



Good News
Bible Reading Program

A free educational service provided by the United Church of God, *an International Association*

— December 2002 —

DATE	READING TOPIC	SCRIPTURES
1 Dec	David, Bathsheba and Uriah	2 Samuel 11
2 Dec	Nathan's parable and David's repentance; His child dies; Solomon born; Rabbah conquered	2 Samuel 12:1-13; Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 12:13-31; 1 Chronicles 20:1-3
3 Dec	Amnon rapes Tamar; Absalom murders Amnon	2 Samuel 13
4 Dec	Absalom returns from exile; David forgives him	2 Samuel 14
5 Dec	Absalom's rebellion; David flees; God will help	2 Samuel 15:1-16:14; Psalm 3
6 Dec	Counsel of Ahithophel versus Hushai	2 Samuel 16:15-17:29
7 Dec	Defeat and death of Absalom; David mourns	2 Samuel 18:1-19:8
8 Dec	David restored as king	2 Samuel 19:9-43
9 Dec	Rebellion of Sheba	2 Samuel 20
10 Dec	Gibeonites avenged; Philistine giants destroyed	2 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8
11 Dec	David's psalm of praise for God's deliverance	2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18
12 Dec	David numbers Israel	2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:1-27
13 Dec	David prepares for the temple; Pursue wisdom	1 Chronicles 21:28-22:19; Proverbs 4:1-9
14 Dec	Adonijah presumes himself the next king	1 Kings 1:1-27
15 Dec	Solomon installed as co-regent	1 Chronicles 23:1; 1 Kings 1:28-53
16 Dec	Divisions of the Levites	1 Chronicles 23:2-32
17 Dec	Divisions of the priests and other Levites	1 Chronicles 24
18 Dec	The musicians	1 Chronicles 25
19 Dec	The gatekeepers, treasuries and other duties	1 Chronicles 26
20 Dec	Military divisions, tribal leaders & other officials	1 Chronicles 27
21 Dec	David instructs Solomon regarding the temple	1 Chronicles 28
22 Dec	Offerings for the temple; David's Prayer; Solomon replaces David as king	1 Chronicles 29:1-25
23 Dec	David's last words; The death of David	1 Kings 2:1-9; 2 Samuel 23:1-7; 1 Kings 2:10-12; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30
24 Dec	Punishment on Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab, Shimei	1 Kings 2:13-46
25 Dec	Solomon requests wisdom	1 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 1:1-13
26 Dec	Solomon's government	1 Kings 4
27 Dec	Agreement with Hiram for temple construction	1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2
28 Dec	Solomon builds the temple	1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3:1-14
29 Dec	Solomon's other buildings; Hiram; Bronze pillars	1 Kings 7:1-22; 2 Chronicles 3:15-17
30 Dec	Temple furnishings	1 Kings 7:23-51; 2 Chronicles 4:1-5:1
31 Dec	The ark and glory enter; Solomon's speech	1 Kings 8:1-21; 2 Chronicles 5:2-6:11

Highlights to Think About from This Month's Reading

The Matter of Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11)

December 1

Often, it is when we are on top of the world that we are most vulnerable to temptation. As the apostle Paul warns: "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). What an incredible position David now appears to be in. He sits enthroned as one of the most powerful rulers on earth. Under this flush of greatness, with tremendous wealth now pouring in, spiritual danger looms. For riches and power can lead one to deny God and disregard Him (Proverbs 30:8-9; Deuteronomy 8). We enter here into the darkest period of David's personal spiritual life. It is of note that David was around 50 years old at this point, after decades of close association with God and experiencing God's hand in his life.

The story opens with the fight against the Ammonites to finish the matter begun in our previous reading. Reference is made to the spring as the time of year when kings go out to battle. There are three reasons for this. 1) Winter in the region is the rainy season. Its end assures troops dry conditions for battle. 2) The rainy season is the time for planting. By the spring, the barley is ready for harvesting and the wheat harvest is well along—freeing up more men to go out to fight. 3) These harvested grains are needed to feed the troops.

David sends Joab to besiege the Ammonite capital of Rabbah (what is today a part of Amman, the modern capital of Jordan). Though so involved with his past battles, David now decides to stay home at Jerusalem. It would seem that he should be with his men on the scene—particularly when the account says kings normally go out with their armies at this time and even the ark of God was at the scene of the battle (verse 11). But with his newfound greatness, perhaps he has begun to deem himself above that. Perhaps he thinks, *We're so powerful now that I don't need to be there. Besides, why place myself in unnecessary danger. I'm the king. I'm too important.* Whether this assessment is accurate or not, events that follow indicate that some sort of spiritual lethargy has set in with David, weakening his character for the time being—the fruit of which soon becomes evident.

One would think the fight with Ammon would be over almost immediately—with the incredible victory David's army has just accomplished. But, though there are some chronological sequence questions in 2 Samuel 12, it doesn't appear to happen that way—the siege, we will see, seems to take a very long time. If so, why? Besides the fact that ancient sieges could last months or even years depending on the resources of those within the city under siege, the real answer may perhaps be found in the blessings and curses pronounced in the time of Moses. God promised that the Israelites would be blessed with military victory when they were obedient—and would suffer reverses when they were not (see Deuteronomy 28:1-7, 15-25). David's amazing victories over the awesome coalition arrayed against him came from God at a time when David was seeking Him. But now it would appear that, with David's present spiritual letdown, God allows the Israelite military to accomplish very little, making it slow going at Rabbah.

Surprisingly, as we will see in our next reading, the book of Chronicles does not record what happens when David remains at Jerusalem. Chronicles, it seems, has a different focus, primarily emphasizing the strength of David and his dynasty. (As we will see, it does not delve into all the turmoil of David's house during his lifetime, such as the rebellion of Absalom.) But God's Word does not skip over David's great sin—for, though it does not appear in Chronicles, we find it in 2 Samuel 11. David looks out from the rooftop of his palace and sees a beautiful woman bathing herself. Although the account says he inquires about her, the nature of this inquiry is unclear as she is almost certainly someone he already knows. She is "Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite" (verse 3). Eliam and Uriah are two of David's elite mighty men, with whom he has spent untold hours around the campfires over the years (see 2 Samuel 23:34, 39). Indeed, Eliam—also known as Ammiel (see 1 Chronicles 3:5)—is the son of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 23:34), whom we will later learn is one of David's chief advisers, something like a prime minister or chief of staff. Living next to the royal palace, probably by David's own granting, these were very important people who would have been regular guests at the king's table. Perhaps David in his inquiry just wants to make sure she will be alone—that there will be no one to inform Uriah.

Though he now reigns over a powerful kingdom, dominating a sizable part of the Middle East, David is unable to reign over his own passions. Having seen this beautiful woman bathing, he lusts after her—coveting his neighbor's wife in violation of the Tenth Commandment. God admonishes us in enticing situations to flee from the stimulus that is before us (see 1 Corinthians 6:18; 2 Timothy

2:22). If David were to now walk by this rule, considerable suffering would be avoided. But, as it is, he uses his power as king to take advantage of Uriah's wife—he “took her” (verse 4). What part Bathsheba herself played in all this is difficult to ascertain. Did she know David would see her bathing? We don't know. She, of course, has sinned in the matter as well, for adultery is a two-way street. But David, as spiritual leader and premier civil authority in the land, has greater accountability. Furthermore, this sordid situation is made worse by the fact that David fathers a child by her.

What a terrible betrayal this is against Uriah. Many refer to this whole episode as that of “David and Bathsheba.” But God does not. He calls it “the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kings 15:5). The name Uriah means “Flame of the Eternal” or “The Eternal Is Light.” As he is called a Hittite, it is apparent that he is probably a foreign mercenary who became a worshiper of the God of Israel. For years, he has devoted his life to the service of David. And this is the treacherous payback he receives from the king—but, sadly, adultery is not the end of it.

With Uriah off fighting the Ammonites, Bathsheba's pregnancy would expose her as an adulteress—and it would probably not take long to learn the father's identity. David's attempts to cover up his sin by getting Uriah together with his wife are not successful. Unlike David, while Uriah's comrades are still in the field, the ever-dedicated soldier refuses to enjoy the comforts of home. What can David do? He makes a fateful decision. “Failing to cover up sin, David plotted the loyal soldier's death. Perhaps David could not face the shame of seeing Uriah after the warrior had learned that David had slept with his wife” (“An Innocent Victim,” *The Nelson Study Bible*, 1997, p. 524). So he despicably sends with Uriah a message to Joab containing orders that essentially constitute Uriah's death sentence—all the while so trusting of Uriah's honor that he knows he won't read it.

Joab does not follow David's orders exactly. “David had told Joab to have Uriah killed by withdrawing soldiers from around him, leaving him to face the enemy alone. Perhaps Joab thought that this would be an obvious betrayal and would be difficult to explain to the other officers in the army. Instead, he devised a plan to have the soldiers fight near the wall. This maneuver endangered more soldiers and resulted in greater loss of life” (*Nelson*, note on 11:23-24). Joab expects David to explode at him over his foolish military tactic, but he tells his messenger to explain to the king that Uriah was killed in the engagement—knowing that David will then understand why Joab did what he did.

Thus, David has committed two heinous sins against God—adultery and murder. David's sin began with a thought in his mind—the sin of lust. He then brought that thought to action by actually committing the act of adultery. He then tried deception to cover up his sin. When that did not work, he had Uriah killed. This is the way sin often works—sin begets sin begets sin. In his further drift from God, David's message to Joab is utterly disgusting. Regarding the loss of a number of his particularly valiant soldiers in the murder of Uriah, he basically says, “Oh, don't worry about it—these things happen. Now get back to work” (compare verse 25). The fact that such a righteous man as King David could sink to this level of sin should serve as a warning to us all to always remain close to God. For if this happened with David, it could, as easily if not more so, happen with us—if we are not vigilant in staying close to God.

To perpetuate his cover-up, David takes Bathsheba as his wife as soon as possible to make it appear that their child is legitimate. It may even be that he intends the marrying of his friend's widow to appear an act of beneficence on his part. But the child is born considerably less than nine months later, taking into account the several weeks that lapsed until Bathsheba discovered she was pregnant, the episode of trying to get Uriah to visit his wife, the deployment of the scheme to kill Uriah, and then Bathsheba's period of mourning, which was customarily a month. But babies are sometimes born prematurely, and David perhaps hopes his sin remains concealed. Yet besides the supposedly short pregnancy, the rushed marriage no doubt makes everyone suspicious. Still, it appears to David that he has gotten away with everything. And he may have for a while. “But,” as the account tells us, “the thing that David had done displeased the LORD” (verse 27). Nothing is hidden from God—a fact we must all remember when it comes to our own lives.

“You Are the Man!”

(2 Samuel 12:1-13; Psalm 51; 2 Samuel 12:13-31; 1 Chronicles 20:1-3)

December 2

Nathan presents his “case” to David as the king was the highest judge in the land—the court of final appeal. In 2 Samuel 8:15, we learned that “David administered *judgment and justice* to all his people.” These words are translated from the Hebrew *mishpat* and *tzedakah*, often translated

“judgment and righteousness.” As the second term is sometimes translated “equity,” the entire phrase seems to indicate letter-of-the-law judgment as well as fairness or fair application. Evidently, the judges of Israel used the judgments in the law as a guideline and were able to consider other factors and circumstances when determining appropriate penalties in a given case. While the law called for restitution in cases of theft, David not only calls for restitution but even pronounces the death sentence—because the *circumstances* of the crime in this case make it particularly heinous, i.e., the great importance and value of the poor man’s lamb to him and the callous and unfeeling attitude of the offender in the face of it. David, not recognizing that Nathan is speaking of him, actually judges himself guilty—and essentially calls for his own execution. It is always easier to see and condemn the sins of others—even when our own sins are staring us square in the face. We tend to have a lot more tolerance for ourselves than we do for others. This is something we all need to recognize and work on.

Nathan shows considerable courage and trust in God when he reveals the offender’s identity to David. After all, David can have Nathan put to death. Still, the prophet delivers God’s message: “*You are the man!*” (verse 7). With all that God had blessed him with, and as enamored with God’s commandments as the Psalms show him to be, David, for a period of his life, came to “despise” or, as the word is perhaps better translated, “think light of” God’s commandments (verse 9). He broke the tenth, which prohibits coveting. As Nathan’s parable makes clear, David also broke the eighth, against stealing. He broke the seventh, against committing adultery. He broke the ninth, against lying and deception. He broke the sixth, against murder. He broke the third, against taking God’s name in vain, by claiming to represent God while acting contrary to Him, causing God’s name to be “profaned among the nations” (compare verse 14; Ezekiel 36:22-23). And David broke the First Commandment, against having other gods before God, by not putting God first in his life—serving his own desires instead. Indeed, “covetous... is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5; compare Ephesians 5:5).

As a result of these sins, Nathan presents David with four specific punishments from God. The first three are given in 2 Samuel 12:10-12: 1) His family will hereafter experience infighting and bloodshed. 2) Adversity will be raised up against David from among his own family. 3) His wives will be taken from him by another, who will lie with them in public. Whereas David’s original sin was committed in secret, this will be done in the open for all to see. As we continue with the story of David’s life, we will see all these consequences come to pass.

At this point, David doesn’t make excuses or try to rationalize his sin. Instead, he fully confesses to what he’s done. A more complete account of his prayer of repentance is found in the sobering words of Psalm 51. For months David has agonized, suffering terrible guilt over his sin: “My sin is always before me” (verse 3). David has hurt a lot of people through what he’s done. But above all, he has sinned against God (verse 4). So he begs God to forgive him and cleanse him from his filthy conduct. He asks for a clean heart and a renewed spirit to serve God—that He would remain in God’s presence and that God’s presence through the Holy Spirit would remain in him. His full confession and earnest desire to walk again in God’s way evokes encouraging news from Nathan: “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13).

However, Nathan stresses to David that he must still suffer many of the consequences for what he’s done lest others think there is no justice with God or that He is not really concerned with holiness. For the fact is that God is *quite* concerned. Even though He forgives us when we repent of error, many times the consequences of sin continue with us for a long time in this life. Of all people, David, as an exalted leader, must be made an example of so that others will fear to do wrong. Clearly, David’s sin has become widely known despite his attempts to conceal it. In this context, there is yet one more listed consequence David must suffer, which will come first in time order: 4) The child born of his adultery with Bathsheba is to die. And his heartfelt prayer and fasting before God for the child will not change God’s mind.

Verses 16-23 provide some spiritual insight into fasting and the difference between penance and repentance. David fasted out of repentance and as part of his appeal to God to relent of His sentence regarding the child. Once David received God’s answer, there was no reason to continue the fast. Yet his servants are baffled. They cannot understand how David could appear so grieved before and be less so now. But it’s not that David is no longer grieved. It is simply that he no longer needs to fast. The fast was never about punishing and abusing himself—to satisfy God with substitute punishment—or to obligate God to fulfill his request. It was about drawing close to God in humility so that God would hear him—realizing that his attitude had to be one that would accept whatever God decided. Still, God affirms that the child must die. Yet David is comforted by his sure faith in the resurrection of the dead. He knows he will eventually join his child in death—but that beyond that he will see him again.

Verse 24 tells us, “Then David comforted Bathsheba.” Often little is said about what Bathsheba had endured—her shame of a pregnancy out of wedlock, the death of her husband, an immediate wedding and adjustment to a new husband—the king of Israel no less—the illness and death of her firstborn, and the torment of terrible feelings of guilt over the adultery that started the tragic chain of events. But David was compassionate. His initial lust for her apparently had been replaced by genuine love.

And *God* comforted David and Bathsheba. Here is an example of God’s perfect grace and forgiveness. God very soon granted a wonderful replacement for the deceased child, reminiscent of Seth replacing Abel (Genesis 4:25). Apparently the first time after the death of their child that David “went in to her and lay with her,” God caused her to conceive the child that He had already chosen to be the next king of Israel. David would later report in 1 Chronicles 22:8-9: “But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘...Behold, a son shall be born to you, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies all around. His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days.’” So when David calls his son’s name Solomon in 2 Samuel 12:24, it is because God had already revealed the name to David. Meaning “Peaceful,” this name is related to the name Jerusalem, and was prophetic of the nature of his future reign as king. God communicates his blessing on the child through Nathan, who gives him another name, Jedidiah (“Beloved of the Eternal”).

Though there are some questions about the chronological sequence of events in 2 Samuel 12, it would appear that, with David’s period of sinfulness finally over, the tide in the siege of the Ammonite capital of Rabbah is at last turned. It seems to have taken a long time—encompassing, if the time flow of the chapter is as presented, both of Bathsheba’s pregnancies. That would make it more than 18 months—as the siege of Rabbah was underway before David first took Bathsheba and there would have been a period of time after the first birth before the second pregnancy. Having seized Rabbah’s water supply, Joab knows it is only a short time until the Ammonites can no longer hold out. So he calls for David to lead the final charge against the city, which David does, and Rabbah finally falls to the Israelites.

The Ammonites are not “cut” with saws and axes as the King James Version translates 1 Chronicles 20:3, but are “put to work” with such implements as the New King James and other modern translations correctly render the verse.

Victorious, David returns to Jerusalem. But other consequences of his sin will soon follow, as God has warned.

The Sword Comes to David’s House (2 Samuel 13)

December 3

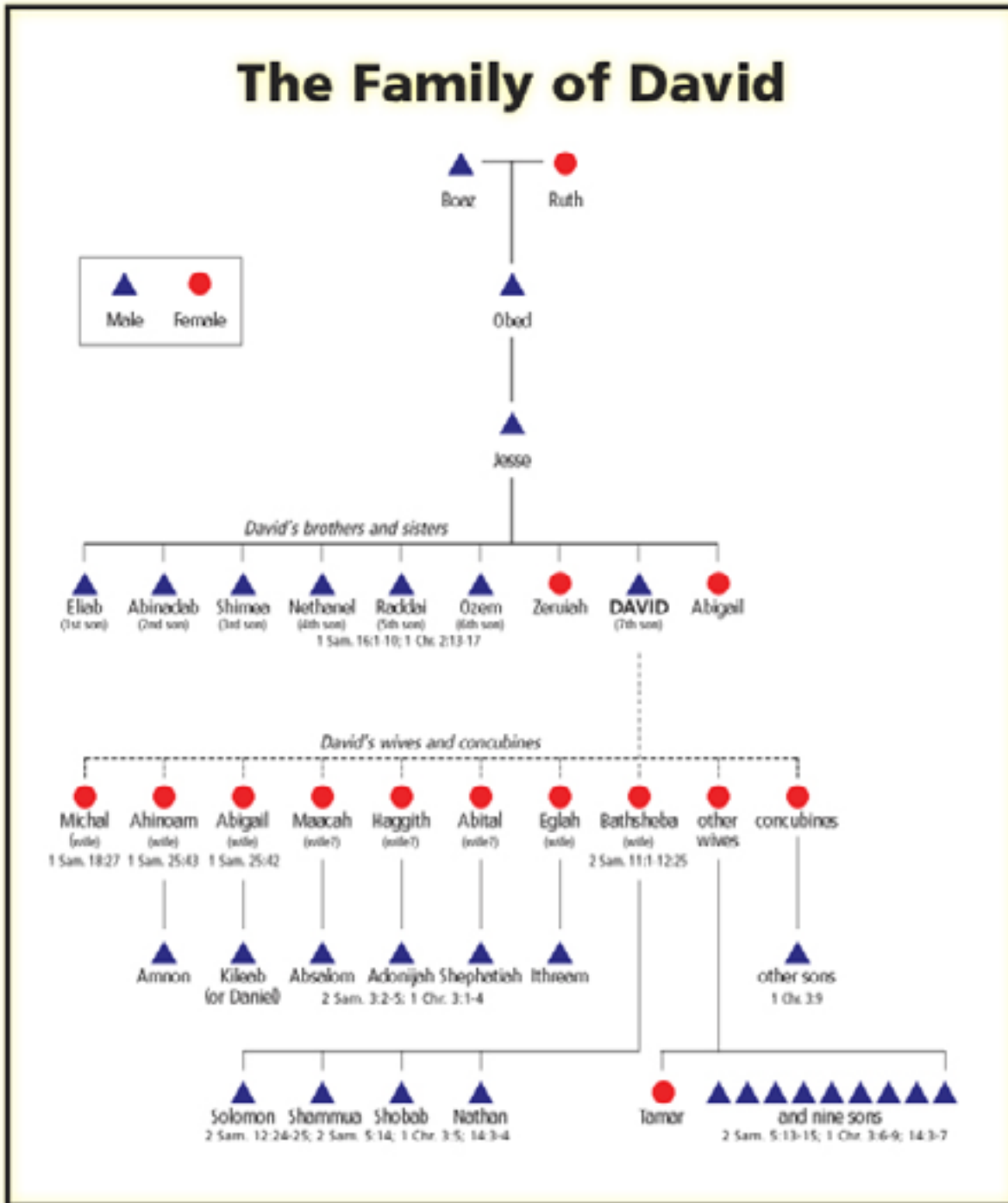
“The Tamar/Amnon/Absalom story is not simply a tale of lust and a brother’s revenge. Amnon, as David’s oldest son (3:2-5), was first in line for the throne. Kileab [or Chileab] had apparently died [as Absalom will act as heir apparent on his return from exile following Amnon’s death, see 15:1-3], so Absalom was next in line after Amnon. Rivalry already existed between Amnon and Absalom! We need to understand the political implications of the events to fully understand the story” (Lawrence Richards, *The Bible Reader’s Companion*, 1991, note on 2 Samuel 13).

David, by his sin, had set a horrible example for his children—that of a man unable to govern his passions. We now find Amnon, David’s firstborn, unable to govern *his* passions. He is in “love” with his virgin half-sister Tamar, David’s daughter by Maacah. David’s only daughter recorded in Scripture, Tamar is the full sister of Absalom.

Marriage to a sister or half-sister is forbidden (Leviticus 18:11). So Amnon’s infatuation cannot be satisfied. Yet he is so obsessively consumed with his longing for her that he visibly loses weight. Upon discovering the reason for this, his crafty cousin Jonadab encourages Amnon to pursue his wicked desire by using trickery to get Tamar alone with him. The plot succeeds, but she refuses his urging her to lie with him, suggesting rather that he ask for her hand of the king—no doubt a ploy to escape the situation, as she certainly knows that David cannot legally grant such a request. Undaunted, Amnon forces himself upon her. The words “he forced her” here “can also mean, ‘he humiliated her.’ Victims of rape sometimes speak more strongly of their humiliation than of the physical pain they were made to suffer” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 2 Samuel 13:14). Of course, it was undoubtedly physically painful—but the psychological anguish she suffered was likely much worse.

There is a strong distinction between love and lust. The Scriptures reveal the true characteristics of love. Love is kind. It does not seek its own gratification. It does not think evil. It does not rejoice in iniquity (1 Corinthians 13). In contrast, lust requires immediate gratification. It is totally contrary

to the way of love. Amnon’s “love” reveals itself for what it is—perverted *lust*—in the rape and in his attitude immediately following it. Amnon now *hates* his sister. Once his lust and his desire to conquer were satisfied, there was a big letdown as he realized he had no real love for Tamar. “The sudden revulsion is easily accounted for; the atrocity of his conduct, with all the feelings of shame, remorse, and dread of exposure and punishment, now burst upon his mind, rendering the presence of Tamar intolerably painful to him” (*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown’s Commentary*, note on verse 15). Perhaps he even irrationally blames her for what she has “made him do.”



Amnon tells her to “be gone” (verse 15). But she does not. Defiled and with no apparent witnesses to what has happened, she will be left shamed and destitute, with no prospect for future marriage. Amnon, however, will hear none of it. He summons a servant and orders him to put her out. Tamar is devastated by this horrific ruining of her life. She is overcome with grief and despair. After telling Absalom of her plight, her brother encourages her to keep the matter to herself, which

she does, while he plots revenge. Absalom certainly cares for his sister—later naming his own daughter after her (14:27). But remember that, secondarily, politics were probably also involved in this matter. Absalom now has what he perhaps reasons to be a legitimate reason to dispose of Amnon and become heir to the throne.

David, though becoming extremely angry on hearing of the matter, takes no action at all. As to why this is we can only guess. First of all, there may have been some confusion in the case since, upon Absalom's urgings, Tamar did not make the matter public. Secondly, while seizing a betrothed woman and having sexual relations with her against her will was a capital crime punishable by death under Israel's civil code, the death penalty was not mandated for seizing an *unbetrothed* woman and having sexual relations with her. The preset punishment in this case was the payment of a bride price and a forced marriage for life if the father so deemed (see Deuteronomy 22:28-29). Could that be allowed here? After all, Abraham being married to Sarah, his half sister, might seem to serve as precedent (compare Genesis 20:12). But since the time of Moses, incest with even a half-sister was punishable by the death of both participants (Leviticus 20:17).

Yet if it could be ascertained that the woman was unwilling in the act of incest, just as in the matter of the rape of a betrothed woman, she would not be punished—only the man. It is possible that Tamar did not “cry out” when she was raped or was not heard (compare Deuteronomy 22:24). Furthermore, there was evidently no examination to determine that defilement had taken place. It would seem, however, that a thorough interrogation of those who had been sent out before the rape (compare 2 Samuel 13:9), might have yielded the essence of what had happened—perhaps some actually did hear a cry from Tamar but were afraid of retribution from Amnon. Remember that someone could only be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Tamar was only one witness if Amnon refused to testify against himself—although evidence itself could also be considered a “witness” in a matter, as the New Testament makes clear (compare 1 John 5:7-8, NRSV).

Nevertheless, David, as already stated, does nothing—he apparently does not even investigate the matter. Perhaps he doesn't want to shame his own household—particularly with a possible lack of needed evidence. Or it may just be that, as with many parents, David is trying to protect his son from the consequences of his actions. Indeed, David displays an apparent unwillingness to appropriately discipline his children, as can be seen even at the end of his life in the example of Adonijah (see 1 Kings 1:6). And even others of his relatives, such as Joab, sometimes literally get away with murder.

Of course, none of this explains why David took no action on Tamar's behalf, given the normally deep-seated sense of protection a father feels for a daughter. Perhaps David was giving special consideration to Amnon as firstborn and heir apparent. Or it could be that David, having been spared the death penalty in his own adultery and even murder, is unwilling to put his son to death for less. Although David had repented of his sins, he was probably still burdened with feelings of guilt. Often those who feel guilty are reluctant to take a strong moral stand, feeling they have lost their moral authority and would be hypocritical to take firm action. This often contributes to a downward moral spiral in families and nations. It may even be that David felt his own sin was partly responsible for what happened, since one of its consequences was to be family infighting.

Remember, God had proclaimed that the sword would never depart from David's house (12:10). And that sword first comes when, two years after Tamar's rape, Absalom finally exacts his revenge. David won't do anything about Amnon—but Absalom does. The deed completed, David's oldest son—an incestuous rapist—is dead. And the one who is now his oldest son is a fugitive from justice charged with murder.

Absalom flees the country to Geshur, northeast of the Sea of Galilee, receiving amnesty from the king there, Talmai, who is his grandfather on his mother's side (see 3:3). There he remains for three years. As David's grief over Amnon's death gradually subsides, he desires a restored relationship with Absalom but perhaps views it as inappropriate to pursue it anytime soon under the circumstances.

Seeds of Rebellion (2 Samuel 14)

December 4

Absalom certainly didn't grow up in a good family situation. Remember, David had six sons by six different women in seven and a half years (see 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 5:5), of whom Absalom was the third. The marriage of his mother, Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur, to David was undoubtedly a political one, and thus there was probably little love involved in it. This was far from ideal for God intended the stable home environment of a loving, monogamous marriage to produce godly offspring (see Malachi 2:15). But sadly, Absalom and his other siblings have been denied this.

This is not to say that people cannot overcome an adverse family situation, as a number of biblical heroes did. It is just to point out that those in such circumstances begin with a disadvantage. Furthermore, it appears that David was rarely home while his earlier children were growing up. Instead, he was away fighting wars (compare 2 Samuel 3–10). This is not stated to condemn David, as these wars carved out the empire God intended Israel to attain. Rather, it is to help us understand the added difficulty Absalom and David's other earlier children had while growing up. And it should also serve as a lesson that a person can be righteous and still need to work on properly balancing work and family responsibilities.

It should also be pointed out that Absalom was a teenager when David committed his terrible sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. How disillusioning this must have been for the boy. His father, the righteous king and great hero, reduced to this. David's actions surely left an impression on his children. Furthermore, besides the natural consequences all of these factors might have produced on their own, God's punishment of turmoil as a consequence of David's sin is now directly at work in David's family. Amnon's character was probably, in part, a result of the same upbringing Absalom experienced. The weaknesses in both of David's sons played a part in the awful circumstances of our previous reading—and the continuing turmoil that God had foretold.

In his longing to see Absalom (13:39), David perhaps thought about some of the mistakes he had made as a father. He probably couldn't help but realize the fact that his own sin of adultery and murder was, at least in part, responsible for what was happening.

Joab, perhaps viewing the king's distraction over the matter as a threat to national security, devises a scheme to get David to reexamine the whole situation and reestablish a relationship with his son. He sends a woman to tell the king a supposedly parallel story—as Nathan had done earlier following David's sin with Bathsheba. Yet this story is only partially parallel: "The fictitious story does not fit Absalom's case, which involved premeditated murder with known hostile intent (13:32). David could only have responded as he did because he wanted his son to return so badly (cf. vv. 37-39)" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on 14:1-4).

However, there may have been a mitigating circumstance in Absalom's killing of Amnon that David could have considered, though it isn't stated in the account. God equated rape with murder—"for just as when a man rises against his neighbor and kills him, even so is this matter" (Deuteronomy 22:26). Though rape in this verse is that of an engaged or married woman, the rape of a sister, who could not legally marry her guilty brother, was surely just as heinous. Indeed, both crimes merited the death penalty. Had Amnon *murdered* Tamar, Absalom could have, according to the law, pursued and killed him as the "avenger of blood." Perhaps there was some justification, then, for avenging something that was evidently *on par* with murder. Moreover, David may have come to reason that he should have personally ordered Amnon put to death—and that Absalom was justified for doing what he did upon David's own failure to act.

In any case, David acquiesces to Joab's wish to have Absalom brought back. However, the king refuses to see his son face to face for another two years. Perhaps he cannot break through the barrier of resentment that has built up over the killing of Amnon. Yet this just serves to further fuel Absalom's growing resentment. For consider how atrocious this is from the young man's perspective. First, his father would not punish Amnon for defiling his sister. Then, he is not allowed to see his father for three years. When his father at last sends for him to come back, he still refuses to see him for two more years, which must have been humiliating. It is apparently during these five years that Absalom's children are born, some at Jerusalem. And yet David will not even deign to visit his own grandchildren. Worse, it may even be that some of Absalom's sons die in infancy during this period—as we later see a declaration from him that he has no sons (18:18)—and yet David still won't come to see Absalom, and neither will he allow Absalom to see him.

Absalom finally presses Joab into intervening, which results in a meeting at last between David and his son—Absalom bowing his head to the ground and the king kissing him. "The kiss was the symbol of their reconciliation. Although David and Absalom were reconciled, the seeds of bitterness that had been sown would soon bear the fruit of conspiracy and rebellion. David's protracted delay in coming to terms with his son ultimately led to disaster. For the moment, though, there was peace" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 14:33).

The Scriptures tell us that it is always best to resolve our differences and not let them drag on. There is no other way out. If an offense occurs, both parties should seek settlement and reconciliation. One of David's major faults was that of not addressing family problems head on, along with not spending the time to guide, direct and correct his children in a timely manner. David, a man

after God's own heart, was by no means an evil person. Rather, like all of us, he made mistakes—and those mistakes had serious consequences.

Adversity from David's Own House (2 Samuel 15:1–16:14; Psalm 3)

December 5

Chapter 15 of 2 Samuel opens with Prince Absalom beginning to present himself as successor to the throne (verse 1). He also presents himself as one who empathizes with the plight of the people and their personal grievances. There may be a measure of truth in David being busied with affairs of state and somewhat cut off from the citizenry. Absalom may even sincerely resent this, considering David's mishandling of his own situation. Perhaps he really does believe he would do a better job of caring for the populace. Still, even if he is thinking this way, it may simply be a way to rationalize his personal ambition. He wants to be king. And, by personal charm and promises, Absalom, the premier politician, over time steals the hearts of the people from his father.

Absalom finally conspires with others to instigate a full-scale revolt. He engineers to have himself declared king in Hebron, where David was first crowned (2:1-7; 5:1-5). As we'll examine further later, Absalom is even joined by Ahithophel, "David's counselor" (15:12)—this term perhaps implying *main* counselor, such as a prime minister or chief of staff (compare 1 Chronicles 27:33-34). After David sinned with Bathsheba and Uriah, God told him through Nathan, "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house" (2 Samuel 12:11). And indeed, his own son has now become his chief adversary—leading a national rebellion against him. David is now reaping what he sowed in his own *personal* rebellion against God (compare Galatians 6:7-8).

Informed of what is happening, David wisely flees from Jerusalem with his trusted servants, lest Absalom's armies trap them all. They head east across the Kidron Valley toward the Judean wilderness. A Levitical contingent led by Zadok and Abiathar bring the Ark of the Covenant to strengthen and encourage the king. But he sends them back to the city with it. "It was David who was going into exile, not the Lord; the symbol of God's presence with his people would remain in the place of worship for the entire community" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 15:24-26). David also believes the priests will serve well as effective spies. As for whether David will be restored to his place in Jerusalem as well, he leaves that in God's hands. When he first fled, he apparently felt God would give the city back to him, as he otherwise would probably not have left 10 concubines there to take care of the palace (verse 16). Interestingly, this decision will have incredible consequences. Indeed, as we will see, this will lead to one of the punishments God had decreed for David because of his adultery with Bathsheba.

While the priests return the ark to its place on Mount Zion, David and his company ascend the Mount of Olives, east of the city, with outward signs of mourning (compare Jeremiah 14:3; Ezekiel 24:17). Upon reaching the top, David worships God (2 Samuel 15:32), no doubt looking across the Kidron Valley to Mount Zion, where the ark and its tent sit next to his palace. He has just received the terrible news that Ahithophel has joined the rebellion—terrible because, besides being a personal betrayal that may be reflected in Psalms 55:12-14 and 41:9 (also prophetic of Christ's betrayal by Judas), Ahithophel gave brilliant counsel (2 Samuel 16:23). And as David is worshiping and beseeching God over the matter, he receives an answer to his prayers in the appearance of another of his advisers, Hushai—whom he sends to infiltrate Absalom's court and work against Ahithophel.

Moving on, just past the summit of the Mount of Olives, David's entourage runs into Ziba, the steward of Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. Surprisingly, he tells the king that Mephibosheth is now expecting the kingdom to be given back to the family of Saul by virtue of what is happening in Israel. But this may actually be a lie, as we are later given a completely different report by Mephibosheth (19:24-30). Nevertheless, David is unaware of this "other side of the story." Moreover, Ziba is clearly bearing gifts for the king and his household, putting himself in mortal danger from Absalom by helping them. So the king, without inquiry, accepts Ziba at his word and grants to him all that belongs to Mephibosheth.

Continuing on a little further east, David's company arrives at Bahurim, where Shimei, a man from the same clan as Saul's family, begins following David and cursing him along the way—implying that David is a usurper guilty of overthrowing Saul and his dynasty. Though David is totally innocent of this charge, he realizes Absalom's rebellion is due to actual sin on his part. And for this reason, he accepts Shimei's railing as part of God's judgment upon him even though the man is breaking the law by cursing the king (compare Exodus 22:28).

It is evidently the next day when David composes Psalm 3, after a night's sleep (compare superscription, verse 5). It might be surprising to learn that he is able to sleep at all under such stressful conditions. Yet he recalls the previous day when he prayed to God from the Mount of

Olives, looking across to His “holy hill,” and how God answered him (verse 4). Reassured and trusting in God, he is able to rest secure even in this troubling time.

Before All Israel, Before the Sun (2 Samuel 16:15–17:29)

December 6

David’s decision to leave 10 concubines, i.e., unofficial wives, at the palace will now be taken advantage of by his enemies. Ahithophel advises Absalom to lie with these women. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes: “In ancient times, taking over a king’s harem was a recognized means of claiming the throne. When Ahithophel advised Absalom to have sexual relations with David’s concubines, he knew that this would finalize the breach between Absalom and David. It was an irrevocable action. Up to this point, Absalom would have been able to back away from all that he had done and still be reconciled to his father. But once he violated the harem of David, he was set on a course of sure and final alienation from his father” (note on 16:22). But there is more going on here.

It is clear that these events are bringing to pass the final punishment God had decreed on David through Nathan after David’s sin of taking his neighbor Uriah’s wife and murdering him. God had said, “I will take *your* wives before your eyes and give them to *your* neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun” (12:11-12). Thus the manner in which Ahithophel counseled Absalom to go about his deed: “The tent that Absalom pitched in the sight of all Israel was probably a bridal tent. Absalom made the people of Israel fully aware that he was engaging in sexual relations with his father’s concubines. Putting the tent on the roof of the palace was an insolent act that was guaranteed to stir the populace one way or another” (note on 16:22).

Yet why would Ahithophel be the one to advise such a thing? Indeed, why has Ahithophel joined Absalom’s rebellion? And why does he now hate David so much to the point of wanting to be the one to lead the attack to actually kill him (17:1-2)? It all makes sense when we remember that Ahithophel is the grandfather of Bathsheba (compare 11:3; 23:34). And his son, her father Eliam or Ammiel, was a close companion of Uriah (compare verses 34, 39; 1 Chronicles 3:5). Author Grant Jeffrey explains, “As David’s counselor in the palace, Ahithophel must have burned with rage to know his king had betrayed his granddaughter’s honor and killed Uriah, her husband, who was a fellow soldier with his son Eliam, Bathsheba’s father. However, there was nothing he could do at the time to exact his revenge. If he had risen in anger against the king he would have lost his life. So he remained silent, keeping his thoughts of revenge secretly to himself all of the years that followed until he saw an opportunity to destroy King David. The Arabs have an expression, ‘That a man who seeks his revenge before forty years has past has moved in haste’” (*The Signature of God*, 1996, pp. 244-245). With this in mind, we can see why Ahithophel would join Absalom’s rebellion and offer to kill David personally. And we can understand why it was Ahithophel who instructed Absalom to lie with his father’s wives “in the sight of all Israel.” He was, no doubt, “attempting to get his revenge by encouraging Absalom to do the same thing to David’s wives as the king had done to his granddaughter” (p. 245).

Though Absalom follows Ahithophel’s advice concerning David’s concubines, he and his lieutenants are persuaded by Hushai to reject Ahithophel’s plan of attack. The shrewdness of Hushai’s counsel is demonstrated in his carefully worded evaluation that Ahithophel’s advice is not good “at this time” (2 Samuel 17:7). In other words, Hushai did not reject Ahithophel’s counsel outright. Instead, his criticism of merely the timing of the plan showed respect for Ahithophel’s wisdom, which may have served to deter suspicion from himself. Of course, verse 14 explains that Hushai’s success is really *God’s* doing. Remarkably, while God has been using circumstances to actually bring about Absalom’s rebellion as punishment on David—in that sense “helping” Absalom—we now see that God is determined to bring Absalom down and ultimately save David.

With his counsel rejected, Ahithophel hangs himself (verse 23). “He apparently realized that Absalom’s cause was doomed, and that when David returned he would be put to death as a disloyal subject” (*Nelson*, note on verse 23).

“O Absalom My Son, My Son!” (2 Samuel 18:1-19:8)

December 7

Now at the city of Mahanaim (17:27), David reviews his troops to assess the situation he and his followers face. Though only a small contingent originally left Jerusalem with him, we see here in the use of the term “thousands” (18:1, 4) that many have soon rallied to his cause, to the point where he is able to divide his army into three companies (verse 2). Initially he is determined to lead this fighting force himself. But this is no ordinary national war. Instead, it is a conflict over David’s kingship—in which the death of David would spell the end of the war. So his men convince him to remove himself from fighting so as not to jeopardize their cause.

David gives orders that his son Absalom not be harmed. Yet, in doing so, David is again showing partiality to his son rather than dealing with him as the situation demands. Absalom has raised his hand to destroy God's anointed king. When someone else claimed to have done this in regard to Saul, David ordered his execution (2 Samuel 1:14-15). Furthermore, the king in this case is Absalom's father. And the penalty the Law of Moses prescribes for striking or even cursing one's parents—and surely raising an armed rebellion to *kill* one's father—is death (Exodus 21:15, 17).

It is interesting to see Absalom's forces referred to as "Israel" and the "people of Israel" (2 Samuel 18:6-7). The appearance is one of a popular uprising—wherein this "army of the people" proves no match against David's experienced troops. The thick woods, rather than concealing and aiding their escape, "devoured more people that day than the sword devoured" (verse 8). Perhaps many died from forest-related injuries, exhaustion, entanglement, exposure, wild animals, etc. The verse could also mean that the forest hindered those fleeing from the field of battle so David's men could more easily catch them. Whatever the case, the observation concerning the part nature played in the outcome is significant—for nature falls within the providence of God.

Indeed, Absalom himself is trapped by a tree (verse 9). We are told that it is his head that becomes caught, but this must surely be due to his thick, long hair. We earlier read in 2 Samuel 14:25-26 of Absalom's good looks and thick hair. Because of these features and the praise he received for them, Absalom gave into vanity—as is clear from the fact that he liked to flaunt his hair by letting it grow long, cutting it only once a year, and then broadcasting the impressive weight of the shorn hair (about five pounds). His addiction to admiration and adulation ultimately contributed to his plot to usurp the throne of Israel. It is thus interesting poetic justice that his hair plays a key part in his ultimate demise.

While Absalom hangs in the tree, Joab kills him—apparently convinced he is doing the right thing. However, it should be pointed out that Joab has violated the king's direct command—which he has no right to do.

Hearing news of the victory of his own forces, David's immediate concern is, nevertheless, for Absalom. On learning of his death, David slumps into grief and mourning. The fact that he is inconsolable spreads through the troops. Joab marches in to David and tells him that such behavior is insulting to all his soldiers (19:5-6). Indeed, the victorious fighting men do not come back to Mahanaim with fanfare or a "ticker-tape parade." Rather, they sneak back into the city trying to escape notice. This is sadly pathetic, and Joab is right to point it out to David.

The king responds by taking his seat in the gate of the city—the place of civil government where judgment is typically rendered. The statement that "all the people came before the king" (verse 8) implies that David *is* following Joab's advice by expressing appreciation to them for their loyalty and help during the recent fighting.

David Restored as King (2 Samuel 19:9-43)

December 8

The desire to restore David to power is not universal. While many of the people are calling for it, there is a reluctance on the part of those in the nation's leadership to call David back to Jerusalem (verses 10-12). Perhaps they fear David will take revenge on Absalom's supporters. So David orders the priests to begin encouraging the elders to support his return—which they do. And David returns to his capital.

In the meantime, David assigns his nephew Amasa (Joab's cousin) the job of commander over the army in place of Joab. By appointing the man who had been commander of Absalom's army to head the combined forces, he secures the allegiance of those who followed Absalom. Furthermore, Amasa also has influence among the leaders of Judah. All of this is helpful in uniting the kingdom. At the same time, Joab is, in some measure, punished for all the crimes he has committed, including the recent one of disobeying David's direct orders about not harming Absalom.

Upon coming back to Jerusalem, David demonstrates great restraint in his clemency to Shimei, binding himself with an oath not to harm the man. He apparently still sees Shimei's actions as somewhat justified. And he wants the civil war to be completely over with no more bloodshed. However, on later reflection, David will apparently come to see this whole situation differently. He originally looked upon Shimei's cursing as ordered by God (16:11). However, Shimei's cursing was over David usurping Saul's throne—a complete falsehood—rather than over David's real sins. At some point, he will decide that Shimei should be executed for his crime of cursing the king, yet David won't be able to do this because of his oath. Therefore, he will order his son Solomon to deal with Shimei (1 Kings 2:8-9, 36-46).

David also restores Mephibosheth after he explains his position on what happened earlier. We read a different version given by his servant Ziba in 2 Samuel 16:1-4. There is quite a contrast in the two stories. Mephibosheth's story makes sense and yet Ziba really did put himself in mortal danger from Absalom. Not knowing who is telling the truth, the king requires that the two men divide the wealth equally between themselves. After all, what else can he do at this point?

We are told in the Scriptures that one should not decide a matter before hearing both sides—that the first one to present his case often seems correct until the person on the other side has his say (Proverbs 18:13, 17). David had not originally followed these principles in this situation.

Concerning 2 Samuel 19:37-38, Chimham is evidently Barzillai's son (see 1 Kings 2:7). Barzillai declines to accept David's offer for himself, but suggests that Chimham be the recipient of David's gratitude in his stead—to which David readily agrees.

Next we see the growing rivalry and resentment between Judah and the northern 10 tribes of Israel. The following chapter will show how a certain Sheba takes advantage of the widespread instability, suspicion and bitterness to lead Israel in a revolt against David and Judah (2 Samuel 19:40-43).

The Rebellion of Sheba (2 Samuel 20)

December 9

Whenever there are divisions among a people, inevitably someone will attempt to assert himself over others into a position of authority. Such is the case with the Benjamite Sheba. Taking advantage of the situation that exists in Israel, with the northern tribes in general rebellion (verse 2), Sheba calls for the army of Israel to follow him against Judah and the king.

David sends Amasa to gather the men of Judah before him. When he does not return in the prescribed time, David places Abishai over the men of Judah to pursue Sheba. Joab is serving under Abishai at this point.

Upon meeting Amasa, Joab kills him—his own cousin—with no established guilt. Joab's self-justification was probably based, in part, on the fact that Amasa had previously joined Absalom and had served as his general. Yet that crime was pardoned. And in the present situation, it is not known why Amasa was late. Joab didn't even ask him! As we've seen, Joab is a man who continually takes matters into his own hands, sometimes breaking the law or violating direct orders in the process. Worse, Joab may have killed Amasa out of spite for taking his job—or as a political move to regain his position. Eventually these sins will catch up with him (1 Kings 1:5-6; 2:28-35).

Joab and his men come to "Abel of Beth Maacah" (2 Samuel 20:15), in northern Galilee four miles west of Dan, where Sheba is holed up. In seeking peace for her city, a wise woman dealing with Joab is able to convince her city to deliver the head of Sheba to Joab, thus resolving the conflict.

In the end, Joab ends up back over the army (verse 23).

The Gibeonites Avenged;

Giants Destroyed (2 Samuel 21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8)

December 10

God allows a famine in the land for three years during David's reign because of the sins of Saul. Saul, in an incident not recorded elsewhere, had broken the sworn treaty Israel had made with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-20), thus violating the law of God (Numbers 30:1-2). In order to settle the matter with the Gibeonites, David agrees to give them seven of Saul's descendants to be executed.

Yet why would David do such a thing? After all, Old Testament law is quite clear that a son is not to be punished for his father's sins (Deuteronomy 24:16; compare 2 Kings 14:6; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 14-20). But since David is not condemned in the text, and since God honors the action by ending the famine (2 Samuel 21:14), David has apparently done the right thing. Perhaps the answer to this matter is hinted at in verse 1, which mentions Saul and his "bloodthirsty house." The original King James has "bloody house" while the NIV has "blood-stained house." Saul, then, was not the sole perpetrator in this case—so were others of his house. Thus, it would seem that the seven men chosen had played some part in Saul's war against the Gibeonites, making them personally guilty. Therefore, it would appear that justice is served.

Saul's concubine Rizpah, mother of two of the men, "remained near the bodies, protecting them from scavengers, from the barley harvest to the early rains (late April to October)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 10). When David is later told of Rizpah's remarkable example of dedication and self-sacrifice, he is moved to gather the bones of those men and arrange for a decent burial. He also retrieves the bones of Saul and Jonathan from their burial place, brings them to Zelah, and buries them in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish (verses 11-14).

We then read about the killing of Goliath's relatives. Here, the account of Chronicles finally joins back up with the book of Samuel. Had we been reading only Chronicles, we may not have noticed the jump of many years between verses 3 and 4 of 1 Chronicles 20. Yet we would have skipped all the way from the conquest of Rabbah to this destruction of the giants—without any mention of David's great sin, the infighting within his house, the rebellion of Absalom, the rebellion of Sheba and the three-year famine. As stated before, it is evident that Chronicles was compiled with a different purpose in mind than Samuel and Kings—that purpose apparently being to show the positive side of the line of David for others to emulate and to point out tabernacle and temple worship as the focus of David's kingdom.

David's Psalm of Praise for God's Deliverance (2 Samuel 22; Psalm 18) December 11

The song of David recorded in 2 Samuel 22 is repeated with nearly identical words in the book of Psalms. Some small differences occur, notably the addition of "I will love You, O LORD, my strength" at the beginning of Psalm 18. This song is a wonderful ode to God's great deliverance from enemies and His divine protection. It is also, as are many of the psalms, prophetically applicable to Jesus Christ. Indeed, 2 Samuel 22:3 (Psalm 18:2) is quoted in Hebrews 2:13, and 2 Samuel 22:50 (Psalm 18:49) is quoted in Romans 15:9 as applying directly to Jesus.

David Numbers Israel (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:1-27) December 12

The parallel accounts of David's census give some seemingly contradictory details which, when properly understood, shed additional light on this regrettable incident in David's life. While 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that it was Satan who moved David to take the census, 2 Samuel 24:1 attributes this to God, as a result of His anger toward Israel for some unstated reason. No doubt God *allowed* Satan to act, as He did with Job, for His own purposes. But why would God be upset at anyone taking a census, when He ordered them several times Himself in the past (e.g., in Numbers 1 and 26)?

Apparently there was an attitude problem here that even Joab was able to see. Perhaps David and the rest of the people were glorying unduly in their own physical might and power, as seems to be implied by 2 Samuel 24:3. In context, the previous chapter, 2 Samuel 23, dealt with the deeds of David's mighty men, while 2 Chronicles 20 discussed wars and great deeds that had been accomplished. As we've seen, by the time of the census, God was clearly already angry with the Israelites for some reason—and the possibility that they had become swollen with pride and were beginning to put their trust in their own greatness (rather than giving glory to and trusting in God) seems to fit. Or maybe David was considering some unauthorized military expansion campaign, since all of those counted by David's chief general were "valiant men who drew the sword" (2 Samuel 24:9). The NIV says Joab and the army commanders went out "to enroll the fighting men of Israel" (verse 4). One of the proposed punishments would have allowed David to go through with any such plans, but he would have spent three months losing his battles.

Joab and the army officers start by crossing the Jordan, counting the eastern tribes as they journey north, then coming back south among the western tribes, and taking nearly 10 months to do it (verses 5-8). The discrepancies in the counts may be attributable to a variety of reasons, including differences in age versus readiness to fight, counting or excluding those already in the standing army, and the fact that 1 Chronicles specifically excludes Levi and Benjamin (perhaps from Judah's total) while 2 Samuel does not.

Following the census, David finally realizes his error, but as is usually the case with our own sins, the consequences were still something he would have to face. In this case, through the prophet Gad, God offers him a choice of consequences, all of which would affect the entire nation. This may seem unfair, but remember the whole incident was prompted because "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel." Israel as a nation was already guilty of something, and God is dealing here with David and the nation simultaneously according to His own divine purposes in a manner that seems to have been designed to humble all concerned.

One of the differences in the two accounts is in the number of years of the proposed famine. While Chronicles says three, Samuel gives seven. One possibility is that four years of famine had already taken place, and the Chronicles account was offering three more, for a total of seven. In any case, David does not choose that option—or the option of warfare. David's decision is implied by his confidence that God will be far more merciful than man—meaning he evidently chooses the plague. He trusts that God may be willing to not make it overly severe, or that He will perhaps cut the punishment short, which is indeed what seems to happen (2 Samuel 24:16).

As the plague is halted at Jerusalem, David pleads for mercy with God, stating that he should really be the one to suffer from the plague, and not the people. It is interesting to note that David

wrote quite eloquently about sickness in some of his psalms, especially in Psalms 41, 38, 39 and 6. While many of these passages could be figurative of sin, most seem to imply a literal, dread disease that David may have had at some time in his life. It is entirely possible that he may have contracted this plague himself and that these psalms constitute prayers for deliverance from the disease, as well as the sin that brought it about.

The angel stops at the threshing floor of Ornan (or Araunah), a Jebusite, located on the top of Mount Moriah (2 Chronicles 3:1), and gives a command through Gad for David to erect an altar there (1 Chronicles 21:18). David asks to purchase the site to build the altar and offer burnt offerings. Ornan offers to give David the site, and the animals for the offerings, but David states that he would not “offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.” It is a valuable principle for all of us that our offerings to God of service or money require a certain amount of sacrifice from us, or they are not really sacrificial offerings.

Preparing for the Temple; Pursue Wisdom

(1 Chronicles 21:28–22:19; Proverbs 4:1-9)

December 13

The threshing floor David purchases from Ornan the Jebusite eventually becomes the site of the temple Solomon builds. How did David know to choose that site for the temple? In our last reading, we were informed that this is where God directed that a new altar be built (1 Chronicles 21:18)—one that He miraculously sanctioned by fire from heaven (verse 26). The passage in 22:1 sounds like a light suddenly came on in David’s mind as he mentally connected the dots. “By the miraculous sign of fire from heaven, and perhaps other intimations, David understood it to be the will of God that the national place of worship should be fixed there, and he forthwith proceeded to make preparations for the erection of the temple on that spot” (*Jamieson, Fausset, & Brown Commentary*, note on verse 1). “...This is to be the house because this is the altar. The temple was built for the sake of the altar” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, note on verse 1).

It is interesting to consider the fact that the site was a threshing floor, where chaff was separated from grain. Speaking of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist said, “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire” (Luke 3:17).

Although David is not allowed to build the temple himself (1 Chronicles 22:8), he has not been prevented from conducting preparations for it—and these he carries out thoroughly and abundantly (verse 5). David instructs Solomon on what to do regarding this temple, points out his need for wisdom—which Solomon remembers at a critical point (2 Chronicles 1:7-10)—and admonishes him to obey God (instruction he will not continue to do so well with over the course of his life).

David also makes it quite clear that Solomon is to be the next king. He recounts God’s original promise concerning Solomon in 1 Chronicles 22:9-10. These verses are dual in application, referring to both Solomon and the future Messiah. Solomon’s name means “Peaceful.” And note that God specifically and specially calls him “My son.” Solomon’s mostly peaceful reign is a definite type of the coming peaceful reign on earth of David’s descendant Jesus Christ, the ultimate Prince of Peace and Son of God—who is commissioned by God the Father to build a spiritual temple, the Church.

In Proverbs 4:1-9, we find Solomon passing David’s instructions about obedience and the pursuit of wisdom and understanding on to his own children. In this passage, we have words of David recorded outside his psalms or the accounts of his life. And they are words we would all do well to heed.

Adonijah Presumes Himself the Next King (1 Kings 1:1-27)

December 14

Undoubtedly, all of David’s existing wives were too old themselves to provide the type of ’round-the-clock nursing care that Abishag was able to provide as David lay suffering from lack of body heat. “Using a healthy person’s body warmth to care for a sick person is a medical procedure noted by the second-century Greek physician Galen and the Jewish historian Josephus” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 1-3). Abishag was a Shunammite, making her from the town of Shunem—probably the same town, in the territory of Issachar (Joshua 19:18), at which the Philistines gathered before they attacked and killed Saul (1 Samuel 28:4). That would also be the town of the family the prophet Elisha later stayed with frequently during his ministry (2 Kings 4:8).

Seizing on this time of old-age weakness, David’s son Adonijah tries to put himself forward as the next king. Adonijah was David’s fourth son (see 2 Samuel 3:2-5), but his first, Amnon, and third, Absalom, were already dead. (Most commentators believe that David’s second son, Chileab, died young as he is not mentioned since birth and is evidently not a factor when Absalom sets himself up as heir-apparent.)

Yet it is clear that the oldest son was not to be king in this case anyway. God through David had already chosen David's younger son Solomon as successor to the throne (1 Kings 1:13, 17, 30; 2:15; 1 Chronicles 22:9-10). And Adonijah was apparently aware of this since he deliberately avoided inviting to his sacrifice those who would support the king's designate (1 Kings 1:8, 10). Thus, Adonijah is exalting himself against God's will. But even now, late in his life, David has a hard time exercising proper discipline when it comes to his children (verse 6). As with his older half-brother Absalom (compare 2 Samuel 14:25), who was now long dead, Adonijah was very good-looking, and he used some of Absalom's tactics to gain the kingdom (15:1). It should be noted that a casual reading of verse 6 of 1 Kings 1 might lead one to believe that the two men had the same mother, but Absalom's mother was Maacah, and Adonijah's mother was Haggith (verse 5; 2 Samuel 3:3-4).

It is probably no coincidence that Abiathar sided with Adonijah, as a way for God to work out His plan to bring to an end the priestly succession of the family of Eli (compare 1 Samuel 2:27-36). Joab, too, may have been influenced in some way by God to make this choice—to set him up for the punishment his life's record demanded.

Solomon Installed as Co-Regent (1 Chronicles 23:1; 1 Kings 1:28-53) December 15

David puts an end to the question of succession by putting Solomon on the throne before his death—in a great and dramatic public display. This practice becomes fairly common among Israelite kings, as we will see later on.

Adonijah is understandably terrified. His “quest for mercy at the bloodstained (Lev. 4:7, 18, 25, 30) horns of the altar was in keeping with the traditional function of the altar as a haven of refuge for those who had committed unintentional crimes (Exodus 21:12-14)” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 50-53). Adonijah's treason, however, is far from unintentional—so the king sends men to remove him from there. Yet, for the time being, Adonijah is spared any punishment—Solomon giving him temporary clemency no doubt out of respect for David. But Solomon's words indicate that there will yet be an evaluation of him. And Adonijah's future actions will demonstrate his real character, as we will see.

David Organizes the Levites (1 Chronicles 23:2-32) December 16

In addition to his preparations for the building of the temple, David also organizes the temple duties and personnel. This chapter introduces that organization. It deals primarily with those Levites who were to assist the priests in “the work of the service of the house of God” (verses 24, 28, 32), and gives a brief description of the work they were to do. It also points out specifically that the descendants of Moses were not given any special job beyond that of their fellow Kohathites (verses 14-17).

Note in verse 27 that David makes a change in how the Levites are to be numbered. Previously the Levites were not counted for service until age 30, apparently because the work of breaking down, transporting and setting up the tabernacle was considered too demanding and meticulous for younger men (verse 3; compare Numbers 4:2-3, 22-23, 29-30). At the end of his life, David points out that this constant moving of the tabernacle will no longer be necessary (1 Chronicles 23:25-26), and he allows the Levites to enter into the temple service at age 20, the age of “adulthood” for the rest of the tribes.

David Organizes the Priests and Levites Into Courses (1 Chronicles 24) December 17

Twenty-four chief men are chosen to head up the courses of priests who are to serve in some sort of rotating fashion at the temple. Note that Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, has taken over his father's priestly duties, which has apparently been the case for some time (compare 18:16; 2 Samuel 8:17), even before Abiathar's siding with Adonijah.

Of some interest is the eighth course, given to Abijah (1 Chronicles 24:10), in whose division John the Baptist's father Zacharias was serving some 1,000 years later when he received his visit from the angel Gabriel regarding John's birth (see Luke 1:5-23). When their service was completed, the priests in each course could return home to their families, as Zacharias did (Luke 1:23).

Tradition tells us that each course served for one week at a time (except during the three festival seasons, when all courses served together). And Scripture gives an indication that this was likely the case. While dealing specifically with the gatekeepers (who were Levites, but not priests), 1 Chronicles 9:25 states that each division of them served for seven days. That this was probably also the case with the priests is indicated by the fact that the Levites assigned to serve at the temple were also divided by lot into 24 courses (24:19-31).

Lining these weeks up on the Hebrew calendar gives indication as to when Zacharias served—and thus when John the Baptist was conceived, as well as Christ, who was conceived six months later (compare Luke 1:26, 36). This would put John's birth in the spring of the year and Christ's birth in the autumn. (For more details, see "Why Jesus Christ Wasn't Born on Dec. 25," *Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?*, p. 8).

David Organizes the Musicians (1 Chronicles 25)

December 18

David has a particular interest in the group of Levites assigned to be musicians. He is a musician himself (see 1 Samuel 16:16-23), a maker or perhaps even inventor of musical instruments (1 Chronicles 23:5), and a prolific composer.

Twenty-four sons of the three chief musicians are chosen to head up divisions to correspond with the courses of priests. These three were originally chosen by the tribal leader to be the musicians when the ark was moved to Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 15:16-24). The sons of Asaph, of the Levitical sub-tribe of Gershon (Gershon, Kohath and Merari being the three sons of Levi), had four of the divisions. Asaph had been the chief musician assigned to minister before the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:4-7, 37). He, too, composed psalms, with 12 of them bearing his name (Psalms 50; 73-83). The sons of Jeduthun, of the sub-tribe of Merari, had six divisions. Jeduthun is known as Ethan in many scriptures and, along with Heman, served at the tabernacle in Gibeon while the ark was in Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 16:39-42). The sons of Heman, of the sub-tribe of Kohath, made up the remaining 14 divisions. Heman was the grandson of the prophet Samuel, and descendant of Korah. One psalm is attributed to Heman (Psalm 88), but 10 others (42; 44-49; 84-85; 87) are attributed to the sons of Korah, which would include Heman and his descendants. Additional information can be found in 1 Chronicles 6:31-48.

Note that each group of musicians is said to be "under the direction of their father" (25:2, 3, 6). The older King James Version says "under the *hands* of their father," a literal translation of the original Hebrew. This seems to convey the picture of a choral director leading the singers under him. But unlike modern choirs who, since the invention of the printing press and the musical notation of our day, tend to use printed musical notation, it was common for ancient choir directors to use more elaborate hand and arm gestures in a practice known as chironomy. This allowed them to convey not only the timing and volume, but even the notes the group was to sing or play.

When David and Asaph gave the singers and instrumentalists a new song, they probably did not pass out written music for everybody. Certainly the group could learn a new song through hearing someone sing it several times. But history shows that more sophisticated techniques were employed to enable these professional musicians to know what notes they were to sing or play "instantly" through the hand gestures of their father, or other musical director. That one such director may have been David can be seen in the phrase "order of the king" in verse 2—actually, in the Hebrew, "hands of the king." This at least shows David's direct involvement in composing, but it perhaps also means that he occasionally led the musicians himself.

According to the research and theory of Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura (author of *The Music of the Bible Revealed*, 1991), notation of these hand signals may actually be recorded in the accent marks (the jots and tittles) of the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible.

David Organizes the Security Force (1 Chronicles 26)

December 19

Among the gatekeepers, part of the temple security force, was the family of Obed-Edom, who had housed the ark for three months (see 13:13-14). He and his large family had served in this capacity after the ark had been moved (16:37-38), and David had them continue this work. There were also Levites assigned specifically to watch over the treasury—the descendants of Moses among them. And finally, there were Levitical officers and judges appointed to take care of business in the rest of the country, away from the temple.

Verse 10 of 1 Chronicles 26 contains some interesting information. Here a father sets one of his sons as first even though he is not the firstborn. That it was unusual may be ascertained from its mention here. Yet God had, as we have seen repeatedly, directed that this be done many times before. Such occurred with Seth, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses and even David—and now Solomon too.

David's Military and Tribal Organization (1 Chronicles 27)

December 20

Many of the mighty men we previously read about in 1 Chronicles 11 and 2 Samuel 23 headed up groups of 24,000 men who served on national security one month out of each year. These 288,000 men taken together probably constituted the regular army. This organization apparently

dates back to the beginning of David's reign, since Asahel is mentioned as the leader in the fourth month. He was killed by Abner before David moved to Jerusalem (see 2 Samuel 2:18-23), and was succeeded by his son Zebadiah (1 Chronicles 27:7).

The tribal leaders at this time are also listed, but how they were chosen is not stated. The individual tribes may have done that. It is interesting to note that the tribal leader of Judah is David's brother Elihu (1 Chronicles 27:18), apparently his oldest brother elsewhere called Eliab (1 Samuel 16:6). And the leader of Benjamin is the son of Abner, apparently the Abner who was Saul's uncle and military commander, well respected in his tribe and by all of Israel before his murder at the hand of Joab (compare 2 Samuel 2-3). David's economic or agricultural administrators are listed, along with several other officials over the course of his reign.

David Instructs Solomon Regarding the Temple (1 Chronicles 28)

December 21

David gathers the leaders together (the ones we have been reading about in the foregoing chapters) to explain the transfer of power and his goals for Solomon. In verse 2, we can imagine an old and frail king, perhaps sometime during the summer months after a cold winter of trying to keep warm (compare 1 Kings 1:1-4), gathering his strength to be able to stand on his feet. David starts by discussing his consuming passion—to build the temple of God—and says that God did not allow him to build it because he was a man of war, his reign being replete with bloodshed. He points out that God Himself chose Solomon as king and the one to build the temple (1 Chronicles 28:5-6). Later Solomon tells Hiram that David was surrounded by too many wars, and that a time of peace would now permit Solomon, a man of peace, to build the temple (1 Kings 5:3-5).

We have seen that David gathered materials for the temple and organized the priesthood. Now he turns those materials and organizational plans over to Solomon, as well as detailed building plans, and explains that God revealed the design to him (1 Chronicles 28:12, 19). Similarly, God had revealed the plans for the tabernacle to Moses (Exodus 25:8-9) to ensure that His earthly dwelling was patterned after the one in heaven (Hebrews 8:5).

Offerings for the Temple; David's Prayer;

Solomon Replaces David as King (1 Chronicles 29:1-25)

December 22

David reiterates that God is the one who chose Solomon, and then describes the materials he has assembled for Solomon to use in building the temple. This time, he also mentions his personal contributions, and encourages others to contribute as well. As in the days of Moses (compare Exodus 35:20-29), those who were able donated generously and willingly. The words "with a loyal heart" (1 Chronicles 29:9) are translated from a Hebrew phrase literally meaning "with a fullness of heart" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 9). And David is moved to thank God for actually enabling them to give—indeed, to simply give back to God what He has Himself given in the first place.

David's prayer here has served much more than just this occasion. Indeed, many even today use words from it without knowing it. When Christ gave an outline of how to pray in His famous Sermon on the Mount—"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come..." (Matthew 6:9-13)—He concluded it with words of praise used in David's prayer. Jesus told us to conclude our prayers along these lines: "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (verse 13). Compare this with David's words in 1 Chronicles 29:10-12. Of course, the preincarnate Christ very likely inspired the words David prayed.

Finally, Solomon is once again anointed king, and Zadok is confirmed as the high priest with no mention here of the now out-of-favor line of Abiathar. Verse 23 states that Solomon sat on the "throne of the LORD." And it really was God's throne (compare 1 Samuel 8:7). Jesus Christ will once again occupy this throne when He returns to reign over Israel and all nations—that is, not the same physical chair but the office of responsibility.

The passage ends with the statement that God bestowed on Solomon "such majesty as had not been on any king before him in Israel" (verse 25). *The Nelson Study Bible* notes, "Obviously this included only Saul and David, but it is still a remarkable statement in light of David's widely recognized power and magnificence (11:9; 14:2; 18:1-13; 29:28)" (note on verse 25). Indeed, David was apparently the dominant ruler of the age—and yet Solomon's rule is already greater in power and prestige, and will be greater yet, as we will soon see.

David's Last Words and Death

(1 Kings 2:1-9; 2 Samuel 23:1-7; 1 Kings 2:10-12; 1 Chronicles 29:26-30)

December 23

In addition to David's commands to Solomon to live uprightly before God, David gives Solomon some last-minute instructions, telling him to take care of some "unfinished business." David had

never properly dealt with Joab. Siding with Adonijah was the last straw, and David commands Solomon to deal with Joab's transgressions accordingly. Remembering Absalom's rebellion, David especially singles out Barzillai for reward and now feels that Shimei should be held responsible for his malicious behavior.

In his final "psalm," David says that God directly told him that "he who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Samuel 23:3). This recalls the type of individuals Moses was to seek out to place in positions over God's people: "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (Exodus 18:21). Indeed David himself, in spite of his mistakes, was such a man. As God will later state about him: "David did what was right in the sight of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). This does not mean that David sinned only in this one matter. It means that only once in his spiritual life did he really stray far from God, defying Him through serious disobedience for an extended period. Still, he repented. And despite his egregious transgression in this matter, David was, overall, "a man after God's own heart" (see Acts 13:22).

David then dies at the age of 70, after reigning a total of 40 years following the death of Saul. But that, of course, is not the end. For he will one day rise again, at the resurrection from the dead, into the Kingdom of God to reign over Israel once more (see Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 37:24). But he will then live and reign as a perfect being, as David himself well knew, once having prayed to God, "As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Solomon Establishes His Kingdom (1 Kings 2:13-46)

December 24

When David responded to Nathan's parable following the death of Uriah, he stated that the man in the story should have to pay fourfold for the death of the poor man's lamb (see 2 Sam 12:1-6). It is interesting to note that the Scriptures explicitly record the subsequent untimely deaths of four of David's sons: the child born of his adultery with Bathsheba, Amnon at the hand of Absalom, Absalom at the hand of Joab, and finally Adonijah by the order of Solomon.

Adonijah had been warned to watch his behavior very carefully (1:51-53). His natural birth order had given him a solid claim to the throne. He has the support of the former chief army commander and one of the two highest-ranking priests. Having Abishag would increase his claim a bit more, since the virgins of a king's harem apparently were considered part of the royal property inherited by the next king (2 Samuel 12:8). "The Greek historian Herodotus says that among the Persians a new king inherited the previous king's harem and that to possess the harem was taken as title to the throne. While no such custom is [explicitly] expressed in Scripture, Absalom's earlier public appropriation of his father's concubines did symbolize his determination to take David's throne (2 Sam. 16:21-23). Solomon rightly took Adonijah's request for Abishag, who had been David's concubine, as an indication he was still plotting rebellion" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on 1 Kings 2:13-25). Using Solomon's own mother as an unwitting accomplice in the plot to boost Adonijah's image was the last straw. Solomon is swift and decisive in dealing with his brother's transgression.

Partly because of suspected collusion (verse 22), Solomon formally deposes Abiathar, and apparently the rest of his family, from any further role in the priesthood. Zadok's appointment to replace Abiathar as priest fulfills the prophecy given long before that God would raise up a faithful priest to replace the line of Eli (verses 26-27, 35; 1 Samuel 2:35; Ezekiel 44:15).

Then Joab is executed as a suspected accomplice, which also fulfills David's directive (1 Kings 2:5-6). Shimei, not part of the immediate incident, is given a rather mild sentence to remain in Jerusalem, but under penalty of death if he leaves. After three years, though, it seems he forgets the seriousness of the penalty, or Solomon's resolve to carry it out, and he also is executed.

Solomon Requests Wisdom (1 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 1:1-13)

December 25

The Egyptian pharaoh gives his daughter in marriage to Solomon, cementing an alliance between Egypt and Israel. "In the ancient Middle East, political alliances were often ratified by the marriage of the son of one king to the daughter of another" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 1 Kings 3:1). Yet this case is remarkable in two respects. First: "Except in unusual circumstances, the pharaohs of Egypt did not observe this custom (but see 1 Chr. 4:17, 18). Therefore, the giving of Pharaoh's daughter to Solomon attested to the Israelite king's growing prestige and importance to the Egyptian king" (same note). Second: The pharaoh is the one giving his daughter to a foreign ruler along with a dowry, making Solomon appear to be the senior partner in the alliance. It is perhaps even likely that the pharaoh is the one who first proposed the alliance and marriage, rather than it being something Solomon sought. In any case, as part of the dowry, the pharaoh gives Solomon a

captured, albeit destroyed, city of the Canaanites located near the Philistine border, which Solomon rebuilds as a fortress city (1 Kings 9:15-17). Solomon provides well for Pharaoh's daughter, building a special house for her patterned after his own (3:1; 7:8; 9:24).

Consider what this development means as far as Solomon's power and prestige is concerned. The image of Israel as an insignificant nation in the time of David and Solomon is simply incorrect. David was already allied with King Hiram of Tyre, the ruler of the Phoenician Empire, which dominated ancient maritime commerce (2 Samuel 5:11-12). This close alliance continues under Solomon (1 Kings 5:1). Assyria remains weak and subdued at this time, David apparently even achieving dominance over the powers of Mesopotamia (see highlights on 1 Chronicles 19 and 2 Samuel 10). And now Egypt, the other great power of the ancient world, joins the Israel-Phoenician alliance—with Solomon apparently sitting as the dominant figure among the partners. This is rather astonishing. And the true greatness of Solomon's reign has not even been experienced as of this point in the story flow.

We next see the point made that the people sacrificed at high places (1 Kings 3:2). While this originally denoted hilltop shrines, it eventually became a generic term for any place of worship. Since the destruction of Shiloh and the separation of the tabernacle and the ark, and until the temple was built at Jerusalem, no single established place of worship existed. So multiple sites were employed for sacrificing and burning incense—perhaps even some formerly pagan worship places.

Indication that the current practice of the people was not acceptable is found in 1 Kings 3:3, where we are told that Solomon “loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, *except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.*” Still, Solomon's overall attitude at this time was one of seeking and obeying God. (It should be noted that later righteous kings of Judah allowed such high places to remain—apparently not understanding the problem with them.)

The *chief* high place—that is, the main worship center—was now at Gibeon, since that is where the tabernacle and original bronze altar were currently located (1 Kings 3:2-4; 2 Chronicles 1:3-6). Clearly this was an acceptable place of worship. Solomon goes there often in his early years as king to worship God. At one such visit, God appears to him in a dream and offers to grant him whatever he wants. Solomon focuses on the immense task of governing the people, and has the humility and sense, thanks to his father David's instructions (compare 1 Chronicles 22:12; Proverbs 4:3-9), to ask for wisdom, knowledge and an understanding heart to carry out his responsibilities in governing God's people (2 Chronicles 1:10; 1 Kings 3:9).

David would have preferred Solomon's focus be on acquiring the understanding and wisdom *to remain faithful in keeping God's laws* (2:3; 1 Chronicles 22:12-13; 28:7, 9; 29:19). It is not enough to judge righteously. A leader must be righteous himself. Nevertheless, God is impressed with Solomon's unselfish request at this point, and not only grants him knowledge and wisdom, but also the tremendous riches and honor he could have asked for. And if he should continue in God's way, he would also be granted a long life (1 Kings 3:14).

An example of the wisdom to judge that God granted the king is shown in the case of the two prostitutes and the baby, a case still famous even among those with little biblical knowledge.

Solomon's Government (1 Kings 4)

December 26

Solomon has a special group of district officers who arrange for food for the king and his large and growing household (see 1 Kings 11:3). Two of these district officers become part of the family by marrying Solomon's daughters (4:11, 15). “The provisions described here would have fed some 4,000 to 5,000 people though some estimates run as many as 14,000! The figures suggest Solomon developed a large, complex bureaucracy, and the land was wealthy enough to support it” (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verses 20-23).

Solomon's wisdom is not confined to discernment in judgment. He is also known throughout the world of his day for his proverbs and songs, a number of which are preserved as part of the Scriptures. And he develops a keen knowledge in the sciences: “To say that Solomon ‘named’ (1 Kings 4:33, NIV, ‘described’) plants and animals means that he mastered zoology and biology” (note on verses 29-34). He also gets involved in building projects, some of which we will read about in the next few chapters, and others which are described in Ecclesiastes (2:4-6).

With the peaceful reign of Solomon underway, Judah and Israel flourish with population growth and good times. The general peace and prosperity brought about by God were a type of conditions the whole world will experience when Jesus Christ returns and rules the earth (1 Kings 4:20-25; see Micah 4:4).

Agreement with Hiram for Temple Construction (1 Kings 5; 2 Chronicles 2) December 27

Hiram, king of Tyre, had been David's ally, and had helped him build his palace at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:11). Some see the words "Hiram had always loved David" (1 Kings 5:1) to simply denote their political alliance—the word for ally in a number of Old Testament passages literally meaning "lover." But "Solomon's note about the temple begins, 'You know,' suggesting that David had shared his dream of building a temple with Hiram as well, and that the two may have been [actual] friends" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on 1 Kings 5:1-6). The area of modern Lebanon along the border between the two ancient kingdoms contained some of the best timber around. And Hiram has some highly skilled workers. So Solomon arranges for workmen from this Phoenician king to help cut and deliver wood for the temple, and to assist in stonecutting. Hiram offers Solomon one craftsman in particular, also named Hiram (or Hiram), the son of a man of Tyre and an Israelite woman, who will make most of the temple furnishings—as Bezalel made things for the tabernacle in the wilderness.

Solomon also drafts thousands of Israelite workers. "In addition to slave labor, Solomon relied on the *corvee* [labor exacted in lieu of taxes by public authorities] to provide workers. This practice was common in ancient times, and involved claiming a person's labor as sort of a personal tax. By alternating shifts Solomon was able to maintain agricultural production at home, while keeping work moving on his massive construction project. Not many years ago some rural counties in the Midwest had a form of *corvee*: farmers would keep the roadsides mowed in return for reduction of local taxes" (note on verses 13-17).

Solomon Builds the Temple (1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3:1-14)**December 28**

The date of the beginning of the building of the temple is given as the 480th year after the children of Israel came out of Egypt, which was also the fourth year of Solomon's reign. Thanks to the painstaking work of Professor Edwin Thiele, who in 1950 worked out a likely chronology for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah (showing the books of Kings to be entirely trustworthy and in harmony with the well-established Assyrian chronology), it can be reasonably ascertained that Rehoboam began his reign in or very close to 931/930 B.C. As 1 Kings 11:42 informs us that Solomon reigned 40 years, Solomon's first year, according to this chronology, was 970/969 B.C., and his fourth year (in which he began the construction of the temple) was 967/966 B.C. Based on these dates, we may conclude that the Exodus occurred in or very close to the year 1447/1446 B.C.

As regards chronology, this chapter also provides us with a way to determine whether Judah was counting the years of a king's reign using a Nisan-to-Nisan (spring-to-spring) or a Tishri-to-Tishri (autumn-to-autumn) reckoning on the Hebrew calendar. The work on the temple was begun in the second month of Solomon's fourth year (1 Kings 6:1), and completed in the eighth month of Solomon's 11th year, having been under construction seven years (1 Kings 6:38). Months are always numbered from the spring month of Nisan (first month of the sacred year), regardless of whether one is reckoning a year from Nisan to Nisan (sacred year) or Tishri to Tishri (civil year). Reckoning was also inclusive, meaning the first and last units or fractions of units in a group are included and counted as full units. If Judah had been using a Nisan-to-Nisan reckoning of regnal years, the temple would have been described as eight years in building. However, using a Tishri-to-Tishri reckoning yields the seven years of 1 Kings 6:38.

The temple sanctuary, which contained the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, or Holy of Holies, was a rectangular building measuring about 90 feet long by 30 feet wide by 45 feet high. (This and subsequent measurements assume an 18-inch cubit—although it is possible that they may have used the longer 20.5-inch royal cubit from Egypt or a larger variant, which would make these measurements bigger.) On the eastern side of the sanctuary was an enclosed porch that extended the width of the building, projected about 15 feet from it, and apparently formed a 180-foot tower (compare 2 Chronicles 3:4). Around the sanctuary building Solomon built a very curious "honeycomb" of offices or rooms. These rooms were arranged in three stories; the lowest rooms were about 7.5 feet wide, the middle story rooms were about 9 feet wide, and the upper rooms were about 10.5 feet wide. In 1 Kings 6:6, we are told that Solomon built "narrow ledges around the outside of the temple, so that the support beams would not be fastened into the walls of the temple." This indicates that the sides of the sanctuary had a stepped appearance during construction, and the upper story offices each projected one cubit further toward the sanctuary interior than the office below. No doubt the exterior facade concealed this stepped feature once the building was completed. Within the southern side of the office complex was a "winding stairway"—either a circular or square spiral—that provided access to the second and third story offices. This honeycomb of offices would seem to bear on Christ's statement, "In My Father's house are many rooms" (John 14:2, NIV). He may have been

using the temple's architecture as a visual model to His teaching (though, as we will examine when we later come to this verse in our reading, He was also probably using another analogy of His day—that of a groom building on to his father's house to prepare for the addition of his wife to the family).

Interestingly, 1 Kings 6 also tells us that every stone was cut and polished and prepared for its position *away from* the building site—"so that no hammer or chisel or any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built" (verse 7). Just as the physical temple of God was built of stones finished and fitted for their place before they were brought to the mountain and assembled into a glorious building, so Christians, each a living stone (1 Peter 2:5), together a spiritual temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), are being finished and fitted for their place before they will be brought together at the resurrection and assembled in glory.

God's Promise to Solomon (1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3:1-14)

Dec. 28 Cont'd

During the construction of the temple, God sent word to Solomon saying, "If you walk in My statutes, execute My judgments, keep all My commandments, and walk in them, then I will perform My word with you, which I spoke to your father David" (1 Kings 6:12). Some mistakenly think that this puts a condition on God's unconditional promise to David in 2 Samuel 7. It does nothing of the sort. God's promise to David—that he would have an eternal dynasty and never lack a man to sit upon his earthly throne—is unconditional. But God did not promise this eternal dynasty would continue through *Solomon's* line.

The unconditional promise was that one of *David's* descendents would occupy the throne forever. God's promise to Solomon was that *if he* remained faithful, *then his* line would occupy that throne forever. But Solomon, as we will see, did not remain faithful. Although Solomon's line still occupies that throne in the person of the British monarch, that throne will be turned over to another of David's descendents, Jesus Christ, who is a descendent of David through *Nathan* (Luke 3:31), not Solomon. This will occur at Christ's second coming. Solomon's ruling line will then cease. So, the unconditional promise to David will be kept, but Solomon's dynasty will not endure forever because he failed to fulfill the condition (see also the highlights for 1 Chronicles 17 and 2 Samuel 7 on "The Davidic Covenant").

Solomon Builds His Palace (1 Kings 7:1-22; 2 Chronicles 3:15-17)

December 29

Solomon also built the main administrative centers of Israel's government. The massive *House of the Forest of Lebanon* probably served as Solomon's armory. Measuring about 150 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet tall, it obtained its name from the white fragrant cedar wood with which it was paneled—no doubt taken from Lebanon's famous Mount Lebanon—and from its 45 pillars, which must have looked like the trees of a forest. Around the building ran a three-course row of windows, beveled on the inside to maximize the dispersion of daylight. The doors were similarly beveled on the exterior, for aesthetics, and arranged in groups of three, providing quick access to the interior. Before the building was also a colonnade of pillars supporting an exterior roof.

Solomon's court was seated in the *Hall of Judgment*. Here Solomon sat as the Supreme Justice of Israel under God. Under Israel's system of justice, a citizen could appeal directly to the king in matters of law or equity and, if the king agreed to hear the case, the proceedings were held in the Hall of Judgment. Once again, the hall was paneled with Lebanon cedar. Here also was perhaps the main chamber for what some have described as Israel's national Assembly of Elders, a sort of House of Lords or Senate for Israel, which, in the opinion of some modern examiners, assisted the king in the government over which he presided. We'll see further mention of this in a few days.

Solomon's personal residence was modeled on the Hall of Judgment, although little information is given about its own features. If Solomon followed the typical pattern of Middle Eastern monarchs, his personal residence was at one extreme of the complex, the House of the Forest of Lebanon and the Hall of Judgment in the center, and the residence of the daughter of Pharaoh was at the opposite extreme (along with the residence of Solomon's harem).

A Foolish Strategy for Peace and Security

(1 Kings 7:1-22; 2 Chronicles 3:15-17)

Dec. 29 Cont'd

In mentioning Solomon's personal residence, Scripture adds that Solomon built a similar residence for his wife, the daughter of Pharaoh. It was not the practice of sovereigns to dwell with their spouses, and thus a second residence was provided for the daughter of Pharaoh. But this note also raises some questions we have not yet looked at. When had Solomon taken the daughter of Pharaoh? Was it before or after his father's death? And why was such a pairing permitted, especially given the prohibitions against marrying a non-Israelite (Exodus 23:31-33; 34:12-16; Deuteronomy

7:1-4)? It would appear that she was his first wife, given her mention here and in 1 Kings 11 (even though Solomon's heir, Rehoboam, was not her son but the son of an Ammonite, 14:21).

First of all, it should be noted that the prohibitions just cited were against marrying Canaanites, not Egyptians. And in 1 Kings 3, the fact that Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh (verse 1) was immediately followed by the fact that he at that time generally walked in obedience to God (verse 3)—that is, his marriage was not referred as something wrong. Still, we can see in it the seeds of what later became a huge problem.

Generally speaking, as mentioned in our earlier highlights on 1 Kings 3 and 2 Chronicles 1, the marriages of Middle Eastern sovereigns often were the seals of political alliances made with foreign potentates. Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh was most likely the sealing of an alliance with Egypt. Josephus, the Jewish historian, states that Solomon took the daughter of Pharaoh after David's death (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 8, chap. 2, sec. 1). And it does follow that way in 1 Kings. Did Solomon undertake the alliance with Egypt on the death of David in an effort to forestall a possible war with Israel's powerful southern neighbor—who might seek to take advantage of a new king suspected of lacking the military acumen of his father? It would appear that one of Solomon's strategies for maintaining peace and the stability of his kingdom was to enter into marriage and trading alliances with the major nations and many trading sheiks of the eastern deserts surrounding Israel. Thus Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3) were not so much wives as tokens of international covenants, most of them probably never being seen more than once by Solomon—though there were a number that he clearly did love (verse 2).

Whatever the reason for Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, it began a trend that obviously got out of hand. Indeed, this multiplying of pagan wives was *clearly* in disobedience to God (Deuteronomy 17:17)—as was marrying women from nations that God had certainly forbidden (see 1 Kings 11:2). And it eventually proved to be the undoing of his kingdom for, as recorded in 1 Kings 11, his foreign wives eventually led him into idolatry. The result was the rebellion of the northern 10 tribes after his death, and the voiding of the conditional covenant God made with him concerning the perpetuity of his seed upon the throne of Israel. Solomon had failed to learn the lesson of Psalm 75:6-7: "For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south. But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another." While alliances with other kingdoms did serve to strengthen Israel for a while, the true exaltation of Israel would not come from these alliances with temporary rulers of this earth but from God. And so would abasement for disobedience. It is never prudent or wise to contravene the commands of God. War, instability and schism—whether personal or national—are the result.

Hiram's Work (1 Kings 7:23-51; 2 Chronicles 4:1-5:1)

December 30

To construct the temple, Solomon employed the skills of a master craftsman, Hiram (or Hiram), fetched from Hiram king of Tyre. As explained in previous readings, he was the son of a Tyrian man who himself was a metalworker, but there's some minor confusion regarding his mother. According to 2 Chronicles 2:14, his mother was "of the daughters of Dan," yet 1 Kings 7:14 informs us that she was "of the tribe of Naphtali." One explanation may be that Hiram's mother was a Danite woman who had formerly married a Naphtalite man and thereby became a Naphtalite by marriage. In that case, we could assume that her first husband died and she then married a Tyrian man, Hiram's father.

Hiram worked in bronze, an alloy of copper (about 80%) and tin (about 20%); brass is an alloy of copper (about 60%) and zinc (about 40%). While scholars still debate somewhat whether the Hebrew *nechosheth* should be translated *brass* or *bronze*, the weight of evidence seems to prefer bronze. Copper was readily available in many places, and the Phoenicians—actually a Tyrian-Sidonian-Israelite alliance—controlled a brisk trade in tin mined in southwest England. Zinc was a relatively unknown metal in Solomon's day.

Hiram's works, no doubt guided by God as with the construction of the original tabernacle furnishings, were truly remarkable. He oversaw the design and construction of the great cherubim whose wings overshadowed the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place; the altar of incense, the table of showbread, and the great candlestick and its instruments, all of which were in the Holy Place; the two pillars which stood in the porch of the temple, as well as their adornments; the great altar, on which all sacrifices were offered; the laver (ceremonial washbasin) called *the Sea*, in which the priests washed; the 10 mobile lavers, in which the burnt offerings were washed; the shovels, which were used to remove the ashes of the altar; the basins, which were used to catch the blood of the

sacrifices; the pots, which were used to remove the innards of the sacrifices; the 10 tables, on which the sacrifices were prepared; and the doors of the temple.

The Dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:1-21; 2 Chronicles 5:2-6:11) December 31

Of all the days that ever passed upon the earth, surely the day that Solomon dedicated the temple must rank as one of the most awesome. The temple was a magnificent creation, with stunning gold, silver, bronze, jewels, marble, engraving and woodwork adorning its every feature. To be in its courts must have been a breathtaking experience!

The dedication of this extraordinary edifice—every aspect of which was masterfully designed to express and extol the magnificence of the One who dwelt within—was an occasion that called for the greatest pomp and ceremony. To the dedication Solomon invited Israel’s most important dignitaries. Two groups are specifically mentioned in 1 Kings 8:1—the “elders of Israel” *and* “the heads of the tribes, the chiefs of the fathers of the children of Israel.” Some have concluded that these two groups are distinct—representing the government of Israel in its national and tribal components. Those with this view see the “elders of Israel” as the members of the governing body in Israel’s *national* government, functioning, it is surmised, somewhat like a House of Lords or Senate. According to the same view, the “heads of the tribes, the chiefs of the fathers of the children of Israel,” apparently one from each tribe, are seen as the senior members of the individual *tribal* governments. We know for sure that Israel’s government was not an absolute monarchy. It was “constitutional”—that is, rather than the king’s word being the highest law of the land, his own powers derived from the written law of Moses as given by God, to which he was himself answerable. It also appears that Israel’s government may have been a *federal* monarchy—the word “federal” describing a system wherein separate states are united under one central authority while retaining certain regulatory powers.

The dedication of the temple occurred in the Feast of the seventh month (1 Kings 8:2, 2 Chronicles 5:3). This may seem somewhat odd, as the temple construction ceased in the *eighth* month (1 Kings 6:38). This means that the temple stood unoccupied for nearly a year before it was dedicated. Why did Solomon choose to wait 11 months before dedicating this magnificent edifice? It may be that all of the temple furnishings were not yet complete. Of course, it may also be that everything was complete and that Solomon simply waited intentionally. The Bible doesn’t spell out the reason for the delay.

Whatever the case, it is interesting that the dedication took place in the feast of the seventh month. But just which feast *was* this—the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Tabernacles or the Eighth Day (now known to us as the Last Great Day)—all of which fall during that same month? (See Leviticus 23.) It should be noted that only one of God’s annual festivals is elsewhere actually called simply the “Feast of the Lord”—i.e., the Feast of Tabernacles (see Leviticus 23:39). A seven-day festival, it was clearly *the* major feast of the seventh month. Yet 1 King 8:65-66 records that the dedication of the temple was *14* days. Strangely, however, it says that the people were sent away on the *eighth* day. As it makes no sense for this to mean the eighth day out of 14, these verses must mean that the 14th day of the dedication feast was *the* Eighth Day—that is, Tishri 22 on the Hebrew Calendar or what we now often refer to as the Last Great Day—and that the people were dismissed at the end of that day. In fact, 2 Chronicles 7:9-10 states that the people observed the dedication of the altar for seven days and the feast for seven days, finally being sent away on the 23rd day of the seventh month, which must mean the very beginning of that day at sunset (which would also be the end of the 22nd, i.e., the end of the Eighth Day). Thus, the feast of the dedication clearly began prior to the Feast of Tabernacles—with the entire period apparently being looked upon as one expanded Feast of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Kingdom of God and is, therefore, eminently the Kingdom Feast, looking to the future enthronement of the divine King, Jesus Christ, and the inauguration of the government of God on Earth. Thus, the enthronement symbolism is fitting for the enthronement of God in His temple.

In a stupendous display, “the glory of the LORD”—an awesome glowing cloud—“filled the house of the LORD” (1 Kings 8:11). “As a cloud had covered the tabernacle and God’s glory had filled it when it was inaugurated (Exodus 40:34), so now a cloud filled the temple. This visible presence of God’s dwelling with His people—sometimes called the ‘shekinah [indwelling] glory’—gave the people assurance and incentive for obedient and holy living” (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on 1 Kings 8:10-11).

As for Solomon’s speech, given before he passionately prays that God will always hear and respond to the prayers of His people, he recounts the promise God made to David in 2 Samuel 7,

where God foretold an enduring dynasty descended from David. Solomon specifically identifies himself as the son who, as God promised, would build the temple. This speech, divinely sanctioned and preserved for all time by God in Scripture, verifies that the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7 refers to Solomon, the *immediate* son of David. It invalidates attempts to “spiritualize” the promises of 2 Samuel 7 regarding David’s house—that is, mistakenly claiming they are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Although Jesus *is* building God’s Church, God’s *spiritual* temple, nevertheless the promise made by God to David through the prophet Nathan referred to a literal and immediate son of David—and that David’s dynasty would continue forever from that time. While there is likely duality in 2 Samuel 7, the *primary* and *intended* meaning of the promise to David concerns a successor son and a literal physical temple—and a literal dynasty beginning at that time that would never end.

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