manner. Saul's short-lived dynasty had come to an abrupt and ignominious end. With his death, the transfer of power began. David was poised to become the next king of Israel. God's hand-picked successor was about to ascend the throne of Israel and assume the responsibility of leading the people of Israel on God's behalf. The man who had repeatedly shown honor and respect for the Lord's anointed was about to *become* the Lord's anointed. And every event and circumstance up until this point had been part of God's sovereign plan for David's life. The timing was perfect, and the plan was unfolding just as God had ordained it.

2 Samuel 1:17-27

A Godly Response to Ungodliness

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:

*"Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!
How the mighty have fallen!
Tell it not in Gath,
publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.*

*"You mountains of Gilboa,
let there be no dew or rain upon 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 turned not back,
and the sword of Saul returned not empty.*

*"Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
In life and in death they were not divided;
they were swifter than eagles;
they were stronger than lions.*

*"You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.*

*"How the mighty have fallen
in the midst of the battle!*

*"Jonathan lies slain on your high places.
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
very pleasant have you been to me;
your love to me was extraordinary,
surpassing the love of women.*

*“How the mighty have fallen,
and the weapons of war perished!” – 2 Samuel 1:17-27 ESV*

What is the normal reaction someone has to the failure or fall of an enemy? It probably isn't to compose a beautiful poem or song lauding their accomplishments. Most people wouldn't go out of their way to praise the one who had stood against them and caused them pain and suffering. No, the most likely response would be a sense of relief mixed with a somewhat veiled form of glee. Any outward expressions of sorrow and regret would be considered good etiquette. For most, their true response would remain hidden from view. Inside, they would be celebrating what could only be seen as the wicked getting their just desserts.

But it is amazing to see how David reacted to the death of Saul. Here was a man who had made his sole mission in life to kill David, hunting him down relentlessly and making his life a living hell. Two different times, David spared the life of Saul, receiving Saul's assurance that he would no longer pursue him. But those words proved empty, and Saul's promises, unreliable. He continued to treat David with contempt and took every opportunity to bring about his death.

But when David heard that Saul was dead, he did not rejoice. There were no expressions of relief or prayers of thanksgiving to God for having delivered him from his enemy. No, David mourned. It would be easy to say that most of David's sorrow was directed at his friend Jonathan, the son of Saul, who was also killed on the field of battle that day. But this lament won't allow us to draw that conclusion. David goes out of his way to express his sorrow over the death of Saul, the very one who had, on two different occasions, tried to kill him by his own hand. He even praises the life of the one who had sought his death.

*For there the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled;
the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil. – 2 Samuel 1:21 NLT*

*The bow of Jonathan was powerful,
and the sword of Saul did its mighty work.
They shed the blood of their enemies
and pierced the bodies of mighty heroes. – 2 Samuel 1:22 NLT*

How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan! – 2 Samuel 1:23 NLT

O women of Israel, weep for Saul... – 2 Samuel 1:24 NLT

This lament reveals a great deal about David. It was not that David was above seeking vengeance or wishing ill will on those who proved to be his enemies. Psalm 28 reveals that David had the capacity for calling down the wrath of God on his enemies.

*Do not drag me away with the wicked—
with those who do evil—
those who speak friendly words to their neighbors*

*while planning evil in their hearts.
 Give them the punishment they so richly deserve!
 Measure it out in proportion to their wickedness.
 Pay them back for all their evil deeds!
 Give them a taste of what they have done to others.
 They care nothing for what the Lord has done
 or for what his hands have made.
 So he will tear them down,
 and they will never be rebuilt! – Psalm 28:3-5 NLT*

But throughout his ongoing conflict with Saul, David viewed him as the Lord's anointed. He was the king of Israel, appointed by God, and therefore, worthy of honor and respect. To attack Saul would have been to attack God. To dishonor the king would be to show disrespect to the One who had placed him on the throne in the first place. However, there is more to it than just a respect for the position. David legitimately loved Saul and considered him a father figure. When David had the first opportunity to take Saul's life, he referred to him as "father," assuring him, "May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you" (1 Samuel 24:12 ESV).

Later, in chapter 26, David had a second chance to take Saul's life, but declined, referring to himself as Saul's servant and telling him, "Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the Lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation" (1 Samuel 26:24 ESV). David had served in Saul's court. He had been Saul's armor bearer. He had been at Saul's side in battle and even in the throne room when Saul did battle with an evil spirit. David would play his lyre to calm Saul's troubled mind. As a result, Saul treated David like a son. He even allowed David to marry his daughter. David experienced no joy at Saul's death; his heart was broken.

The king was dead, and David's best friend was gone. The armies of Israel had been defeated, and the kingdom was demoralized. The pagan Philistines were celebrating their victory over the God of Israel. So, David had no cause for joy, and no reason to gloat or celebrate the demise of his former pursuer. He had learned to see things from God's perspective, and there was no joy in heaven. God was not celebrating the death of Saul or the fall of Israel to the Philistines. God finds no joy in the fall or failure of His people, so why should we? In fact, the Scriptures make it clear that God doesn't even rejoice in the death of the wicked.

"Do you think that I like to see wicked people die? says the Sovereign LORD. Of course not! I want them to turn from their wicked ways and live." – Ezekiel 18:23 NLT

"For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live." – Ezekiel 18:32 ESV

“As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?” – Ezekiel 33:11 NLT

David was a man after God’s own heart. If that phrase means anything, it means that David shared God’s compassion and concern for His chosen people. David may not have liked what Saul had done to him. He may not have enjoyed the suffering he had to endure at the hands of Saul. But he still viewed Saul as the king of Israel and as a son of God. Saul’s death brought David no pleasure, because he knew it brought no pleasure to God. So, he mourned, wept, and lamented. But he also celebrated, not Saul’s demise, but his life and legacy. He honored the man who had dishonored him. David offered praise for the life of the man who had offered rewards to anyone who would take David’s life. Not exactly a normal response, but it is a godly one.

Jesus Himself provided us with the godly response to wickedness in our lives. Even now, it goes against the grain. It pushes against our normal predisposition. But it provides us with the godly reaction to ungodliness and the righteous response to unrighteousness.

“You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbor’ and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.” – Matthew 5:42-48 NLT

2 Samuel 2:1-7

At Long Last

After this David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" And the Lord said to him, "Go up." David said, "To which shall I go up?" And he said, "To Hebron." So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David brought up his men who were with him, everyone with his household, and they lived in the towns of Hebron. And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When they told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul," David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "May you be blessed by the Lord, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. Now may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them." – 2 Samuel 2:1-7 ESV

David had waited a long time for this day and spent countless months enduring sleepless nights wondering what God's plan was for his life. His memory of being anointed by the prophet Samuel was distant, but it was always on his mind. What had it meant? Why had God selected him and then allowed him to endure the pain of loss and the ignominy of exile and a fugitive lifestyle for all those years? David had been hunted like an animal, betrayed by his own people, on two different occasions narrowly escaped death by his own father-in-law, and had been forced to find refuge in caves and among the enemies of Israel. But God had not left or forsaken him, and had not abandoned His plans for him. While David may not have always understood what God was doing *to him*, he trusted that God had good things in store *for him*. David's confidence in God is evident in the psalms he wrote about God, many of which were composed during the darkest days of his life.

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid? – Psalm 27:1 ESV*

*Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;
be gracious to me and answer me!
You have said, "Seek my face."
My heart says to you,
"Your face, Lord, do I seek."
Hide not your face from me.
Turn not your servant away in anger,
O you who have been my help.*

*Cast me not off; forsake me not,
O God of my salvation! – Psalm 27:7-9 ESV*

*Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.*

*Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him;
fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way,
over the man who carries out evil devices! – Psalm 37:5-7 ESV*

David had committed his way to the lord. He had trusted, not perfectly and not always peacefully. He had moments of doubt and made his fair share of decisions based on fear and not faith. But despite it all, he continued to place his fate in God's hands. Now God was revealing to David the plans He had made for him so long ago. Long after David's initial anointing by Samuel, he was finally anointed the king of Judah.

David had arrived in Hebron, a city within the territory of Judah, because he had sought the counsel of God. After he had received the sad news of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David didn't jump to conclusions or rush into action. He didn't just assume that, with Saul's death, he was now de facto king of Israel. Rather than rushing back into the land of Judah and claiming his rightful place as king, David waited and turned to God for guidance, asking, "Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?" When God said, "Go," David asked, "To which shall I go up?"

David wanted specifics. He wanted details. He had learned that God's will was not something to be taken lightly. Attempting to do God's will your way usually didn't end too well. In fact, it was dangerous. So, David wasn't taking any chances. When he arrived in Hebron, a city in the southern portion of Israel near the border with the Philistines, he received a warm welcome from the people of Judah.

There is not a lot of fanfare associated with David's anointing as king by the people of Judah. There doesn't appear to have been much pomp and circumstance associated with the momentous occasion. The text simply states, "And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah" (2 Samuel 2:4 ESV). Much like his initial anointing by Samuel, there is a certain sense of anonymity associated with this event. At this point, only the most southern tribe of Judah, David's own tribe, recognized him as king. The rest of the country was unaware of it. This is similar to what happened after Samuel had anointed David in his father's home. David returned to the pasture and his job as a shepherd. No announcements were made. No one else in the nation was aware of what happened. Now, after being anointed as king by the people of Judah, nothing much seemed to change. He had the backing of one tribe but the other eleven tribes were unaware that David was even alive.

As his first official duty as king, David sought to recognize the efforts of the men of Jabesh-gilead in retrieving the bodies of Saul and his sons and giving them proper burials. He blessed them for what they had done and assured them of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. The people of Jabesh-gilead had a special affection for Saul. Not long after his anointing as king of Israel, he had rescued them from the Ammonites, who had captured their city. Forty years later, when Saul's body had been hung on the wall of Beth-shan, the men of Jabesh-gilead had undertaken a very dangerous journey to retrieve it. David was grateful for what they had done and wanted them to know it. He also wanted them to inform them that he had been anointed king of Judah. Jabesh-gilead was on the other side of the Jordan and in the territory belonging to the tribe of Gad. In contacting them and blessing them for what they had done, David was employing diplomacy to unify the nation after their defeat by the Philistines and the fall of their king.

David knew the days ahead would be difficult and long. He couldn't just waltz into the land and expect everyone to greet him as their king. His acceptance would come in stages. In fact, as will become obvious in the remaining verses of this chapter, David's God-ordained kingship over all of Israel would face an immediate challenge. His work was cut out for him. Long-held hostilities between the northern and southern tribes were going to erupt, and men with ulterior motives and alternative plans would make David's ascension to the throne of Israel difficult and drawn out. But God's will would be done, and David was content to do God's will God's way, no matter how long it took.

2 Samuel 2:8-17

Here We Go Again

But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is at Gibeon. And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David. – 2 Samuel 2:8-17 ESV

The fact that verse 8 starts with the word “but” should reveal something. There is something about to happen that will stand in direct contrast to the events of the first seven verses. David had received a warm welcome from the people of Judah, which was to be expected, since he was a member of the tribe of Judah. David knew he would have a more difficult time winning over the rest of the tribes of Israel and convincing them to make him their king. That’s part of the reason behind his overtures to the men of Jabesh-gilead, because they were of the tribe of Gad. The nation of Israel, while having been united under the leadership of Saul, was still little more than a loose confederation of 12 tribes. Their relationships with each other were typically fractious and contentious. Now, David was attempting to unite them under his leadership and sovereignty as king.

But that’s not the only “but” in these verses. There was yet another challenge to David’s quest to become the king of Israel. It seems that not all of Saul’s sons died with him on the battlefield. There was one name left out: Ish-bosheth. He was the youngest of Saul’s four sons and would have been about 40 years old when his father and brothers fell at the battle of Gilboa. His given name was Eshbaal, which provides an interesting insight into King Saul. Baal was a Canaanite deity, and the name Eshbaal means “man of Baal.” So, Saul named his youngest son after a false god. Interestingly enough, the Jews would not repeat the name of this pagan idol, so they substituted the word, “boshesh”, which meant “shame” or “confusion.” So, Eshbaal became known as Ish-bosheth. And the son of Jonathan, who appears later in the story, was known as Mephibosheth.

But back to Ish-bosheth. It seems that this sole-surviving son of Saul either made it out of the alive or was not present. Abner, the commander of Saul's armies, decided to use Ish-bosheth as a tool to keep David from ascending to the throne. Keep in mind that Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, as was Abner, his uncle. So, it seems that Abner was attempting to keep the crown within the ranks of the Benjamites.

So, Saul "appointed him king over Gilead, the Geshurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and all Israel" (2 Samuel 2:9 ESV). This would have been way out of Abner's area of responsibility as Saul's former commander-in-chief. It was not up to him to choose and appoint the king. Israel was a theocracy ruled over by God Almighty. It was up to Him to choose their king, just as He had chosen Saul. Abner did not have authority or permission from God to do what he did. But he didn't let that small detail stand in his way.

Lest we think this was a small matter of little or no consequence, notice that Ish-bosheth was made king over Geshur. That was an area within the territory belonging to the tribe of Manasseh. Jezreel was in the land belonging to the tribe of Issachar. And then the text goes on to include the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and "all Israel." So, effectively, Abner crowned Ish-bosheth as king over all Israel, even countering David's claim to be king over Judah. We're told that Ish-bosheth reigned for two years, so this was no short-lived, flash-in-the-pan event. Once again, David found himself facing serious opposition and confronting another enemy within his own nation. Saul was dead, but his son was alive, and so was Abner. Abner had probably never forgotten the little lecture David had given him at Gibeah, after David had snuck into their camp and taken Saul's spear and water jug as he slept.

"Well, Abner, you're a great man, aren't you?" David taunted. "Where in all Israel is there anyone as mighty? So why haven't you guarded your master the king when someone came to kill him? This isn't good at all! I swear by the Lord that you and your men deserve to die, because you failed to protect your master, the Lord's anointed! Look around! Where are the king's spear and the jug of water that were beside his head?" – 1 Samuel 26:15-16 NLT

Abner even led his troops into battle against David and his men, meeting them at the pool of Gibeon. The initial conflict was an agreed-upon battle between 24 men, 12 from each side. This mini-battle ended in a draw, with all 24 men dead. But that was not the end of the hostilities. It was followed by a fierce battle between the forces of these two opposing kings, and many lost their lives that day. Like the American Civil War, this battle featured brothers fighting against brothers. It characterized the divided nature of the kingdom at that time. This was the contentious atmosphere in which David was forced to begin his reign.

David's path to the throne had been anything but easy, and it was not getting any smoother. He had been anointed by Samuel years earlier, but it had taken a long time before a crown was placed on his head. Even when it was, it represented the allegiance of a single tribe, his own. Winning over the other 11 tribes and solidifying his God-appointed position as King of Israel was going to be difficult and drawn out. There were still lessons for David to learn. God was

providentially shifting the mindset of the tribes of Israel from autonomous people groups living in isolation and under self-rule to that of a single nation united under one king. God was unifying what had been fractious. He was solidifying what had been disparate. He was making of the divided tribes of Israel a great nation that would be ruled by a king who was a man after His own heart. The days ahead would be rocky and filled with disappointment. Many would die. Others would lose loved ones as a result of the battles that followed. David's fledgling kingdom would suffer before it ever experienced any success. But it was all part of God's sovereign plan.

2 Samuel 2:18-32

A Divided Kingdom

And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was. And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still.

But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. And as the sun was going down they came to the hill of Ammah, which lies before Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. And the people of Benjamin gathered themselves together behind Abner and became one group and took their stand on the top of a hill. Then Abner called to Joab, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that the end will be bitter? How long will it be before you tell your people to turn from the pursuit of their brothers?" And Joab said, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, surely the men would not have given up the pursuit of their brothers until the morning." So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore.

And Abner and his men went all that night through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, and marching the whole morning, they came to Mahanaim. Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing from David's servants nineteen men besides Asahel. But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin 360 of Abner's men. And they took up Asahel and buried him in the tomb of his father, which was at Bethlehem. And Joab and his men marched all night, and the day broke upon them at Hebron. – 2 Samuel 2:18-32 ESV

As this chapter closes, we are given a glimpse into what will become a long-standing issue for the nation of Israel. With Saul's death, each tribe was left to fend for itself and determine its own fate. Abner, who was Saul's uncle, former commander-in-chief, and fellow Benjaminite, took it upon himself to crown Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, the king of "all Israel" (2 Samuel 2:9). David had already been appointed king by his own tribe, the tribe of Judah, but Abner refused to accept him as king. Suddenly, the nation was divided into factions, and their differences quickly escalated. Forces led by Abner and comprised mostly of his kinsmen did battle with David and the people of Judah. Abner and his men were routed and pursued by the Benjamites. One particular man, Asahel, who happened to be "as swift of foot as a wild gazelle," took it upon himself to catch Abner. Everyone knew that Abner was the driving force behind the battle. Ish-bosheth, the king, is not even mentioned as being at the battle.

But Asahel's enthusiasm got the best of him when Abner killed him. That led the brothers of Asahel to take up the chase to avenge their brother's death.

The whole affair ended in an awkward truce. As the two parties faced off once again, with Abner and the Benjamites on one side and the forces of Judah on the other, Abner called out, "Must we always be killing each other? Don't you realize that bitterness is the only result? When will you call off your men from chasing their Israelite brothers?" (2 Samuel 2:26 NLT). The battle had not been going Abner's way. He had already lost more than 300 men, while David's troops had lost only 20. He could see that things were not going his way, so he appealed to Joab to accept a cease-fire. "So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men stopped and pursued Israel no more, nor did they fight anymore" (2 Samuel 2:28 ESV).

The battle ended, but the hostilities between the northern and southern tribes of Israel were far from over. In fact, the 12 tribes of Israel would experience ongoing hostilities for generations to come. It is interesting to examine the blessings that Jacob gave to each of his 12 sons, the very men from whom the 12 tribes of Israel descended. In particular, Jacob said of Benjamin:

*"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
devouring his enemies in the morning
and dividing his plunder in the evening."* – Genesis 49:27 NLT

And here were Abner and the men of Benjamin, attempting to devour David and the men of Judah, refusing to accept David as their king.

Of Judah, Jacob said:

*"Judah, your brothers will praise you.
You will grasp your enemies by the neck.
All your relatives will bow before you.
Judah, my son, is a young lion
that has finished eating its prey.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down;
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?
The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from his descendants,
until the coming of the one to whom it belongs,
the one whom all nations will honor."* – Genesis 49:8-10 NLT

All your relatives will bow before you. Well, that isn't exactly what happened. Abner and the Benjaminites were having a difficult time giving up what they believed to be their right to be the ruling tribe. King Saul had been one of theirs and it only made sense that Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, should be the next king. But the only problem was that Ish-bosheth was not the man God had chosen. Jacob, under divine inspiration, had clearly communicated that all the tribes would

bow down to Judah. However, that fact was unacceptable to Abner and his fellow Benjamites. They had what they believed to be a better plan. Their agenda was driven by selfishness and self-centeredness. Abner was not willing to give up his role as the commander-in-chief of the king's armies. He had no love affair with Ish-bosheth. In fact, he was simply using him as a means to maintain his own power and significance. Abner was accustomed to being a man of influence and importance. The idea of that being taken away from him was unacceptable.

At the end of the day, Abner and the men of Benjamin were not fighting David and the forces of Judah; they were opposing God. They were resisting the will of God and attempting to achieve their own agenda, their way, and by force.

It is shocking to consider how easily we can find ourselves doing battle with God because we don't like what He is doing. Too often, we determine His will to be distasteful and unacceptable and rationalize a way to reject it or replace it with a plan of our own. Even if that results in conflict with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we'll stubbornly stick to our guns, justifying our actions as right and just. But in the end, we are going to war with God, and that is a battle we will never win.

Accepting the idea that God's will is always best is difficult. Especially when it seems to go against what we think is best for us. Abner couldn't imagine a kingdom without him in leadership. He was unwilling to accept the idea that he was not a part of this particular phase of God's plan. Self-importance and an inflated sense of self-worth can lead us to react to God in ways that are ultimately self-destructive. Rather than accept David as king, Abner was willing to risk it all for one last chance at glory. His actions left 381 men dead and a nation divided. Demanding our way and asserting our will always results in unnecessary destruction. It may not end in death, but it will always bring pain, suffering, division, jealousy, and broken relationships. In Galatians 5, Paul states, "When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear" (Galatians 5:19 NLT). Then he includes the following:

...hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division... – Galatians 5:20 NLT

Division is destructive, and it is usually a byproduct of our sinful natures, driving us to think about ourselves more than others. Unity is critical for God's people. God's desire was to unite 12 tribes under a single banner, led by one man. And God still desires that His people be one. That is why Jesus prayed in the garden:

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." – John 17:20-21 NLT

Unity requires humility. Self-importance and pride are antithetical to God's will for His people. Living for God requires dying to self. Experiencing His blessing both personally and corporately

requires that we submit to His will, whether we like it or not, and whether He chooses to use us or not.

2 Samuel 3:1-5

David's Achilles Heel

There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

And sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and his second, Chileab, of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; and the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital; and the sixth, Ithream, of Eglah, David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron. – 2 Samuel 3:1-5 ESV

It's already clear that David was considered a man after God's own heart. This was not a designation made by David or any other man. It was conferred upon him by the prophet of God under the divine inspiration of the Spirit of God. Years earlier, Samuel had broken the bad news to Saul. "But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart. The LORD has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command" (1 Samuel 13:14 NLT). Centuries later, the apostle Paul, while preaching to the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch, reconfirmed this divine designation of David as a man after His own heart.

"After that, God gave them judges to rule until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people begged for a king, and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. But God removed Saul and replaced him with David, a man about whom God said, 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.'" – Acts 13:20-22 NLT

But as an overview of David's life reveals, this lofty-sounding description did not mean he was perfect or without sin. Like any other man, David struggled with his own sinful nature. He could be prone to disobedience and doubt, just like anybody else. And he had his own unique set of sins with which he struggled. One, in particular, would prove to be a constant source of temptation and testing for him: Lust.

The opening lines of this chapter read, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David." But there was another battle brewing in the life of David. While he was growing stronger in his military position over Abner and the house of Saul, David was literally sowing the seeds of dissent and future discord that would rip his kingdom apart. It is important to note that God had made ample preparations for the arrival of a king on the scene. In fact, He had ordained that there would be a king over Israel. But He knew that the people would tend to want the wrong kind of king. So, He provided them with very clear commands:

"You are about to enter the land the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, you may think, 'We should select a king to rule over us like the other

nations around us.’ If this happens, be sure to select as king the man the Lord your God chooses. You must appoint a fellow Israelite; he may not be a foreigner.

*“The king must not build up a large stable of horses for himself or send his people to Egypt to buy horses, for the Lord has told you, ‘You must never return to Egypt.’ **The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord.** And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.” – Deuteronomy 17:14-117 NLT*

Somewhat hidden and overlooked in this divine command is God’s prohibition against polygamy. When it came to “the man the Lord your God chooses,” he must “not take many wives for himself.” And God was very clear as to His reason behind this command: “because they will turn his heart away from the Lord.” Yet, we read in these opening verses of chapter 3, “And sons were born to David at Hebron.” There is nothing wrong with that statement until you read the following verses and notice the various mothers listed: Ahinoam of Jezreel, Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel, Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur, and Eglah. And missing from the list is Michal, David’s first wife, the daughter of Saul. So effectively, at this early point in his reign, David had five wives. He would go on to have as many as eight.

It doesn’t take a stretch of the imagination to determine that David had an inordinate attraction to women, and he tended to act on it. Abigail is listed as one of his wives. She was the widow of Nabal, whom God destroyed. David barely let Nabal’s body grow cold before he took the dead man’s wife. David could be impulsive, and if we fast-forward to one of the most famous or infamous events in David’s life, we see that his impulsiveness led him to commit not only adultery, but murder. The eleventh chapter of 2 Samuel reveals the story of David and Bathsheba, a personal low point in David’s life that was permanently chronicled in the Scriptures. At a time when David the king should have been leading his troops in battle, he had determined to stay home. One day, while walking about the roof of his palace, he saw Bathsheba bathing on the roof of her nearby home. There are some who speculate that this was not the first time David spied Bathsheba bathing. It could have been the very reason he stayed home from battle. His act of voyeurism resulted in him having Bathsheba brought to him. Their illicit and unlawful liaison resulted in an unplanned pregnancy. Since Bathsheba’s husband, a soldier in David’s army, was off at war, it would be difficult to explain how his wife became pregnant. That’s when David launched an all-out effort to cover his sin. But his strategy failed, and he resorted to having Bathsheba’s husband murdered by commanding that he be exposed to enemy fire on the front lines.

This was not a stellar moment in David’s life. However, it offers a glimpse into a highly vulnerable area with which he struggled. David’s love affair with women proved to be problematic throughout his reign. In fact, if we look at the list of sons mentioned in these opening verses of chapter three, we see Amnon and Absalom. These two brothers, born to different mothers, would grow up to cause David much pain and suffering. In 2 Samuel 13, we have the sad story of Amnon’s rape of Tamar, his half-sister. Later on, in that very same chapter, we read of Absalom’s orchestration of Amnon’s murder, out of revenge for what he

had done to Tamar, his sister. Absalom would be forced into exile for what he had done, but would later return, only to orchestrate the overthrow of his father's kingdom.

Verses 1-5 of chapter 3 seem innocent enough, but they foreshadow a future filled with brokenness, pain, and suffering. It began with David's unwillingness to obey the command of God. While David never seemed to allow his many wives to lead him away from his love and worship for God, his son, Solomon, would. Solomon would follow in his father's footsteps, suffering from the same addictive tendencies. In fact, Solomon would outdo his father in a major way, eventually amassing for himself a staggering 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1-3). Just as God warned, these women, many of whom were from foreign nations and worshiped pagan gods, would eventually convince Solomon to erect altars and high places to their false gods throughout the land of Israel. The book of 1 Kings paints a very bleak picture of the closing days of Solomon's reign.

Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. – 1 Kings 11:1-8 ESV

And it all began with David. A little compromise and a few concessions. Giving in to the desires of the flesh. Refusing to obey God fully and heed His warning. The long-term ramifications for sin can be devastating. Yes, David would be forgiven by God when he repented of his sin with Bathsheba, but the child she bore would die as a result. There are consequences to disobedience. God blessed David's kingdom, but his many wives would prove to be a constant source of trouble in his life. David's battle with the house of Saul would be nothing compared to the spiritual war he would wage as a result of his own sin nature.

2 Samuel 3:6-21

When Sin Clouds Our Thinking

While there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner was making himself strong in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?" Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, "Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the Lord has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him.

And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you." And he said, "Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face." Then David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, saying, "Give me my wife Michal, for whom I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines." And Ish-bosheth sent and took her from her husband Paltiel the son of Laish. But her husband went with her, weeping after her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go, return." And he returned.

And Abner conferred with the elders of Israel, saying, "For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then bring it about, for the Lord has promised David, saying, 'By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.'" Abner also spoke to Benjamin. And then Abner went to tell David at Hebron all that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin thought good to do.

*When Abner came with twenty men to David at Hebron, David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. And Abner said to David, "I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace. – 2 Samuel 3:6-21
ESV*

Living in disobedience to God's commands can cloud our thinking. It renders us incapable of making wise decisions because we often make them in the flesh. As long as we harbor unconfessed sin in our hearts, our minds will suffer from cloudy thinking. That seems to have been David's problem. As we saw in the opening verses of this chapter, David had a problem with women; he was addicted to them. So much so that he ended up with as many as eight wives, in direct violation of God's law. Now, when Abner proposed to hand over to David the

other tribes and solidify his kingship, David readily agreed, but on one condition. He demanded that Michal, the daughter of Saul and his first wife, be returned to him. And this is even though Michal had already remarried. We are not given David's motives. Perhaps he was simply trying to solidify his right to be king over all the tribes and assumed that having Michal as his queen would win over the Benjamites. But the likely reason behind David's demand for Michal's return was tied to his love affair with women. He wanted her back. He emphasized to Ish-bosheth that he had every right to have her back because, he said, "I paid the bridal price of a hundred foreskins of the Philistines" (2 Samuel 3:14 ESV).

But, once again, David was making decisions with a mind clouded by sin. He wasn't clearly processing the ramifications of his actions. First of all, Michal had remarried, and God had made it clear in His law that it was unacceptable for anyone to remarry their former spouse after they had married again (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). And when David demanded that she be returned to him, she was removed from her home by force, leaving her husband in tears. This decision would come back to haunt David. His relationship with Michal would never be the same. Later in the book of 2 Samuel, there is a story recorded of when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. David had arranged for a royal procession, complete with music and joyous celebration. He led the parade, dancing with joy before the cart carrying the Ark of the Covenant. But we read what Michal thought about David's exhibition.

As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she despised him in her heart. – 2 Samuel 6:16 ESV

But demanding the return of Michal was not the only poor decision David made. His negotiations with Abner would prove problematic. This man had been the one to convince Ish-bosheth, the sole remaining son of Saul, to declare himself the rightful king of Israel. Abner was the one who led the armies of Ish-bosheth against David, and he is the one who killed Asahel, the brother of Joab. Abner was a self-seeking opportunist who would do anything to feather his own nest. He had no love affair with Ish-bosheth; he was simply using him. And when Ish-bosheth confronted Abner about sleeping with one of his concubines, Abner became furious and threatened to switch sides – which he did. He had just been defeated by David's forces in battle, and he knew that Ish-bosheth was not fit to be king. So, he made a deal with David, completely motivated by self-preservation. David, his mind clouded by sin, unwisely accepted his offer.

Had David been thinking clearly, he would have seen through Abner's overtures, and recognized that Abner had no allegiance to him or his kingdom. He was in it for himself. And David didn't even seem to consider how his decision would impact Joab, his friend and commander-in-chief. In fact, when David made this decision, Joab was just returning from a successful raid, where he and David's men had captured a great deal of plunder. David never seems to consider how Joab would take the news of his willing acceptance of Abner's offer. As a result, David's decision brought about further and unnecessary bloodshed.

It was one thing for David to refuse to kill king Saul, the Lord's anointed, when he had the chance. But to knowingly overlook the unfaithfulness of Abner and welcome him back with open arms was another thing. Throughout his lifetime, David would consistently demonstrate a tendency to avoid doing the right thing. Years later, when his own son Absalom had his half-brother Amnon murdered for raping his sister, Tamar, David took no action. He simply allowed Absalom to run away. There was no punishment meted out. Absalom was not forced to pay for his sin. When Joab tricked David into allowing Absalom to return, he once again avoided the inevitable, refusing to meet with his son. His lack of action resulted in Absalom's growing resentment and eventual attempt to overthrow David's rule.

Sin clouds our thinking. It makes it impossible to hear clearly from God. It blinds us to reality and casts a mist over the circumstances of life. We are unable to see things as they truly are. Our discernment becomes impaired, our spiritual vision becomes blurry, and our capacity to make wise choices weakens. David was still a man after God's own heart, but he was still a man who had to deal with the reality of indwelling sin.

Paul gives us a remedy for when we find our thinking clouded by sin:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. — Romans 12:1-2 NLT

2 Samuel 3:22-30

The Complexity of Sin

Just then the servants of David arrived with Joab from a raid, bringing much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David at Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. When Joab and all the army that was with him came, it was told Joab, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he has let him go, and he has gone in peace." Then Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you. Why is it that you have sent him away, so that he is gone? You know that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you and to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing."

When Joab came out from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know about it. And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach, so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother. Afterward, when David heard of it, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever guiltless before the Lord for the blood of Abner the son of Ner. May it fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house, and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge or who is leprous or who holds a spindle or who falls by the sword or who lacks bread!" So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon. – 2 Samuel 3:22-30 ESV

Sin is simple to commit. For most of us, it comes far easier than we would like. We can find ourselves committing sins as the result of the slightest temptation. But the ramifications for sin are rarely simple or easy. Sins can be addictive and habit-forming, with one leading to another, then another. Our sins can lead others to sin. That happens to be the case in these verses concerning David, Abner, and Joab. David, in his desire to have Michal, his first wife, returned to him, made an unwise decision that was unsanctioned by God. In exchange for Michal and the allegiance of the rest of the tribes of Israel, David made an alliance with Abner, the former commander-in-chief of Saul's army. This was the very same man who had convinced Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, to claim the throne as the rightful heir of Saul. Abner, without God's counsel of approval, appointed Ish-bosheth king of the Benjamites and all the other tribes of Israel. In doing so, he stood against not only David, but God, who had chosen David to be Saul's replacement. Abner did not do what he did in ignorance. His plan was deliberate and premeditated.

"For some time past you have been seeking David as king over you. Now then bring it about, for the Lord has promised David, saying, 'By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.'" – 2 Samuel 3:16-17 ESV

His decision to make Ish-bosheth king of Israel was an act of rebellion against God's appointed choice. Yet, David, in his desire to get his wife back and in hopes of solidifying the kingdom, made an agreement with Abner.

When Joab, a commander in David's army, returned from battle with his troops, he heard the news of what David had done and was shocked. He even confronted David, saying, "What have you done? What do you mean by letting Abner get away? You know perfectly well that he came to spy on you and find out everything you're doing!" (2 Samuel 3:24-25 NLT). Joab was not only appalled by David's naiveté, but with his insensitivity to what Abner had done to his brother, Asahel. From Joab's point of view, David should have been seeking to punish Abner for murder, not making alliances with him. Upon leaving David's company, Abner made his way to Hebron, a city of refuge. God had commanded that the Israelites establish six cities of refuge within the promised land.

When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, designate cities of refuge to which people can flee if they have killed someone accidentally. These cities will be places of protection from a dead person's relatives who want to avenge the death. The slayer must not be put to death before being tried by the community. – Numbers 35:10-12 NLT

Notice the very important qualifier: "if they have killed someone by accident." This had not been the case in Abner's killing of Asahel. He had run Asahel through with the butt-end of a spear. There was nothing about it that had been accidental. And yet, Abner, knowing that Joab would be seeking vengeance for the death of his brother, sought refuge in Hebron. Once again, our sins have a way of not only compounding, but of infecting those around us. David's lust for Michal, who had remarried and was therefore off limits for David, caused him to make an unwise allegiance with Abner. Rather than punish him for his murder of Asahel, David rewarded him with freedom. Which then caused Joab to take matters into his own hands. He did what David had been unwilling to do. And what he did was in keeping with the commands of God. Consider carefully what God had said about the matter:

But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. And if he struck him down with a stone tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. ¹⁸ Or if he struck him down with a wooden tool that could cause death, and he died, he is a murderer. The murderer shall be put to death. The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. And if he pushed him out of hatred or hurled something at him, lying in wait, so that he died, or in enmity struck him down with his hand, so that he died, then he who struck the blow shall be put to death. He is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him. – Numbers 35:16-21 ESV

Abner deserved death for what he had done, not a get-out-of-jail-free card from the king. Joab did what David should have done. But in his life, David showed a disinclination to deal with those whose actions deserved judgment. When David's son, Amnon, raped his half-sister,

Tamar, David did nothing to punish him. When Absalom, Tamar's brother, arranged for the murder of Amnon, David took no action. Years later, after David had allowed Absalom to return to Jerusalem unpunished, Absalom fomented a rebellion against his own father. And what did David do? He abandoned the city. He gave up. He walked away.

If David believed what Joab did to Abner was wrong, he did nothing about it. Rather than punish Joab, he pronounced a curse on he and his family, saying:

"Joab and his family are the guilty ones. May the family of Joab be cursed in every generation with a man who has open sores or leprosy or who walks on crutches or dies by the sword or begs for food!" – 2 Samuel 3:29 NLT

David placed all the blame on Joab, and distanced himself from what had happened. This was probably great political policy, since David was attempting to establish his kingdom. He feared the reaction of the Benjamites when they heard of Abner's death. But David's curse on Joab appears to be completely uncalled for and without divine authorization. Abner had been a traitor and a murderer. He had led a rebellion against the God-ordained king of Israel. Rather than surrender, he brutally murdered his pursuer, Asahel. And according to the command of God, he deserved death. In fact, David had violated the very word of God by making his agreement with Abner. In essence, he had allowed Abner to buy his way out of his guilt. Listen to what God has to say about that:

Also, you must never accept a ransom payment for the life of someone judged guilty of murder and subject to execution; murderers must always be put to death. And never accept a ransom payment from someone who has fled to a city of refuge, allowing a slayer to return to his property before the death of the high priest. – Numbers 35:31-32 NLT

The truly fascinating thing about all of this is David's reaction to the death of Abner. How much of it is based on political posturing, we will never know. Was David simply attempting to win over the northern tribes by assuring them of his love for Abner? Only David and God know for sure. But suffice it to say that David showed far more sadness over the death of Abner than he did for Asahel, one of his own men, whom Abner murdered. There is no record of David having mourned Asahel's death. No tears were shed. No memorial service was held. And yet, David will go out of his way to memorialize and eulogize the death of a traitor and a murderer.

Sin has a way of growing like a cancer. Unchecked, it can spread, infecting our life and destroying our spiritual health. Not only that, it can contaminate those around us. It is never simple or easily controlled. We may think we have a handle on our sin and are able to manage it, but we are deluded and naive. Sin is dangerous and deadly, and when we attempt to apply logic to our sins in order to rationalize our behavior, we run the risk of opening the door to additional and even more deadly forms of rebellion against God.

The apostle John gives us some sobering counsel regarding the sin in our lives:

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts. – 1 John 1:8-10 NLT

2 Samuel 3:31-39

When Helping God Out Hurts

Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And King David followed the bier. They buried Abner at Hebron. And the king lifted up his voice and wept at the grave of Abner, and all the people wept. And the king lamented for Abner, saying,

*"Should Abner die as a fool dies?
Your hands were not bound;
your feet were not fettered;
as one falls before the wicked
you have fallen."*

And all the people wept again over him. Then all the people came to persuade David to eat bread while it was yet day. But David swore, saying, "God do so to me and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!" And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people. So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner. And the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? And I was gentle today, though anointed king. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are more severe than I. The Lord repay the evildoer according to his wickedness!" – 2 Samuel 3:31-39 ESV

There is a lot going on in this passage. It is a convoluted and confusing mixture of different events that make it difficult to truly determine what is going on. Abner, the former commander-in-chief of Saul's armies, has been killed by Joab, the general over David's armies. This had been an act of vengeance because Abner had killed Joab's brother, Asahel. Abner had just made an alliance with David, promising that he could bring the northern tribes of Israel under David's rule. He had also agreed to David's demand to return Michal, David's first wife, even though she had already remarried. The apparent motivation behind Abner's switching of sides from Ish-bosheth to David, was because Ish-bosheth had confronted him about having sexual relations with one of his concubines. Abner, who was the one who had made it possible for Ish-bosheth to be king over Israel in the first place, didn't like Ish-bosheth's tone. As a result, he decided to hand the kingdom of Ish-bosheth over to David. Abner was a self-seeking opportunist who, from the very beginning, was looking out for his own interests. He had no dedication to or devotion for David. He simply knew that he would be better off moving his allegiances to the winning side.

But Joab threw a wrench into Abner and David's plans by pursuing and killing Abner for murdering his brother. While this outcome caught David off guard, it shouldn't have surprised him. He had just made a treaty with a man who was a known traitor and murderer. Not only that, he had done so without consulting Joab or at least letting him know beforehand what he

was going to do. Joab was caught off guard and reacted with surprise, anger, and retribution against Abner.

Yet, when David received the news of Abner's death, he reacted with shock and sadness. He lashed out at Joab, even pronouncing horrific curses on him and his household, for generations to come. In essence, David publicly chastised Joab for his killing of Abner, declaring for everyone to hear that it was his desire that God make every descendant of Joab suffer from a plague, be crippled, die by the sword, become beggars, or end their lives destitute. This sounds like a bit of an overreaction. What was the motivation behind David's response? Why did he react so strongly to what Joab had done? The passage does not say. There are many commentators who go out of their way to justify David's actions as righteous and just, reflecting his godly heart. But there may be more going on here than meets the eye. David had made his allegiance with Abner to solidify his kingdom. Abner had promised to bring the tribe of Benjamin, as well as the other northern tribes, under David's rule. Now that plan was in jeopardy. David most likely feared that when the people of Benjamin heard that Abner, a fellow tribesman and hero, had been killed, they might renege on their commitment. David's hopes of a unified kingdom could evaporate right before his eyes. So, he launched an emergency PR campaign.

David publicly chastised Joab. He could have done so in private, but he wanted everyone to know his displeasure with Joab's actions. Not only that, David planned a very public display demonstrating his sadness over Abner's death. David even commanded Joab to publicly mourn the man who had killed his own brother. "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner" (2 Samuel 3:31 ESV). David also called for a national day of mourning and arranged for a well-attended, highly visible state funeral for Abner.

David, not done with his public demonstration of sadness over Abner's death, refused to eat or drink anything all day, refusing the encouragement of the people to break his fast. The result? "And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them, as everything that the king did pleased all the people" (2 Samuel 3:36 ESV). In other words, David's actions accomplished exactly what he intended. The passage goes on to state, "So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner the son of Ner" (2 Samuel 3:37 ESV).

One of the things that happens when we study a character like David, is that we come to the passage with preconceived ideas about his character that can influence our interpretation of the text. Because we know that God considered David a man after his own heart, we automatically assume that David's actions were always just. But a cursory look at David's life reveals that this was not the case. David was a man, and like any man, he had a sin nature that sometimes determined his actions. There were times when David did the right thing. But there were just as many times when he did the wrong thing. I believe David's actions surrounding Abner's death reflect the latter. He was simply trying to save his kingdom. He was doing everything IN HIS POWER to do damage control. He desperately wanted a unified kingdom and

he probably justified his actions as being well within God's will. After all, he was just trying to bring about the very thing God had wanted all along: His ascension to the throne of ALL Israel.

But was all of this part of God's will? Was this the way God wanted things done? Had David sought God's will before he made his alliance with Abner? Just like the time when David decided to seek refuge and safety in the land of the Philistines, God allowed him to do so, but David's determination to do things his way would come back to haunt him. There are far too many times when we can convince ourselves that God somehow needs our help. In our attempt to assist God in accomplishing His will for our lives, we come up with self-made plans that end up doing more harm than good.

Abraham attempted to help God fulfill His promise to make of he and Sarah a great nation, He suggested that God allow him to make one of his household servants his heir. After all, Abraham was old and his wife was barren. God needed a plan B, but when God refused Abraham's idea, Sarah came up with one of her own. She suggested that Abraham take her maidservant and impregnate her. Abraham eagerly agreed to his wife's plan and, while Hagar did bear him a son, God refused to allow Ishmael to serve as Abraham's substitute heir. God had other plans.

I believe David was attempting to help God out. After years of wandering and waiting, he was ready to establish his kingdom once and for all. Abner had provided him with a prime opportunity to speed up the process. Yet David conveniently overlooked the red flags that accompanied his alliance with Abner. He demanded and received his wife back, even though she had to be removed by force from her current husband. In doing so, David violated the law of God. Then David had to overlook Abner's guilt regarding the murder of Asahel. David even allowed him to escape to Hebron, a city of refuge. Abner did not meet the necessary requirements as provided by the law. Out of political convenience, David had ignored the possible ramifications his decision would have on Joab, one of his most faithful companions and bravest military leaders. In an attempt to solidify and secure his kingdom, David had been willing to make some risky and unwise decisions.

And yet, as God is so prone to do, He blessed David in spite of David. God did not need David's help. He had not commanded David to make an alliance with Abner. And because David didn't seek God's input, his decision resulted in Abner's death and his rash cursing of Joab and his family. Ultimately, it also resulted in the murder of Ish-bosheth by two assassins who thought they were doing David a favor.

Decisions made by godly men, but without God's help, never result in godly outcomes. They produce confusion, dissension, and difficulties of all kinds. And while God's will always ends up being accomplished, our attempts to help Him out usually make the experience far more difficult than it needed to be.

2 Samuel 4

Crippled by Self-Sufficiency

When Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, his courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed. Now Saul's son had two men who were captains of raiding bands; the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon a man of Benjamin from Beeroth (for Beeroth also is counted part of Benjamin; the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have been sojourners there to this day).

Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.

Now the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, set out, and about the heat of the day they came to the house of Ish-bosheth as he was taking his noonday rest. And they came into the midst of the house as if to get wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. When they came into the house, as he lay on his bed in his bedroom, they struck him and put him to death and beheaded him. They took his head and went by the way of the Arabah all night, and brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The Lord has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring." But David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth?" And David commanded his young men, and they killed them and cut off their hands and feet and hanged them beside the pool at Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-bosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner at Hebron. – 2 Samuel 4 ESV

Up to this point, the transition of the kingdom from Saul to David had been anything but smooth. With Saul's death, you would have thought that the path for David's God-ordained ascension to the throne would have been cleared of all roadblocks. But then Abner showed up and convinced Saul's son, Ish-bosheth to claim the crown for himself. This set up a long, drawn-out conflict between the tribe of Judah and the remaining tribes of Israel. Then, when David's men routed the army of Ish-bosheth, you would have thought that Abner, the commander of Ish-bosheth's troops would have recommended surrender. But it would not be until Ish-bosheth made a stink about Abner sleeping with one of his concubines that Abner decided to turn his back on the house of Saul and offer his services and the allegiance of the remaining tribes of Israel to David.

David, in an effort to solidify his claim to the crown, took Abner up on his offer and made a peace treaty with him, with a special addendum, that Ish-bosheth return David's wife, Michal,

to him. The only problem with David's deal with Abner is that he never informed Joab, his own military commander. What made this oversight particularly blatant was that Abner had murdered Joab's brother, Ahasel. David's treaty with Abner surprised and offended Joab, and so, he took matters into his own hands and murdered Abner. This forced David into damage control, prompting him to throw a huge state funeral for Abner and to pronounce a devastating curse on his own military commander.

Now things were in a state of turmoil. Upon hearing of Abner's death, Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul and the king of the remaining tribes of Israel, lost his nerve. Up until that point, he had been little more than a puppet king, relying heavily on Abner's charisma and leadership to survive. Now that Abner was dead, he was on his own, a thought that left him scared to death. Not only that, the people of Israel had no confidence in his ability to lead the nation without Abner's help. In this unstable state, Ish-bosheth found himself in a highly vulnerable spot. And it led two men, Rechab and Baanah, to plot and carry out the assassination of the king. They believed, that with Ish-bosheth out of the way, they could hand over the kingdom to David, and receive a reward for their act of allegiance.

It does not appear that any of this was God's will. This was clearly the work of two men, who were taking matters into their own hands and attempting to facilitate the outcome that best suited their own personal interests. Like Abner, Rechab and Baanah had no love affair with David; they were in it for what they could get out of it. Ish-bosheth was nothing more than a means to an end, with the end being their own personal ambitions.

What's important to note is that all of this began with David's decision to make an alliance with Abner, a plan that had been concocted by Abner, but not ordained or approved by God. Nowhere do we see David seeking or receiving God's permission to sign a deal with Abner. And in doing so, David created a highly unstable and potentially dangerous atmosphere. God didn't need David's help in uniting the kingdom. He had not sanctioned a treaty with Abner. And because David chose to act without God's approval, Abner ended up dead, Joab ended up cursed by David, Ish-bosheth ended up assassinated by Rechab and Baanah, and those two men would end up executed by David's order. Their heads and hands were cut off and their bodies hung up for public display. What a great way to start a kingdom!

In the middle of this mess there is one subtle ray of light but it's easy to miss. In verse four, there is the mention of Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. This verse is almost a parenthetical statement that comes out of the blue. It doesn't seem to fit the context, but it sets up something that will happen later in the story and is recorded in chapter nine.

Mephibosheth was the grandson of Saul, and as such, he would have been a potential heir to the throne of Saul. But he was only five-years old and suffered from a physical disability. In the middle of all the death, deceit, self-centered promotional efforts, jockeying for position, seeking of rewards, and looking out for number one, Mephibosheth's name appears as a subtle hint that it is the helpless and hopeless, the overlooked and the down-and-out whom God protects. Abner could make deals, but he would eventually have to deal with God. Rechab and

Baanah could come up with plans to line their pockets and improve their futures, but ultimately, their futures were in God's hands. Joab could seek to mete out revenge on his own terms, but would learn that vengeance, when not left up to God can end up as anything but a blessing. David could attempt to speed up his ascension to the throne of all Israel, but he would learn the hard way, that trying to accomplish God's will your own way rarely ends well.

We're told that Mephibosheth "was crippled in his feet." Could it be that this little description was meant to provide a not-so-subtle insight into how David, in an attempt to help God out, was actually crippling his own kingship. The helplessness of Mephibosheth provides a dramatic reminder of David's need for God. This young boy, who lacked the ability to walk on his own, would find himself at the mercy of the king. He would have no other choice than to entrust his life to the sovereign will of his grandfather's replacement. And David was still learning that his life, his kingdom, and his future rule over the house of Israel were completely at the mercy of God Almighty. Waiting on and resting in Him is always the best course of action.

2 Samuel 5:1-10

A New King and a New Capital

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.'" So 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 king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off"—thinking, "David cannot come in here." Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. And David said on that day, "Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack 'the lame and the blind,' who are hated by David's soul." Therefore it is said, "The blind and the lame shall not come into the house." And David lived in the stronghold and called it the city of David. And David built the city all around from the Millo inward. And David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him. — 2 Samuel 5:1-10 ESV

"And they anointed David king over Israel." The great day finally arrived but it had not been without its difficulties and delays. There had probably been moments when David felt like it would never happen. It was in those moments of doubt that David had been tempted to take matters into his own hands and speed up the process. But the will of God can't be rushed. Our impatience and subsequent impulsive attempts to help God out will never cause God to alter His timing or the outcome He has in mind. In most cases, it will simply complicate things, making our wait seem even longer and the circumstances surrounding our lives even harder.

But the day finally arrived when David was crowned king over all 12 tribes of Israel. The elders of Israel, representing the 11 other tribes (because Judah had already anointed David king) went to Hebron and formally announced their recognition of David as their king. It is interesting to note that they confessed that David had been the one who had really led Israel, even during the days of Saul. David had been the military leader. He was the one who had commanded the troops and brought about the victories over their enemies. Then they also acknowledged that they had known all along that David had been God's choice to be the next king of Israel.

And the Lord told you, "You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be Israel's leader." — 2 Samuel 5:2 NLT

In the ancient Near East, the term, "shepherd" was used to describe either a divinity, a king, or ruler. So, they were admitting that they had known all along that David had been the God-

appointed ruler over Israel. But they had never done anything about it up until this point. This awareness on their part helps explain the reaction of Saul to David's success. He feared David and was jealous of him. It wasn't just that they sang songs about him, it was that he knew the rumors that David was to be the shepherd of Israel. So, he had set out to kill David.

A lesson to learn from this story is that it is possible to know the will of God and refuse to accept it. We can be completely aware of what it is that God wants us to do and then simply refuse to do it. If they had known all along that David was the God-appointed replacement for Saul, why had they not made David king years earlier? Knowing God's will is one thing, obeying it is another.

But as the old saying goes: Better late, then never. They finally crowned David king. The year was 1004 B.C. and David was 30-years old. He had already reigned seven years over Judah and he would reign an additional 33 years over the unified kingdom of Israel. So, David would enjoy a four-decades-long rule, and he would prove to be the greatest king Israel ever had. His reign would have its highs and lows, its moments of glory and its days of heart-crushing humiliation and defeat. Like any man, David would make mistakes. He would leave behind a legacy filled with all kinds of victories on the battle field as well as defeats in his own home. There was his affair with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. There was the rape of his daughter, Tamar by her half-brother Amnon, followed closely by Amnon's murder by Tamar's brother, Absalom.

David would prove to be a great king, but not always a great father. His reign would be marked by courage, wisdom, and a willingness to serve God. But he would have his moments of self-inflicted pain and suffering because of his own impulsiveness and pride. David was not a perfect man, but he was a godly man. He had a heart for God and a desire to serve Him. And the one thing that set David apart from Saul and so many of the other kings of Israel, was his heart of repentance. David messed up regularly and sometimes, spectacularly, but he was always quick to repent. He desired to be right with God. He even invited God to investigate his heart and expose anything in it that might be offensive to God but oblivious to himself.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life." – Psalm 139:23-24 NLT

This chapter is really a snapshot of the true beginning of David's reign as king, and it chronicles David's capture of the city of Jerusalem. The passage rather matter-of-factly states, "the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites" (2 Samuel 5:6 ESV). David was searching for a capital, a city from which to rule over his newly unified nation. He had been using Hebron in the south, but it would prove too distant from all the other tribes to make a good capital. Jerusalem was centrally located and was situated on a mountain top surrounded by valleys, which made it easy to defend.

But there was something far more important about Jerusalem and the site on which it was located than its natural defensive capabilities. It was located on Mount Moriah. That is the same mountain top on which God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22).

The city of Jerusalem itself has ties all the way back to Melchizedek, who was the king to which Abraham offered a tenth of his spoils taken in battle. The Genesis account lists Melchizedek as the king of Salem, which was to become the city of Jerusalem. The author of Hebrews would later compare Melchizedek with Jesus:

This Melchizedek was king of the city of Salem and also a priest of God Most High. When Abraham was returning home after winning a great battle against the kings, Melchizedek met him and blessed him. Then Abraham took a tenth of all he had captured in battle and gave it to Melchizedek. The name Melchizedek means “king of justice,” and king of Salem means “king of peace.” There is no record of his father or mother or any of his ancestors—no beginning or end to his life. He remains a priest forever, resembling the Son of God. – Hebrews 7:1-3 NLT

The mountain range on which Jerusalem sits also contains the Mount of Olives, the very place from which Jesus ascended back into heaven after his death and resurrection. It is also the place to which He will return at His second coming. The very same mountain on which Jerusalem sits was where Jesus was crucified. The very location where Abraham had been commanded to offer up his son Isaac would be the same place where God offered up His one and only Son for the sins of the world.

Jerusalem had great significance. It was to be David’s capital and eventually the home of the Temple, built by David’s son, Solomon. Jerusalem would be where Jesus had His triumphal entry, but also His trials and condemnation to death for claiming to be the Son of God. It would be outside the walls of Jerusalem, the city of peace, that Jesus would be hung on a cross and left to die. Jesus would one day weep over the city of Jerusalem, saying:

“How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace. But now it is too late, and peace is hidden from your eyes. Before long your enemies will build ramparts against your walls and encircle you and close in on you from every side. They will crush you into the ground, and your children with you. Your enemies will not leave a single stone in place, because you did not accept your opportunity for salvation.” – Luke 19:43-44 NLT

David was choosing Jerusalem, “the city of peace” to be his capital. But over the centuries, it would know times of peace and times of difficulty. It would contain the Temple of God, but many of its inhabitants would act as if God did not exist. Even in the days of Jesus, He recognized that their love for God had waned and the days of God’s judgment were coming. But Jerusalem still holds a special place in the heart of God and it will be from the city of

Jerusalem that the second David, the King of kings and Lord of lords will rule and reign when Christ sets up His kingdom on earth.

2 Samuel 5:11-16

A Different Set of Standards

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house. And David knew that the Lord had established him 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 who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. – 2 Samuel 5:11-16 ESV

Verses 11-12 appear as almost a parenthetical statement, but are intended to provide further proof of David's increasing control and power over Israel. Hiram, the king of Tyre, reigned from 980-947 B.C., so that would mean that his gift of cedar trees, carpenters, and masons would have been much later in David's reign, long after he had established Jerusalem as his capital. But they give evidence of the growing recognition of David as the rightful king of Israel. News of his crowning as king over all of Israel had spread. As we shall see in the next section of this same chapter, even the Philistines had heard the news and would try to do something about it. Only, they would not come bearing gifts or offering to construct David a palace. But more about that later.

What stands out in these verses is the statement, "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" (2 Samuel 5:12 ESV). David was fully aware that his reign had been God's doing, from beginning to end. Every phase of his life, from his original anointing by Samuel up until this moment, had been God's doing. And David also knew that his ascension to the throne of Israel had not been for his own sake, but for the sake of the people of Israel. He had been made king by God so that he might rule the people of God justly and righteously. He was God's hand-picked agent, His earthly representative, chosen to care for and protect His people. David fully understood his divine role, later putting his thoughts in the form of a psalm:

*How the king rejoices in **your** strength, O Lord!
He shouts with joy because **you** give him victory.
For **you** have given him his heart's desire;
you have withheld nothing he requested. Interlude*

***You** welcomed him back with success and prosperity.
You placed a crown of finest gold on his head.
He asked **you** to preserve his life,
and **you** granted his request.
The days of his life stretch on forever.
Your victory brings him great honor,*

*and **you** have clothed him with splendor and majesty.
You have endowed him with eternal blessings
 and given him the joy of your presence.
 For the king trusts in the **Lord**.
 The unfailing love of the **Most High** will keep him from stumbling.* – Psalm 21:1-7 NLT

And yet, even with David's awareness of his God-ordained role and his complete dependence upon God's good favor for his reign to be successful, he still had the capacity to disobey the very One who made his kingship possible. Verse 13 provides a stark reminder that David had a dark side, and it is not to be overlooked or ignored. The author could have left it out, but under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, this less-attractive aspect of David's life was included. It simply states, "And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David" (2 Samuel 5:13 ESV).

It would be easy to read this as just another indication of David's growing power and significance. For any other king of any other nation, that would probably be an accurate interpretation. Except that David was NOT just another king, and Israel was far from just another nation. He was God's hand-picked ruler over His chosen people and, as such, David answered to a higher authority and was held to a higher standard. It is important to remember what God told the people of Israel any man who would rule as the king of Israel.

"The king must not take many wives for himself, because they will turn his heart away from the Lord. And he must not accumulate large amounts of wealth in silver and gold for himself.

"When he sits on the throne as king, he must copy for himself this body of instruction on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He must always keep that copy with him and read it daily as long as he lives. That way he will learn to fear the Lord his God by obeying all the terms of these instructions and decrees. This regular reading will prevent him from becoming proud and acting as if he is above his fellow citizens. It will also prevent him from turning away from these commands in the smallest way. And it will ensure that he and his descendants will reign for many generations in Israel."— Deuteronomy 17:17-20 NLT

God's king was not to be like all the other kings. He was to operate according to a different set of standards. What was acceptable and expected for other kings of other nations was off-limits for the king of God's chosen people. Other kings might be able to use their power and authority to justify all kinds of self-satisfying, self-promoting actions, but not David. Yet, we see David continuing to take multiple wives, in direct disobedience to God's command.

The second part of the Deuteronomy passage provides an essential element of God's command for His king. He was to be a man who knew the words of God well. He was to always keep God's word before himself. He was to have the instructions of God read to him daily. Why? So, he would learn to fear the Lord his God **by obeying all the terms of these instructions and**

decrees. David wasn't free to approach God's commands cafeteria-style, choosing those that seemed most attractive and ignoring the ones he didn't like. He was to obey them ALL. That included God's commands regarding the taking of many wives because God knew that the king's disobedience to that command would ultimately result in the distancing of the king's heart from God.

One of the things David failed to recognize was that his reign was setting the standard for future kings. What he did, they would do. Future generations of Israelite kings would follow his lead, and many would magnify his small acts of disobedience. What David did in moderation, his heirs would do to excess. Even David's construction of a personal palace, with the help of King Hiram, would prove to set a precedent for future kings, and God would have strong words for them.

*And the Lord says, "What sorrow awaits Jehoiakim,
who builds his palace with forced labor.
He builds injustice into its walls,
for he makes his neighbors work for nothing.
He does not pay them for their labor.
He says, 'I will build a magnificent palace
with huge rooms and many windows.
I will panel it throughout with fragrant cedar
and paint it a lovely red.'
But a beautiful cedar palace does not make a great king!
Your father, Josiah, also had plenty to eat and drink.
But he was just and right in all his dealings.
That is why God blessed him.
He gave justice and help to the poor and needy,
and everything went well for him.
Isn't that what it means to know me?"
says the Lord.
"But you! You have eyes only for greed and dishonesty!
You murder the innocent,
oppress the poor, and reign ruthlessly." – Jeremiah 22:13-17 NLT*

David's reign was in its early stages, and every step he took and decision he made at this early juncture would prove to be critical. His choices would have long-term ramifications. Even reading the list of sons born to him by his growing harem of wives indicates that David's actions had future implications. There, nestled discreetly in the list of sons, is the name of Solomon, the very one who would follow David as king of Israel. And he would prove to be his father's son, in more ways than one.

*Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh:
Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning
which the Lord had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with*

them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father. – 1 Kings 11:1-4 ESV

David was God’s king. But he didn’t always rule God’s way. As a follower of Jesus Christ, I am God’s son, His heir, but that doesn’t mean I always live like one. Obedience is the true mark of sonship. Fearing God begins with obeying God. Even Jesus said, “If you love me, obey my commandments” (John 14:15 NLT). The apostle John took it a step further, writing, “And we can be sure that we know him if we obey his commandments” (1 John 2:3 NLT). The most significant proof of David’s love for God would be found in his obedience to the commands of God. And the same thing holds true for us today. Love without obedience is hypocrisy. Claiming to love God while continuing to disobey God reflects a love of self, not a love of God. And every one of us, just like David, faces this danger every day of our lives.