



Samuel

GOD IS FAITHFUL



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Samuel was a prophet during the time of David and is a key figure in 1 and 2 Samuel. These two books are one story that focuses on the nation of Israel and their continued disobedience of the God who delivered them from the desert and gave them the promised land. These books take place right after the period of the Judges. The people of Israel are ready for a king to rule over them.

Samuel continued to grow to be more like Christ during a time of idol worship and disobedience of God. Throughout these books, God will use Samuel as a mouthpiece to speak to his people and to bring in the first two kings of Israel.

A theme that runs throughout the books of Samuel is the people of Israel continuing to disobey and turn their backs on God. Despite their disobedience, God remains faithful—so the title of our series is Samuel: God Is Faithful. Throughout both books, kings will rise and fall, but God still chooses to bless the nation of Israel.

This reading plan will be different from the other reading plans you have done in the past. We will be reading through all of 1 and 2 Samuel in the next five weeks. At the end of each day, you will be left with one idea or question. As you read, there will be opportunities for application in your life. We also want you to delight in the faithfulness of our Creator as you read. This book will take some dramatic turns, and there will be things that are hard to read. As you are reading, remind yourself that we still serve this same faithful God—a God that even when his people completely turn their back on him, he still chooses to be faithful and loves them so much that eventually he would send his one and only Son to take away their sin.

DAY 1 | 1 SAMUEL 1-4

The continued disobedience of Eli's sons will bring repercussions for the people of Israel. God is still moving in the midst of this disobedience and he provides Samuel as an answer to prayer for Hannah.

1 Hannah has no children. This was considered shameful, and Elkanah likely marries Peninnah because Hannah is barren.

2 The ESV says, "The Lord had closed her womb." Even though this would have caused her great shame, Elkanah loves and cares deeply for her. God is faithful in providing a protector and provider for her.

3 Hannah lays her burdens at the Lord's feet, pouring out her deep desire to have a child.

4 Eli, the priest, sees how she is pouring out her heart, and after rebuking her, gives her a blessing that will come to fruition in the future.

5 The answer to Hannah's prayers—a son named Samuel!

There was a man named Elkanah who lived in Ramah in the region of Zuph in the hill country of Ephraim. He was the son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, of Ephraim. Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah did not¹.

Each year Elkanah would travel to Shiloh to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of Heaven's Armies at the Tabernacle. The priests of the Lord at that time were the two sons of Eli—Hophni and Phinehas. On the days Elkanah presented his sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to Peninnah and each of her children. And though he loved Hannah, he would give her only one choice portion because the Lord had given her no children². So Peninnah would taunt Hannah and make fun of her because the Lord had kept her from having children. Year after year it was the same—Peninnah would taunt Hannah as they went to the Tabernacle. Each time, Hannah would be reduced to tears and would not even eat.

"Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be downhearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?"

Once after a sacrificial meal at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. Eli the priest was sitting at his customary place beside the entrance of the Tabernacle. Hannah was in deep anguish, crying bitterly as she prayed to the Lord. And she made this vow: "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut."

As she was praying to the Lord, Eli watched her. Seeing her lips moving but hearing no sound, he thought she had been drinking. "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!"

"Oh no, sir!" she replied. "I haven't been drinking wine or anything stronger. But I am very discouraged, and I was pouring out my heart to the Lord.³ Don't think I am a wicked woman! For I have been praying out of great anguish and sorrow."

"In that case," Eli said, "go in peace! May the God of Israel grant the request you have asked of him."⁴

"Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. Then she went back and began to eat again, and she was no longer sad.

The entire family got up early the next morning and went to worship the Lord once more. Then they returned home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with Hannah, the Lord remembered her plea, and in due time she gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I asked the Lord for him."⁵

The next year Elkanah and his family went on their annual trip to offer a sacrifice to the Lord and to keep his vow. But Hannah did not go. She told her husband, "Wait until the boy is weaned. Then I will take him to the Tabernacle and leave him there with the Lord permanently."

“Whatever you think is best,” Elkanah agreed. “Stay here for now, and may the Lord help you keep your promise.” So she stayed home and nursed the boy until he was weaned.

When the child was weaned, Hannah took him to the Tabernacle in Shiloh. They brought along a three-year-old bull for the sacrifice and a basket of flour and some wine. After sacrificing the bull, they brought the boy to Eli. “Sir, do you remember me?” Hannah asked⁶. “I am the very woman who stood here several years ago praying to the Lord. I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request. Now I am giving him to the Lord, and he will belong to the Lord his whole life.”⁷ And they worshiped the Lord there.

Then Hannah prayed:⁸

“My heart rejoices in the Lord!

The Lord has made me strong.

Now I have an answer for my enemies;

I rejoice because you rescued me.”⁹

No one is holy like the Lord!

There is no one besides you;

there is no Rock like our God.

“Stop acting so proud and haughty!

Don’t speak with such arrogance!

For the Lord is a God who knows what you have done;

he will judge your actions.

The bow of the mighty is now broken,

and those who stumbled are now strong.

Those who were well fed are now starving,

and those who were starving are now full.

The childless woman now has seven children,

and the woman with many children wastes away.

The Lord gives both death and life;

he brings some down to the grave but raises others up.

The Lord makes some poor and others rich;

he brings some down and lifts others up.

He lifts the poor from the dust

and the needy from the garbage dump.

He sets them among princes,

placing them in seats of honor.

For all the earth is the Lord’s,

6 Hannah reminds Eli that he blessed her, her prayers were answered, and she now has Samuel.

7 Hannah commits her son to the Lord. This will be key as we study the book of Samuel.

8 This Prayer of Praise reflects the theme of the book of Samuel. Hannah’s prayer emphasizes God’s sovereignty. God is still faithful to the people of Israel even after their continued sinfulness.

9 Hannah was ridiculed by her enemies because she was barren, and now she rejoices because God is faithful.

and he has set the world in order.
 “He will protect his faithful ones,
 but the wicked will disappear in darkness.
 No one will succeed by strength alone.
 Those who fight against the Lord will be shattered.
 He thunders against them from heaven;
 the Lord judges throughout the earth.
 He gives power to his king;
 he increases the strength of his anointed one.”

Then Elkanah returned home to Ramah without Samuel. And the boy served the Lord by assisting Eli the priest.

Eli's sons have no respect for the Lord, and their sin will eventually lead to great loss for Israel.

10 Now the sons of Eli were scoundrels who had no respect for the Lord¹⁰ or for their duties as priests. Whenever anyone offered a sacrifice, Eli's sons would send over a servant with a three-pronged fork. While the meat of the sacrificed animal was still boiling, the servant would stick the fork into the pot and demand that whatever it brought up be given to Eli's sons. All the Israelites who came to worship at Shiloh were treated this way. Sometimes the servant would come even before the animal's fat had been burned on the altar. He would demand raw meat before it had been boiled so that it could be used for roasting.

Eli's sons are sinning against the Lord.

The man offering the sacrifice might reply, “Take as much as you want, but the fat must be burned first.” Then the servant would demand, “No, give it to me now, or I'll take it by force.” So the sin of these young men was very serious in the Lord's sight, for they treated the Lord's offerings with contempt.¹¹

Even in the face of this terrible sin, we continue to see God's faithfulness to his people by giving Hannah more children and Samuel continuing to grow in the presence of the Lord!

But Samuel, though he was only a boy, served the Lord. He wore a linen garment like that of a priest. Each year his mother made a small coat for him and brought it to him when she came with her husband for the sacrifice. Before they returned home, Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, “May the Lord give you other children to take the place of this one she gave to the Lord.” And the Lord blessed Hannah, and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.¹²

Now Eli was very old, but he was aware of what his sons were doing to the people of Israel. He knew, for instance, that his sons were seducing the young women who assisted at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Eli said to them, “I have been hearing reports from all the people about the wicked things you are doing. Why do you keep sinning? You must stop, my sons! The reports I hear among the Lord's people are not good. If someone sins against another person, God can mediate for the guilty party. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede?” But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, for the Lord was already planning to put them to death.

While Eli's sons continue to sin, Samuel continues to grow in favor with the Lord and will be a key part in rebuking Eli's sons.

13 Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew taller and grew in favor with the Lord and with the people.¹³

One day a man of God came to Eli and gave him this message from the Lord: “I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. I chose your ancestor Aaron from among all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer

sacrifices on my altar, to burn incense, and to wear the priestly vest as he served me. And I assigned the sacrificial offerings to you priests. So why do you scorn my sacrifices and offerings? Why do you give your sons more honor than you give me—for you and they have become fat from the best offerings of my people Israel!

“Therefore, the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I promised that your branch of the tribe of Levi would always be my priests. But I will honor those who honor me, and I will despise those who think lightly of me. The time is coming when I will put an end to your family, so it will no longer serve as my priests. All the members of your family will die before their time. None will reach old age.¹⁴ You will watch with envy as I pour out prosperity on the people of Israel. But no members of your family will ever live out their days. The few not cut off from serving at my altar will survive, but only so their eyes can go blind and their hearts break, and their children will die a violent death. And to prove that what I have said will come true, I will cause your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, to die on the same day!

“Then I will raise up a faithful priest who will serve me and do what I desire. I will establish his family, and they will be priests to my anointed kings forever. Then all of your surviving family will bow before him, begging for money and food. ‘Please,’ they will say, ‘give us jobs among the priests so we will have enough to eat.’”

Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.¹⁵

One night Eli, who was almost blind by now, had gone to bed. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Tabernacle near the Ark of God. Suddenly the Lord called out, “Samuel!”

“Yes?” Samuel replied. “What is it?” He got up and ran to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?”

“I didn’t call you,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.” So he did.

Then the Lord called out again, “Samuel!”

Again Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?”

“I didn’t call you, my son,” Eli said. “Go back to bed.”

Samuel did not yet know the Lord because he had never had a message from the Lord before. So the Lord called a third time, and once more Samuel got up and went to Eli. “Here I am. Did you call me?”

Then Eli realized it was the Lord who was calling the boy. So he said to Samuel, “Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to bed.

And the Lord came and called as before, “Samuel! Samuel!”

And Samuel replied, “Speak, your servant is listening.”

Then the Lord said to Samuel, “I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel. I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family, from beginning to end. I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn’t disciplined them. So I have vowed that the sins of Eli and his sons will never be forgiven by sacrifices or offerings.”¹⁶

14 Because of the sin of Eli’s sons, soon Eli’s family will be cut off and everyone will die before they reach an old age.

15 Samuel has continued to grow in spiritual maturity, and although visions from the Lord were not common at this time, one is about to happen!

16 The Lord tells Samuel how he is going to unleash his wrath on Eli and his family. Because Eli’s sons have sinned and he has not rebuked them, his whole family will face the wrath of God.

Samuel stayed in bed until morning, then got up and opened the doors of the Tabernacle as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him. But Eli called out to him, “Samuel, my son.”

“Here I am,” Samuel replied.

“What did the Lord say to you? Tell me everything. And may God strike you and even kill you if you hide anything from me!” So Samuel told Eli everything; he didn’t hold anything back. “It is the Lord’s will,” Eli replied. “Let him do what he thinks best.”

The Lord has made himself known to Samuel, and he is continuing to grow to be more like God. **17**

As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable.¹⁷ And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh and gave messages to Samuel there at the Tabernacle. And Samuel’s words went out to all the people of Israel.

At that time Israel was at war with the Philistines. The Israelite army was camped near Ebenezer, and the Philistines were at Aphek. The Philistines attacked and defeated the army of Israel, killing 4,000 men. After the battle was over, the troops retreated to their camp, and the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the Lord allow us to be defeated by the Philistines?” Then they said, “Let’s bring the Ark of the Covenant¹⁸ of the Lord from Shiloh. If we carry it into battle with us, it will save us from our enemies.”

The Ark of the Covenant was the most holy relic in Israel. This was the place that God would dwell in the Holy of Holies in the temple. **18**

So they sent men to Shiloh to bring the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli, were also there with the Ark of the Covenant of God. When all the Israelites saw the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord coming into the camp, their shout of joy was so loud it made the ground shake!

“What’s going on?” the Philistines asked. “What’s all the shouting about in the Hebrew camp?” When they were told it was because the Ark of the Lord had arrived, they panicked. “The gods have come into their camp!” they cried. “This is a disaster! We have never had to face anything like this before! Help! Who can save us from these mighty gods of Israel? They are the same gods who destroyed the Egyptians with plagues when Israel was in the wilderness. Fight as never before, Philistines! If you don’t, we will become the Hebrews’ slaves just as they have been ours! Stand up like men and fight!”

So the Philistines fought desperately, and Israel was defeated again. The slaughter was great; 30,000 Israelite soldiers died that day. The survivors turned and fled to their tents. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were killed.¹⁹

Here, we see all that God has told Samuel is starting to come true. Both of Eli’s sons have died, and now the rest of Eli’s family will feel this burden. **19**

A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield and arrived at Shiloh later that same day. He had torn his clothes and put dust on his head to show his grief. Eli was waiting beside the road to hear the news of the battle, for his heart trembled for the safety of the Ark of God. When the messenger arrived and told what had happened, an outcry resounded throughout the town.

“What is all the noise about?” Eli asked.

The messenger rushed over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and blind. He said to Eli, “I have just come from the battlefield—I was there this very day.”

“What happened, my son?” Eli demanded.

“Israel has been defeated by the Philistines,” the messenger replied. “The people have been slaughtered, and your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were also killed. And the Ark of God has been captured.”

When the messenger mentioned what had happened to the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from his seat beside the gate. He broke his neck and died, for he was old and overweight.²⁰ He had been Israel’s judge for forty years.

Eli’s daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near her time of delivery. When she heard that the Ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth. She died in childbirth, but before she passed away the midwives tried to encourage her. “Don’t be afraid,” they said. “You have a baby boy!” But she did not answer or pay attention to them.

She named the child Ichabod (which means “Where is the glory?”), for she said, “Israel’s glory is gone.” She named him this because the Ark of God had been captured and because her father-in-law and husband were dead. Then she said, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured.”

REFLECTION:

Eli allowed his sons to continue sinning against God, and because of their sin and disobedience, the whole nation of Israel is suffering. As you go throughout your day today, think about your sin. Do we realize the weight of our sin? Consider not only the consequences that it has for us, but also the consequences and pain that it can and will cause others around us.

20 In deep sadness, Eli fell backwards and died. Realizing that all that Samuel had told him is coming true and that the Ark of the Covenant is gone, he now sees the magnitude of the sin of his sons and what it has done to Israel.

DAY 2 | 1 SAMUEL 5-7

The people of Israel continue to feel the weight of the sins of Eli's sons, and they will lose something extremely important to the nation. However, God's power is so immense that the Philistines will actually give back what they tried to take because they are terrified of the wrath of God.

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the town of Ashdod. They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside an idol of Dagon. But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord! So they took Dagon and put him in his place again. But the next morning the same thing happened—Dagon had fallen face down before the Ark of the Lord again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact. That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon in Ashdod will step on its threshold.

Then the Lord's heavy hand struck the people of Ashdod and the nearby villages with a plague of tumors. When the people realized what was happening, they cried out, "We can't keep the Ark of the God of Israel here any longer! He is against us! We will all be destroyed along with Dagon, our god." So they called together the rulers of the Philistine towns and asked, "What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

The rulers discussed it and replied, "Move it to the town of Gath." So they moved the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath. But when the Ark arrived at Gath, the Lord's heavy hand fell on its men, young and old; he struck them with a plague of tumors, and there was a great panic.

So they sent the Ark of God to the town of Ekron, but when the people of Ekron saw it coming they cried out, "They are bringing the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us, too!" The people summoned the Philistine rulers again and begged them, "Please send the Ark of the God of Israel back to its own country, or it will kill us all."¹ For the deadly plague from God had already begun, and great fear was sweeping across the town. Those who didn't die were afflicted with tumors; and the cry from the town rose to heaven.

The Ark of the Lord remained in Philistine territory seven months in all. Then the Philistines called in their priests and diviners and asked them, "What should we do about the Ark of the Lord? Tell us how to return it to its own country."

"Send the Ark of the God of Israel back with a gift," they were told. "Send a guilt offering so the plague will stop. Then, if you are healed, you will know it was his hand that caused the plague."

"What sort of guilt offering should we send?" they asked.

And they were told, "Since the plague has struck both you and your five rulers, make five gold tumors and five gold rats, just like those that have ravaged your land. Make these things to show honor to the God of Israel. Perhaps then he will stop afflicting you, your gods, and your land. Don't be stubborn and rebellious as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were. By the time God was finished with them, they were eager to let Israel go.

1 The people are terrified of God's power, and they are now begging the Ark of the Covenant to be sent back because they realize everything that is happening is because God is pouring his wrath out on these people.

“Now build a new cart, and find two cows that have just given birth to calves. Make sure the cows have never been yoked to a cart. Hitch the cows to the cart, but shut their calves away from them in a pen. Put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, and beside it place a chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors you are sending as a guilt offering. Then let the cows go wherever they want. If they cross the border of our land and go to Beth-shemesh, **we will know it was the Lord who brought this great disaster upon us**². If they don’t, we will know it was not his hand that caused the plague. It came simply by chance.”

So these instructions were carried out. Two cows were hitched to the cart, and their newborn calves were shut up in a pen. Then the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors were placed on the cart. And sure enough, without veering off in other directions, the cows went straight along the road toward Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went. The Philistine rulers followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they saw the Ark, they were overjoyed! The cart came into the field of a man named Joshua and stopped beside a large rock. So the people broke up the wood of the cart for a fire and killed the cows and sacrificed them to the Lord as a burnt offering. Several men of the tribe of Levi lifted the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors from the cart and placed them on the large rock. Many sacrifices and burnt offerings were offered to the Lord that day by the people of Beth-shemesh. The five Philistine rulers watched all this and then returned to Ekron that same day.

The five gold tumors sent by the Philistines as a guilt offering to the Lord were gifts from the rulers of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The five gold rats represented the five Philistine towns and their surrounding villages, which were controlled by the five rulers. The large rock at Beth-shemesh, where they set the Ark of the Lord, still stands in the field of Joshua as a witness to what happened there.

But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done. “Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” they cried out. “Where can we send the Ark from here?”

So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, “The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come here and get it!”

So the men of Kiriath-jearim came to get the Ark of the Lord. They took it to the hillside home of Abinadab and ordained Eleazar, his son, to be in charge of it. **The Ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for a long time—twenty years in all. During that time all Israel mourned because it seemed the Lord had abandoned them.**³

Then Samuel said to all the people of Israel, “If you want to return to the Lord with all your hearts, get rid of your foreign gods and your images of Ashtoreth. **Turn your hearts to the Lord and obey him alone**⁴; then he will rescue you from the Philistines.” So the Israelites got rid of their images of Baal and Ashtoreth and worshiped only the Lord.

Then Samuel told them, “Gather all of Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you.” So they gathered at Mizpah and, in a great ceremony, drew water from a well and poured it out before the Lord. They also went without food all day and confessed that they had sinned against the Lord. (It was at Mizpah that Samuel became Israel’s judge.)

2 The Philistines are doing anything they can to rid themselves of God’s wrath. They are willing to send back the Ark and animals to be sacrificed in hopes that God will show them mercy. Again, they are terrified in the face of God’s overwhelming power.

3 Even though the Ark of the Covenant is returned, the people are lamenting because they feel God has abandoned them. However, God is getting ready to raise up a judge, Samuel, to bring his people back to him.

4 This is the first time the people of Israel have heard from God in about 20 years. They have created other idols, and now Samuel is telling them to turn and obey God alone. If the Israelites obey, God will deliver them from the Philistines.

When the Philistine rulers heard that Israel had gathered at Mizpah, they mobilized their army and advanced. The Israelites were badly frightened when they learned that the Philistines were approaching. “Don’t stop pleading with the Lord our God to save us from the Philistines!” they begged Samuel. So Samuel took a young lamb and offered it to the Lord as a whole burnt offering. He pleaded with the Lord to help Israel, and the Lord answered him.

The people listened to Samuel and turned in obedience. Because of that, while Samuel makes a sacrifice, God confuses the Philistines and allows Israel to defeat them. God honored his promise.

5 Just as Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines arrived to attack Israel. But the Lord spoke with a mighty voice of thunder from heaven that day, and the Philistines were thrown into such confusion that the Israelites defeated them. The men of Israel chased them from Mizpah to a place below Beth-car, slaughtering them all along the way.⁵

Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah. He named it Ebenezer (which means “the stone of help”), for he said, “Up to this point the Lord has helped us!”

So the Philistines were subdued and didn’t invade Israel again for some time. And throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the Lord’s powerful hand was raised against the Philistines. The Israelite villages near Ekron and Gath that the Philistines had captured were restored to Israel, along with the rest of the territory that the Philistines had taken. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites in those days.

Samuel continued as Israel’s judge for the rest of his life. Each year he traveled around, setting up his court first at Bethel, then at Gilgal, and then at Mizpah. He judged the people of Israel at each of these places. Then he would return to his home at Ramah, and he would hear cases there, too. And Samuel built an altar to the Lord at Ramah.

REFLECTION:

In our reading today, we see that God is overwhelmingly powerful. He is a God who keeps his promises, showing the nation of Israel, “If you follow and obey me, my power is much greater than you can begin to fathom.” Remind yourself today—we get to serve the same God. Our God is more powerful than we can even begin to fathom, and he is worthy to be feared.

DAY 3 | 1 SAMUEL 8-11

Saul will become the first king of Israel despite Samuel warning the people of Israel that having a king will cause trouble. God is still faithful to the nation of Israel and will allow the Israelite army to overwhelm their opponent and continue to thrive and grow.

As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba. But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice.

Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. “Look,” they told him, “you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.”¹

Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the Lord for guidance. “Do everything they say to you,” the Lord replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don’t want me to be their king any longer. Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them.”

So Samuel passed on the Lord’s warning to the people who were asking him for a king. “This is how a king will reign over you,” Samuel said. “The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment. The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants. He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the Lord will not help you.”²

But the people refused to listen to Samuel’s warning. “Even so, we still want a king,” they said. “We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle.”

So Samuel repeated to the Lord what the people had said, and the Lord replied, “Do as they say, and give them a king.” Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home.

There was a wealthy, influential man named Kish from the tribe of Benjamin. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, of the tribe of Benjamin. His son Saul was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land.³

One day Kish’s donkeys strayed away, and he told Saul, “Take a servant with you, and go look for the donkeys.” So Saul took one of the servants and traveled through the hill country of Ephraim, the land of Shalishah, the Shaalim area, and the entire land of Benjamin, but they couldn’t find the donkeys anywhere.

Finally, they entered the region of Zuph, and Saul said to his servant, “Let’s go home. By now my father will be more worried about us than about the donkeys!”

1 The people of Israel are ready for a king. Samuel’s sons are wicked, so they want a king to rule over them instead. God tells Samuel that the people have turned their back on the God who delivered them from Egypt, but if they still want a king after Samuel warns them, he will give them what they want.

2 Samuel makes it very clear all that a king will do and take from the people. At some point they will beg for relief from the king, but God will not answer them. He will give them what they ask for, and they will have to deal with the consequences.

3 Saul looks the part. He is different from everyone around him and looks like someone fit to be king.

But the servant said, "I've just thought of something! There is a man of God who lives here in this town. He is held in high honor by all the people because everything he says comes true. Let's go find him. Perhaps he can tell us which way to go."

"But we don't have anything to offer him," Saul replied. "Even our food is gone, and we don't have a thing to give him."

"Well," the servant said, "I have one small silver piece. We can at least offer it to the man of God and see what happens!" (In those days if people wanted a message from God, they would say, "Let's go and ask the seer," for prophets used to be called seers.)

"All right," Saul agreed, "let's try it!" So they started into the town where the man of God lived.

As they were climbing the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to draw water. So Saul and his servant asked, "Is the seer here today?"

"Yes," they replied. "Stay right on this road. He is at the town gates. He has just arrived to take part in a public sacrifice up at the place of worship. Hurry and catch him before he goes up there to eat. The guests won't begin eating until he arrives to bless the food."

So they entered the town, and as they passed through the gates, Samuel was coming out toward them to go up to the place of worship.

Now the Lord had told Samuel the previous day, "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him to be the leader of my people, Israel. He will rescue them from the Philistines, for I have looked down on my people in mercy and have heard their cry."

When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said, "That's the man I told you about! He will rule my people."⁴

Just then Saul approached Samuel at the gateway and asked, "Can you please tell me where the seer's house is?"

"I am the seer!" Samuel replied. "Go up to the place of worship ahead of me. We will eat there together, and in the morning I'll tell you what you want to know and send you on your way. And don't worry about those donkeys that were lost three days ago, for they have been found. And I am here to tell you that you and your family are the focus of all Israel's hopes."

Saul replied, "But I'm only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe! Why are you talking like this to me?"

Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and placed them at the head of the table, honoring them above the thirty special guests. Samuel then instructed the cook to bring Saul the finest cut of meat, the piece that had been set aside for the guest of honor. So the cook brought in the meat and placed it before Saul. "Go ahead and eat it," Samuel said. "I was saving it for you even before I invited these others!" So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

When they came down from the place of worship and returned to town, Samuel took Saul up to the roof of the house and prepared a bed for him there. At daybreak the next morning, Samuel called to Saul, "Get up! It's time you were on your way." So Saul got ready, and he and Samuel left the house together. When they reached the edge

God gave Samuel clear instructions on how to identify the person he has chosen to reign over his people. As soon as Samuel sees him, God confirms his identity.

4

of town, Samuel told Saul to send his servant on ahead. After the servant was gone, Samuel said, “Stay here, for I have received a special message for you from God.”

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it over Saul’s head. He kissed Saul and said, “I am doing this because the Lord has appointed you to be the ruler over Israel, his special possession. When you leave me today, you will see two men beside Rachel’s tomb at Zelzah, on the border of Benjamin. They will tell you that the donkeys have been found and that your father has stopped worrying about them and is now worried about you. He is asking, ‘Have you seen my son?’

“When you get to the oak of Tabor, you will see three men coming toward you who are on their way to worship God at Bethel. One will be bringing three young goats, another will have three loaves of bread, and the third will be carrying a wineskin full of wine. They will greet you and offer you two of the loaves, which you are to accept.

“When you arrive at Gibeah of God, where the garrison of the Philistines is located, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the place of worship. They will be playing a harp, a tambourine, a flute, and a lyre, and they will be prophesying. At that time the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them. You will be changed into a different person. After these signs take place, do what must be done, for God is with you.⁵ Then go down to Gilgal ahead of me. I will join you there to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. You must wait for seven days until I arrive and give you further instructions.”

5 Samuel gave Saul clear instructions to follow in order to be anointed King of Israel.

As Saul turned and started to leave, God gave him a new heart, and all Samuel’s signs were fulfilled that day. When Saul and his servant arrived at Gibeah, they saw a group of prophets coming toward them. Then the Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy. When those who knew Saul heard about it, they exclaimed, “What? Is even Saul a prophet? How did the son of Kish become a prophet?”

And one of those standing there said, “Can anyone become a prophet, no matter who his father is?” So that is the origin of the saying “Is even Saul a prophet?”

When Saul had finished prophesying, he went up to the place of worship. “Where have you been?” Saul’s uncle asked him and his servant.

“We were looking for the donkeys,” Saul replied, “but we couldn’t find them. So we went to Samuel to ask him where they were.”

“Oh? And what did he say?” his uncle asked.

“He told us that the donkeys had already been found,” Saul replied. But Saul didn’t tell his uncle what Samuel said about the kingdom.

Later Samuel called all the people of Israel to meet before the Lord at Mizpah. And he said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, has declared: I brought you from Egypt and rescued you from the Egyptians and from all of the nations that were oppressing you. But though I have rescued you from your misery and distress, you have rejected your God today and have said, ‘No, we want a king instead!’ Now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by tribes and clans.”⁶

6 Samuel reminds the people that even though they are getting what they asked for, they have gone against God’s plan, and there will be consequences.

So Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel before the Lord, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen by lot. Then he brought each family of the tribe of Benjamin before the Lord, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. And finally Saul son of Kish was

chosen from among them. But when they looked for him, he had disappeared! So they asked the Lord, “Where is he?”

7 The person who is supposed to be their heroic king is hiding in the baggage.

And the Lord replied, “He is hiding among the baggage.”⁷ So they found him and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else.

Then Samuel said to all the people, “This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!”

8 Samuel has warned them of the coming consequences, but they are still blinded.

And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”⁸

Then Samuel told the people what the rights and duties of a king were. He wrote them down on a scroll and placed it before the Lord. Then Samuel sent the people home again.

9 Even though the people are disobedient, God continues to be faithful to his people and to Saul.

When Saul returned to his home at Gibeah, a group of men whose hearts God had touched went with him.⁹ But there were some scoundrels who complained, “How can this man save us?” And they scorned him and refused to bring him gifts. But Saul ignored them.

[Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the people of Gad and Reuben who lived east of the Jordan River. He gouged out the right eye of each of the Israelites living there, and he didn’t allow anyone to come and rescue them. In fact, of all the Israelites east of the Jordan, there wasn’t a single one whose right eye Nahash had not gouged out. But there were 7,000 men who had escaped from the Ammonites, and they had settled in Jabesh-gilead.]

About a month later, King Nahash of Ammon led his army against the Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead. But all the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace. “Make a treaty with us, and we will be your servants,” they pleaded.

“All right,” Nahash said, “but only on one condition. I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace to all Israel!”

“Give us seven days to send messengers throughout Israel!” replied the elders of Jabesh. “If no one comes to save us, we will agree to your terms.”

When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and told the people about their plight, everyone broke into tears. Saul had been plowing a field with his oxen, and when he returned to town, he asked, “What’s the matter? Why is everyone crying?” So they told him about the message from Jabesh.

Then the Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul, and he became very angry. He took two oxen and cut them into pieces and sent the messengers to carry them throughout Israel with this message: “This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who refuses to follow Saul and Samuel into battle!” And the Lord made the people afraid of Saul’s anger, and all of them came out together as one. When Saul mobilized them at Bezek, he found that there were 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 men from Judah.

So Saul sent the messengers back to Jabesh-gilead to say, “We will rescue you by noontime tomorrow!” There was great joy throughout the town when that message arrived!

The men of Jabesh then told their enemies, “Tomorrow we will come out to you, and you can do to us whatever you wish.” But before dawn the next morning, Saul arrived, having divided his army into three detachments. He launched a surprise attack against

the Ammonites and slaughtered them the whole morning. The remnant of their army was so badly scattered that no two of them were left together.

Then the people exclaimed to Samuel, “Now where are those men who said, ‘Why should Saul rule over us?’ Bring them here, and we will kill them!”

But Saul replied, “No one will be executed today, for today the Lord has rescued Israel!”

Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us all go to Gilgal to renew the kingdom.” So they all went to Gilgal, and in a solemn ceremony before the Lord they made Saul king. Then they offered peace offerings to the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites were filled with joy.¹⁰

10 The Lord gave the Israelites something that he did not want to give. Although he is sovereign, he is simultaneously in a real and intimate relationship with his people.

Saul officially begins his reign as King.

REFLECTION:

In chapters 8-11, we see the people of Israel believing they know better than God what is best for their nation. Although it is going to cause a lot of pain and suffering for the people of Israel, God gives them what they want. Even though they go against God, we see that God is still faithful. Today, delight in the faithfulness of our Creator. Even in our continued disobedience, we serve a merciful and gracious God who continues to remain faithful to his people.

DAY 1 | 1 SAMUEL 12-14

Samuel is leaving the Israelites with some final words of encouragement as he steps down as their judge. As Saul officially takes over, we will see him make great military advancements while also being overtaken by pride.

Then Samuel addressed all Israel: “I have done as you asked and given you a king. Your king is now your leader. I stand here before you—an old, gray-haired man—and my sons serve you. I have served as your leader from the time I was a boy to this very day. Now testify against me in the presence of the Lord and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong.”

“No,” they replied, “you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe.”

“The Lord and his anointed one are my witnesses today,” Samuel declared, “that my hands are clean.”

“Yes, he is a witness,” they replied.

“It was the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron,” Samuel continued. “He brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. Now stand here quietly before the Lord as I remind you of all the great things the Lord has done for you and your ancestors.

“When the Israelites were in Egypt and cried out to the Lord, he sent Moses and Aaron to rescue them from Egypt and to bring them into this land. But the people soon forgot about the Lord their God, so he handed them over to Sisera, the commander of Hazor’s army, and also to the Philistines and to the king of Moab, who fought against them.

1 “Then they cried to the Lord again and confessed, ‘We have sinned by turning away from the Lord and worshiping the images of Baal and Ashtoreth. But we will worship you and you alone if you will rescue us from our enemies.’ Then the Lord sent Gideon, Bedan, Jephthah, and Samuel to save you, and you lived in safety.¹

“But when you were afraid of Nahash, the king of Ammon, you came to me and said that you wanted a king to reign over you, even though the Lord your God was already your king. All right, here is the king you have chosen. You asked for him, and the Lord has granted your request.

“Now if you fear and worship the Lord and listen to his voice, and if you do not rebel against the Lord’s commands, then both you and your king will show that you recognize the Lord as your God. But if you rebel against the Lord’s commands and refuse to listen to him, then his hand will be as heavy upon you as it was upon your ancestors.

“Now stand here and see the great thing the Lord is about to do. You know that it does not rain at this time of the year during the wheat harvest. I will ask the Lord to send thunder and rain today. Then you will realize how wicked you have been in asking the Lord for a king!”

So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day. And all the people were terrified of the Lord and of Samuel. “Pray to the Lord your God for us, or

We often find ourselves in this cycle of crying out to God, God rescuing us, forgetting God, God disciplining us, and then repeating this cycle. We often forget God because we are fearful.

we will die!” they all said to Samuel. “For now we have added to our sins by asking for a king.”

“Don’t be afraid,” Samuel reassured them. “You have certainly done wrong, but make sure now that you worship the Lord with all your heart, and don’t turn your back on him. Don’t go back to worshiping worthless idols that cannot help or rescue you—they are totally useless! The Lord will not abandon his people, because that would dishonor his great name. For it has pleased the Lord to make you his very own people.

“As for me, I will certainly not sin against the Lord by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and faithfully serve him. Think of all the wonderful things he has done for you. **But if you continue to sin, you and your king will be swept away.**”²

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years.

Saul selected 3,000 special troops from the army of Israel³ and sent the rest of the men home. He took 2,000 of the chosen men with him to Micmash and the hill country of Bethel. The other 1,000 went with Saul’s son Jonathan to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin.

Soon after this, Jonathan attacked and defeated the garrison of Philistines at Geba. The news spread quickly among the Philistines. So Saul blew the ram’s horn throughout the land, saying, “Hebrews, hear this! Rise up in revolt!” All Israel heard the news that Saul had destroyed the Philistine garrison at Geba and that the Philistines now hated the Israelites more than ever. So the entire Israelite army was summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines mustered a mighty army of 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and as many warriors as the grains of sand on the seashore! They camped at Micmash east of Beth-aven. **The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns.**⁴ Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead.

Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for Samuel, as Samuel had instructed him earlier, but Samuel still didn’t come. Saul realized that his troops were rapidly slipping away. So he demanded, “Bring me the burnt offering and the peace offerings!” And Saul sacrificed the burnt offering himself.

Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Saul went out to meet and welcome him, but Samuel said, **“What is this you have done?”**⁵

Saul replied, “I saw my men scattering from me, and you didn’t arrive when you said you would, and the Philistines are at Micmash ready for battle. So I said, ‘The Philistines are ready to march against us at Gilgal, and I haven’t even asked for the Lord’s help!’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering myself before you came.”

“How foolish!” Samuel exclaimed. “You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. Had you kept it, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom must end, for the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart. The Lord has already appointed him to be the leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord’s command.”⁶

2 Samuel wants Israel to know that God loves them. Despite their past sin, they can keep serving the Lord and see his blessing because God loves them. His favor towards Israel was not prompted by their good works, but instead, it pleased God to bless them.

3 This is the first “regular” army for Israel. Previously, Israel only had a militia that assembled in times of national threat. Now, Israel has a professional army.

4 Jonathan is bold enough to launch the initial attack against the Philistines, but the men of Israel are not bold enough to stand strong against their enemy. In fear, they hide or flee across the Jordan River. This is a low point for Israel.

5 Out of fear, panic, and not knowing what else to do, Saul does something sinful.

6 It would be easy to say that the kingdom is taken from Saul because he sinned, and that is true; but it was more than that. David also sinned, yet God never took the kingdom from him and his descendants. The issue is bigger than an incident of sin; the issue is being a man after God’s own heart.

Samuel then left Gilgal and went on his way, but the rest of the troops went with Saul to meet the army. They went up from Gilgal to Gibeah in the land of Benjamin. When Saul counted the men who were still with him, he found only 600 were left! Saul and Jonathan and the troops with them were staying at Geba in the land of Benjamin. The Philistines set up their camp at Micmash. Three raiding parties soon left the camp of the Philistines. One went north toward Ophrah in the land of Shual, another went west to Beth-horon, and the third moved toward the border above the valley of Zeboim near the wilderness.

There were no blacksmiths in the land of Israel in those days. The Philistines wouldn't allow them for fear they would make swords and spears for the Hebrews. So whenever the Israelites needed to sharpen their plowshares, picks, axes, or sickles, they had to take them to a Philistine blacksmith. The charges were as follows: a quarter of an ounce of silver for sharpening a plowshare or a pick, and an eighth of an ounce for sharpening an ax or making the point of an ox goad. So on the day of the battle **none of the people of Israel had a sword or spear**⁷, except for Saul and Jonathan.

The pass at Micmash had meanwhile been secured by a contingent of the Philistine army.

One day Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "Come on, let's go over to where the Philistines have their outpost." But Jonathan did not tell his father what he was doing.

Meanwhile, Saul and his 600 men were camped on the outskirts of Gibeah, around the pomegranate tree at Migron. Among Saul's men was Ahijah the priest, who was wearing the ephod, the priestly vest. Ahijah was the son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, the priest of the Lord who had served at Shiloh.

No one realized that Jonathan had left the Israelite camp. To reach the Philistine outpost, Jonathan had to go down between two rocky cliffs that were called Bozez and Seneh. The cliff on the north was in front of Micmash, and the one on the south was in front of Geba. "Let's go across to the outpost of those pagans," Jonathan said to his armor bearer. "Perhaps the Lord will help us, for nothing can hinder the Lord. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!"

8 "Do what you think is best," the armor bearer replied. **"I'm with you completely, whatever you decide."**⁸

"All right, then," Jonathan told him. "We will cross over and let them see us. If they say to us, 'Stay where you are or we'll kill you,' then we will stop and not go up to them. But if they say, 'Come on up and fight,' then we will go up. That will be the Lord's sign that he will help us defeat them."

When the Philistines saw them coming, they shouted, "Look! The Hebrews are crawling out of their holes!" Then the men from the outpost shouted to Jonathan, "Come on up here, and we'll teach you a lesson!"

9 "Come on, climb right behind me," Jonathan said to his armor bearer, "for the Lord will help us defeat them!"

So they climbed up using both hands and feet, and **the Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor bearer killed those who came behind them**⁹. They killed some twenty men in all, and their bodies were scattered over about half an acre.

7 It is bad enough to be outnumbered. Now, we see God allow the Philistines a huge technological advantage over the Israelites. The only way the Israelites can win is to trust in God.

8 God is going to use Jonathan, but he doesn't use Jonathan alone. When God uses a man, he almost always calls others around the man to support and help him. They are just as important in getting God's work done.

9 When Jonathan sees God's confirming sign, he doesn't lay down his sword and start praying for God to strike them all down. He prays, makes sure his sword is sharp, and trusts God to use him to strike them all down.

Suddenly, panic broke out in the Philistine army, both in the camp and in the field, including even the outposts and raiding parties. And just then an earthquake struck, and everyone was terrified.

Saul's lookouts in Gibeah of Benjamin saw a strange sight—the vast army of Philistines began to melt away in every direction. "Call the roll and find out who's missing," Saul ordered. And when they checked, they found that Jonathan and his armor bearer were gone.

Then Saul shouted to Ahijah, "Bring the ephod here!" For at that time Ahijah was wearing the ephod in front of the Israelites. But while Saul was talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp grew louder and louder. So Saul said to the priest, "Never mind; let's get going!"

Then Saul and all his men rushed out to the battle and found the Philistines killing each other. There was terrible confusion everywhere. Even the Hebrews who had previously gone over to the Philistine army revolted and joined in with Saul, Jonathan, and the rest of the Israelites. Likewise, the men of Israel who were hiding in the hill country of Ephraim joined the chase when they saw the Philistines running away. So the Lord saved Israel that day, and the battle continued to rage even beyond Beth-aven.

Now the men of Israel were pressed to exhaustion that day, because Saul had placed them under an oath¹⁰, saying, "Let a curse fall on anyone who eats before evening—before I have full revenge on my enemies." So no one ate anything all day, even though they had all found honeycomb on the ground in the forest. They didn't dare touch the honey because they all feared the oath they had taken.

But Jonathan had not heard his father's command, and he dipped the end of his stick into a piece of honeycomb and ate the honey. After he had eaten it, he felt refreshed. But one of the men saw him and said, "Your father made the army take a strict oath that anyone who eats food today will be cursed. That is why everyone is weary and faint."

"My father has made trouble for us all!"¹¹ Jonathan exclaimed. "A command like that only hurts us. See how refreshed I am now that I have eaten this little bit of honey. If the men had been allowed to eat freely from the food they found among our enemies, think how many more Philistines we could have killed!"

They chased and killed the Philistines all day from Micmash to Ajjalon, growing more and more faint. That evening they rushed for the battle plunder and butchered the sheep, goats, cattle, and calves, but they ate them without draining the blood. Someone reported to Saul, "Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat that still has blood in it."¹²

"That is very wrong," Saul said. "Find a large stone and roll it over here. Then go out among the troops and tell them, 'Bring the cattle, sheep, and goats here to me. Kill them here, and drain the blood before you eat them. Do not sin against the Lord by eating meat with the blood still in it.'"

So that night all the troops brought their animals and slaughtered them there. Then Saul built an altar to the Lord; it was the first of the altars he built to the Lord.

Then Saul said, "Let's chase the Philistines all night and plunder them until sunrise. Let's destroy every last one of them."

10 Saul puts the army of Israel under an oath so he can take vengeance on his enemies. Even in doing something spiritual, like fasting, Saul's focus is on himself, not the Lord.

11 This group of soldiers sees the honey dripping right in front of their eyes. Yet Saul's foolish oath prevents them from receiving what God puts right in front of them.

12 God specifically commanded Israel that they should always properly drain the blood from an animal as they prepare it for eating (Deuteronomy 12:23-25). On this day of battle, because of Saul's foolish command, the people are so hungry they break this command.

His men replied, “We’ll do whatever you think is best.”

But the priest said, “Let’s ask God first.”

So Saul asked God, “Should we go after the Philistines? Will you help us defeat them?” But God made no reply that day.

Then Saul said to the leaders, “Something’s wrong! I want all my army commanders to come here. We must find out what sin was committed today. I vow by the name of the Lord who rescued Israel that the sinner will surely die, even if it is my own son Jonathan!” But no one would tell him what the trouble was.

Then Saul said, “Jonathan and I will stand over here, and all of you stand over there.” And the people responded to Saul, “Whatever you think is best.”

Then Saul prayed, “O Lord, God of Israel, please show us who is guilty and who is innocent.” Then they cast sacred lots, and Jonathan and Saul were chosen as the guilty ones, and the people were declared innocent.

Then Saul said, “Now cast lots again and choose between me and Jonathan.” And Jonathan was shown to be the guilty one.

“Tell me what you have done,” Saul demanded of Jonathan.

“I tasted a little honey,” Jonathan admitted. “It was only a little bit on the end of my stick. Does that deserve death?”

“Yes, Jonathan,” Saul said, “you must die! May God strike me and even kill me if you do not die for this.”¹³

But the people broke in and said to Saul, “Jonathan has won this great victory for Israel. Should he die? Far from it! As surely as the Lord lives, not one hair on his head will be touched, for God helped him do a great deed today.” So the people rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

Then Saul called back the army from chasing the Philistines, and the Philistines returned home.

Now when Saul had secured his grasp on Israel’s throne, he fought against his enemies in every direction—against Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. And wherever he turned, he was victorious. He performed great deeds and conquered the Amalekites, saving Israel from all those who had plundered them.

Saul’s sons included Jonathan, Ishbosheth, and Malkishua. He also had two daughters: Merab, who was older, and Michal. Saul’s wife was Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz. The commander of Saul’s army was Abner, the son of Saul’s uncle Ner. Saul’s father, Kish, and Abner’s father, Ner, were both sons of Abiel.

The Israelites fought constantly with the Philistines throughout Saul’s lifetime. So whenever Saul observed a young man who was brave and strong, he drafted him into his army.

REFLECTION:

Because Saul is not a man after God’s own heart and because his own relationship with God is more about image than substance, his kingdom cannot last. In what ways do you worry about your own image?

13 Saul is willing to kill his son rather than to humbly admit that he is at fault. Saul began as a humble man, but he is quickly overtaken by pride.

DAY 2 | 1 SAMUEL 15-18

As Saul continues to try and hold onto power, God has a different plan. David rises to power through bold faith by defeating Goliath, but he must also escape an ever-jealous Saul.

One day Samuel said to Saul, “It was the Lord who told me to anoint you as king of his people, Israel. Now listen to this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I have decided to settle accounts with the nation of Amalek for opposing Israel when they came from Egypt. Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.”¹

So Saul mobilized his army at Telaim. There were 200,000 soldiers from Israel and 10,000 men from Judah. Then Saul and his army went to a town of the Amalekites and lay in wait in the valley. Saul sent this warning to the Kenites: “Move away from where the Amalekites live, or you will die with them. For you showed kindness to all the people of Israel when they came up from Egypt.” So the Kenites packed up and left.

Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. Saul and his men spared Agag’s life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

Then the Lord said to Samuel, “I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.” Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord all night.²

Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, “Saul went to the town of Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal.”

When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. “May the Lord bless you,” he said. “I have carried out the Lord’s command!”

“Then what is all the bleating of sheep and goats and the lowing of cattle I hear?” Samuel demanded.

“It’s true that the army spared the best of the sheep, goats, and cattle,” Saul admitted. “But they are going to sacrifice them to the Lord your God. We have destroyed everything else.”³

Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! Listen to what the Lord told me last night!”

“What did he tell you?” Saul asked.

And Samuel told him, “Although you may think little of yourself, are you not the leader of the tribes of Israel? The Lord has anointed you king of Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and told you, ‘Go and completely destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, until they are all dead.’ Why haven’t you obeyed the Lord? Why did you rush for the plunder and do what was evil in the Lord’s sight?”

“But I did obey the Lord,” Saul insisted. “I carried out the mission he gave me. I brought back King Agag, but I destroyed everyone else. Then my troops brought in the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and plunder to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.”

1 This part of the story seems intense and cruel. But in Deuteronomy 25, the Amalekites committed a terrible sin against Israel. When the nation was weak, the Amalekites attacked the most vulnerable of the nation. They did this out of pure violence and greed. God hates it when the strong take advantage over the weak, especially his people. Though this happened more than 400 years before, God still holds it against the Amalekites because time does not erase sin before God.

2 Samuel had God’s heart. It hurt God to reject Saul, and it hurt God’s prophet to see him rejected. We are close to God’s heart when the things that grieve him grieve us and the things that please God please us.

3 In his pride and self-deception, this all makes perfect sense to Saul, but it means nothing to God and Samuel. In fact, it shows that Saul is desperately trying to excuse his sin by word games and half-truths.

But Samuel replied,

“What is more pleasing to the Lord:
your burnt offerings and sacrifices
or your obedience to his voice?

Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice,
and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.

Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft,
and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols.

So because you have rejected the command of the Lord,
he has rejected you as king.”

4 Saul provides a negative example of repentance. Even though he acknowledges he sinned, he offers excuses, becomes defensive, and reveals his insincerity.

5 Just as the robe tears because Saul grasps it too tightly, so his tight grip on pride and stubbornness mean the kingdom will be taken away from him.

6 Agag is the wicked and violent leader of a wicked and violent people. God’s judgment against him and the Amalekites is just.

7 Perhaps Samuel’s excessive mourning over Saul introduces an element of fear and unbelief in his heart. Samuel doesn’t have anything to worry about because God promises to show him what to do.

Then Saul admitted to Samuel, “Yes, I have sinned.⁴ I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord’s command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded. But now, please forgive my sin and come back with me so that I may worship the Lord.”

But Samuel replied, “I will not go back with you! Since you have rejected the Lord’s command, he has rejected you as king of Israel.”

5 As Samuel turned to go, Saul tried to hold him back and tore the hem of his robe.⁵ And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to someone else—one who is better than you. And he who is the Glory of Israel will not lie, nor will he change his mind, for he is not human that he should change his mind!”

Then Saul pleaded again, “I know I have sinned. But please, at least honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel by coming back with me so that I may worship the Lord your God.” So Samuel finally agreed and went back with him, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Then Samuel said, “Bring King Agag to me.” Agag arrived full of hope, for he thought, “Surely the worst is over, and I have been spared!” But Samuel said, “As your sword has killed the sons of many mothers, now your mother will be childless.” And Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.⁶

Then Samuel went home to Ramah, and Saul returned to his house at Gibeah of Saul. Samuel never went to meet with Saul again, but he mourned constantly for him. And the Lord was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel.

Now the Lord said to Samuel, “You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be my king.”

But Samuel asked, “How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me⁷.”

“Take a heifer with you,” the Lord replied, “and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to anoint for me.”

So Samuel did as the Lord instructed. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town came trembling to meet him. “What’s wrong?” they asked. “Do you come in peace?”

“Yes,” Samuel replied. “I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then Samuel performed the purification rite for Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice, too.

When they arrived, Samuel took one look at Eliab and thought, “Surely this is the Lord’s anointed!”

But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don’t judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The Lord doesn’t see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”⁸

Then Jesse told his son Abinadab to step forward and walk in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “This is not the one the Lord has chosen.” Next Jesse summoned Shimea, but Samuel said, “Neither is this the one the Lord has chosen.” In the same way all seven of Jesse’s sons were presented to Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” Then Samuel asked, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse replied. “But he’s out in the fields watching the sheep and goats.”

“Send for him at once,” Samuel said. “We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”

So Jesse sent for him. He was dark and handsome, with beautiful eyes.

And the Lord said, “This is the one; anoint him.”

So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on.⁹ Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

Now the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and the Lord sent a tormenting spirit that filled him with depression and fear.

Some of Saul’s servants said to him, “A tormenting spirit from God is troubling you. Let us find a good musician to play the harp whenever the tormenting spirit troubles you. He will play soothing music, and you will soon be well again.”

“All right,” Saul said. “Find me someone who plays well, and bring him here.”

One of the servants said to Saul, “One of Jesse’s sons from Bethlehem is a talented harp player. Not only that—he is a brave warrior, a man of war, and has good judgment. He is also a fine-looking young man, and the Lord is with him.”

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse to say, “Send me your son David, the shepherd.” Jesse responded by sending David to Saul, along with a young goat, a donkey loaded with bread, and a wineskin full of wine.

So David went to Saul and began serving him. Saul loved David very much, and David became his armor bearer.

Then Saul sent word to Jesse asking, “Please let David remain in my service, for I am very pleased with him.”

And whenever the tormenting spirit from God troubled Saul, David would play the harp. Then Saul would feel better, and the tormenting spirit would go away.¹⁰

8 God reveals the difference between himself and the world when it comes to judging others—we are constantly deceived by appearances.

9 God’s choice of David is not based on his family status but instead on his radical and humble faith. God opposes the proud and exalts the humble.

10 God can work in mysterious ways. Ironically, Saul has become dependent on the one who will ultimately take his place.

The Philistines now mustered their army for battle and camped between Socoh in Judah and Azekah at Ephes-dammim. Saul countered by gathering his Israelite troops near the valley of Elah. So the Philistines and Israelites faced each other on opposite hills, with the valley between them.

Then Goliath, a Philistine champion from Gath, came out of the Philistine ranks to face the forces of Israel. He was over nine feet tall! He wore a bronze helmet, and his bronze coat of mail weighed 125 pounds. He also wore bronze leg armor, and he carried a bronze javelin on his shoulder. The shaft of his spear was as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam, tipped with an iron spearhead that weighed 15 pounds. His armor bearer walked ahead of him carrying a shield.

Goliath stood and shouted a taunt across to the Israelites. "Why are you all coming out to fight?" he called. "I am the Philistine champion, but you are only the servants of Saul. Choose one man to come down here and fight me! If he kills me, then we will be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will be our slaves! I defy the armies of Israel today! Send me a man who will fight me!" When Saul and the Israelites heard this, they were terrified and deeply shaken.

Now David was the son of a man named Jesse, an Ephrathite from Bethlehem in the land of Judah. Jesse was an old man at that time, and he had eight sons. Jesse's three oldest sons—Eliab, Abinadab, and Shimea—had already joined Saul's army to fight the Philistines. David was the youngest son. David's three oldest brothers stayed with Saul's army, but David went back and forth so he could help his father with the sheep in Bethlehem.

For forty days, every morning and evening, the Philistine champion strutted in front of the Israelite army.

One day Jesse said to David, "Take this basket of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread, and carry them quickly to your brothers. And give these ten cuts of cheese to their captain. See how your brothers are getting along, and bring back a report on how they are doing." David's brothers were with Saul and the Israelite army at the valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines.

So David left the sheep with another shepherd and set out early the next morning with the gifts, as Jesse had directed him. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelite army was leaving for the battlefield with shouts and battle cries. Soon the Israelite and Philistine forces stood facing each other, army against army. David left his things with the keeper of supplies and hurried out to the ranks to greet his brothers. As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came out from the Philistine ranks. Then David heard him shout his usual taunt to the army of Israel.

As soon as the Israelite army saw him, they began to run away in fright. "Have you seen the giant?" the men asked. "He comes out each day to defy Israel. The king has offered a huge reward to anyone who kills him. He will give that man one of his daughters for a wife, and the man's entire family will be exempted from paying taxes!"

11 David asked the soldiers standing nearby, "What will a man get for killing this Philistine and ending his defiance of Israel? Who is this pagan Philistine anyway, that he is allowed to defy the armies of the living God?"¹¹

And these men gave David the same reply. They said, "Yes, that is the reward for killing him."

Other soldiers focus on the danger of the battle or the material rewards to be won. It seems that David alone focuses on the reputation of Israel and the honor of the living God.

But when David's oldest brother, Eliab, heard David talking to the men, he was angry. "What are you doing around here anyway?" he demanded. "What about those few sheep you're supposed to be taking care of? I know about your pride and deceit. You just want to see the battle!"

"What have I done now?" David replied. "I was only asking a question!" He walked over to some others and asked them the same thing and received the same answer. Then David's question was reported to King Saul, and the king sent for him.

"Don't worry about this Philistine," David told Saul. "I'll go fight him!"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Saul replied. "There's no way you can fight this Philistine and possibly win! You're only a boy, and he's been a man of war since his youth."

But David persisted. "I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats," he said. "When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. If the animal turns on me, I catch it by the jaw and club it to death. I have done this to both lions and bears, and I'll do it to this pagan Philistine, too, for he has defied the armies of the living God! The Lord who rescued me from the claws of the lion and the bear will rescue me from this Philistine!"

Saul finally consented. "All right, go ahead," he said. "And may the Lord be with you!"

Then Saul gave David his own armor—a bronze helmet and a coat of mail. David put it on, strapped the sword over it, and took a step or two to see what it was like, for he had never worn such things before.

"I can't go in these," he protested to Saul. "I'm not used to them." So David took them off again. He picked up five smooth stones from a stream and put them into his shepherd's bag. Then, armed only with his shepherd's staff and sling, he started across the valley to fight the Philistine.

Goliath walked out toward David with his shield bearer ahead of him, sneering in contempt at this ruddy-faced boy. "Am I a dog," he roared at David, "that you come at me with a stick?" And he cursed David by the names of his gods. "Come over here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and wild animals!" Goliath yelled.

David replied to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven's Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.¹² Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head. And then I will give the dead bodies of your men to the birds and wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel! And everyone assembled here will know that the Lord rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the Lord's battle, and he will give you to us!"

As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him. Reaching into his shepherd's bag and taking out a stone, he hurled it with his sling and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank in, and Goliath stumbled and fell face down on the ground.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with only a sling and a stone, for he had no sword. Then David ran over and pulled Goliath's sword from its sheath. **David used it to kill him and cut off his head.**¹³

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran. Then the men of Israel and Judah gave a great shout of triumph and rushed after the Philistines,

12 David is bold in God, not in himself. He knows the battle belongs to the Lord.

13 David makes certain the enemy is dead. You cannot stop short in dealing with sin or your spiritual enemies; you must kill them dead.

chasing them as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. The bodies of the dead and wounded Philistines were strewn all along the road from Shaaraim, as far as Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelite army returned and plundered the deserted Philistine camp. (David took the Philistine's head to Jerusalem, but he stored the man's armor in his own tent.)

As Saul watched David go out to fight the Philistine, he asked Abner, the commander of his army, "Abner, whose son is this young man?"

"I really don't know," Abner declared.

"Well, find out who he is!" the king told him.

As soon as David returned from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul with the Philistine's head still in his hand. "Tell me about your father, young man," Saul said.

And David replied, "His name is Jesse, and we live in Bethlehem."

After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond between them, for Jonathan loved David. From that day on Saul kept David with him and wouldn't let him return home. **And Jonathan made a solemn pact with David¹⁴**, because he loved him as he loved himself. Jonathan sealed the pact by taking off his robe and giving it to David, together with his tunic, sword, bow, and belt.

Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul's officers alike.

When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. This was their song:

"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!"

This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

The very next day a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice.

Saul was then afraid of David, for the Lord was with David and had turned away from Saul. Finally, Saul sent him away and appointed him commander over 1,000 men, and David faithfully led his troops into battle.

15 David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the Lord was with him.¹⁵ When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him. But all Israel and Judah loved David because he was so successful at leading his troops into battle.

One day Saul said to David, "I am ready to give you my older daughter, Merab, as your wife. But first you must prove yourself to be a real warrior by fighting the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "I'll send him out against the Philistines and let them kill him rather than doing it myself."

Two men, each on track for the same throne—yet they make a covenant of friendship that will prove stronger than jealousy, envy, and ambition.

By all outward appearances, Saul is in control. Saul has the throne. Saul has the army. Saul has the spears. Yet Saul is afraid of David because the Lord is with him.

“Who am I, and what is my family in Israel that I should be the king’s son-in-law?” David exclaimed. “My father’s family is nothing!” So when the time came for Saul to give his daughter Merab in marriage to David, he gave her instead to Adriel, a man from Meholah.

In the meantime, Saul’s daughter Michal had fallen in love with David, and Saul was delighted when he heard about it. “Here’s another chance to see him killed by the Philistines!” Saul said to himself. But to David he said, “Today you have a second chance to become my son-in-law!”

Then Saul told his men to say to David, “The king really likes you, and so do we. Why don’t you accept the king’s offer and become his son-in-law?”

When Saul’s men said these things to David, he replied, “How can a poor man from a humble family afford the bride price for the daughter of a king?”

When Saul’s men reported this back to the king, he told them, “Tell David that all I want for the bride price is 100 Philistine foreskins! Vengeance on my enemies is all I really want.” But what Saul had in mind was that David would be killed in the fight.

David was delighted to accept the offer. Before the time limit expired, he and his men went out and killed 200 Philistines. Then David fulfilled the king’s requirement by presenting all their foreskins to him. So Saul gave his daughter Michal to David to be his wife.¹⁶

When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and how much his daughter Michal loved him, Saul became even more afraid of him, and he remained David’s enemy for the rest of his life.

Every time the commanders of the Philistines attacked, David was more successful against them than all the rest of Saul’s officers. So David’s name became very famous.

REFLECTION:

Despite constantly being in situations where David fears for his life, he continues to trust God and persevere. What is one way you can choose to trust God today?

16 David answers Saul’s attempt at manipulation by taking control of the situation, being a humble servant, and giving more than what is required.

DAY 3 | 1 SAMUEL 19-22

Saul's jealousy of David's success continues to overtake him and Saul will plot to kill David. God is faithful and places people like Jonathan and Michal to help David as he flees.

Saul now urged his servants and his son Jonathan to assassinate David. But Jonathan, because of his strong affection for David, told him what his father was planning. "Tomorrow morning," he warned him, "you must find a hiding place out in the fields. I'll ask my father to go out there with me, and I'll talk to him about you. Then I'll tell you everything I can find out."

The next morning Jonathan spoke with his father about David, saying many good things about him. "The king must not sin against his servant David," Jonathan said. "He's never done anything to harm you. He has always helped you in any way he could. Have you forgotten about the time he risked his life to kill the Philistine giant and how the Lord brought a great victory to all Israel as a result? You were certainly happy about it then. Why should you murder an innocent man like David? There is no reason for it at all!"

So Saul listened to Jonathan and vowed, "As surely as the Lord lives, David will not be killed."

Afterward Jonathan called David and told him what had happened. Then he brought David to Saul, and David served in the court as before.

War broke out again after that, and David led his troops against the Philistines. He attacked them with such fury that they all ran away.

But one day when Saul was sitting at home, with spear in hand, the tormenting spirit from the Lord suddenly came upon him again. As David played his harp, Saul hurled his spear at David. But David dodged out of the way, and leaving the spear stuck in the wall, **he fled and escaped into the night!**

Then Saul sent troops to watch David's house. They were told to kill David when he came out the next morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't escape tonight, you will be dead by morning." So she helped him climb out through a window, and he fled and escaped. Then she took an idol and put it in his bed, covered it with blankets, and put a cushion of goat's hair at its head.

When the troops came to arrest David, she told them he was sick and couldn't get out of bed.

But Saul sent the troops back to get David. He ordered, "Bring him to me in his bed so I can kill him!" But when they came to carry David out, they discovered that it was only an idol in the bed with a cushion of goat's hair at its head.

"Why have you betrayed me like this and let my enemy escape?" Saul demanded of Michal.

"I had to," Michal replied. "He threatened to kill me if I didn't help him."

So David escaped and went to Ramah to see Samuel, and he told him all that Saul had done to him. Then Samuel took David with him to live at Naioth. When the report reached Saul that David was at Naioth in Ramah, he sent troops to capture him. But when they arrived and saw Samuel leading a group of prophets who were prophesying,

From now until the day
Saul dies, David lives
as a fugitive.

1

the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men, and they also began to prophesy². When Saul heard what had happened, he sent other troops, but they, too, prophesied! The same thing happened a third time. Finally, Saul himself went to Ramah and arrived at the great well in Secu. "Where are Samuel and David?" he demanded.

"They are at Naioth in Ramah," someone told him.

But on the way to Naioth in Ramah the Spirit of God came even upon Saul, and he, too, began to prophesy all the way to Naioth! He tore off his clothes and lay naked on the ground all day and all night, prophesying in the presence of Samuel. The people who were watching exclaimed, "What? Is even Saul a prophet?"

David now fled from Naioth in Ramah and found Jonathan. "What have I done?" he exclaimed. "What is my crime? How have I offended your father that he is so determined to kill me?"

"That's not true!" Jonathan protested. "You're not going to die. He always tells me everything he's going to do, even the little things. I know my father wouldn't hide something like this from me. It just isn't so!"

Then David took an oath before Jonathan and said, "Your father knows perfectly well about our friendship, so he has said to himself, 'I won't tell Jonathan—why should I hurt him?' But I swear to you that I am only a step away from death! I swear it by the Lord and by your own soul!"

"Tell me what I can do to help you,"³ Jonathan exclaimed.

David replied, "Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. I've always eaten with the king on this occasion, but tomorrow I'll hide in the field and stay there until the evening of the third day. If your father asks where I am, tell him I asked permission to go home to Bethlehem for an annual family sacrifice. If he says, 'Fine!' you will know all is well. But if he is angry and loses his temper, you will know he is determined to kill me. Show me this loyalty as my sworn friend—for we made a solemn pact before the Lord—or kill me yourself if I have sinned against your father. But please don't betray me to him!"

"Never!" Jonathan exclaimed. "You know that if I had the slightest notion my father was planning to kill you, I would tell you at once."

Then David asked, "How will I know whether or not your father is angry?"

"Come out to the field with me," Jonathan replied. And they went out there together. Then Jonathan told David, "I promise by the Lord, the God of Israel, that by this time tomorrow, or the next day at the latest, I will talk to my father and let you know at once how he feels about you. If he speaks favorably about you, I will let you know. But if he is angry and wants you killed, may the Lord strike me and even kill me if I don't warn you so you can escape and live. May the Lord be with you as he used to be with my father. And may you treat me with the faithful love of the Lord as long as I live. But if I die, treat my family with this faithful love, even when the Lord destroys all your enemies from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a solemn pact with David, saying, "May the Lord destroy all your enemies!" And Jonathan made David reaffirm his vow of friendship again, for Jonathan loved David as he loved himself.

2 This is an unusual work of the Holy Spirit—to come upon men who do not seek after God, who do not long to be filled with the Spirit. God does this to protect David, and this is his way of "disarming" those who come to capture David.

3 This assures David that Jonathan is still his loyal friend and that Jonathan hasn't bought into Saul's lies about David.

Then Jonathan said, “Tomorrow we celebrate the new moon festival. You will be missed when your place at the table is empty. The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid before, and wait there by the stone pile. I will come out and shoot three arrows to the side of the stone pile as though I were shooting at a target. Then I will send a boy to bring the arrows back. If you hear me tell him, ‘They’re on this side,’ then you will know, as surely as the Lord lives, that all is well, and there is no trouble. But if I tell him, ‘Go farther—the arrows are still ahead of you,’ then it will mean that you must leave immediately, for the Lord is sending you away. **And may the Lord make us keep our promises to each other, for he has witnessed them.**”⁴

4 This is a crucial time in David’s life. Either he will be welcomed back to the palace and his home, or he will be a fugitive until Saul gives up the hunt for David. A lot depends on the message sent by a few arrows.

So David hid himself in the field, and when the new moon festival began, the king sat down to eat. He sat at his usual place against the wall, with Jonathan sitting opposite him and Abner beside him. But David’s place was empty. Saul didn’t say anything about it that day, for he said to himself, “Something must have made David ceremonially unclean.” But when David’s place was empty again the next day, Saul asked Jonathan, “Why hasn’t the son of Jesse been here for the meal either yesterday or today?”

Jonathan replied, “David earnestly asked me if he could go to Bethlehem. He said, ‘Please let me go, for we are having a family sacrifice. My brother demanded that I be there. So please let me get away to see my brothers.’ That’s why he isn’t here at the king’s table.”

Saul boiled with rage at Jonathan. “You stupid son of a whore!” he swore at him. “Do you think I don’t know that you want him to be king in your place, shaming yourself and your mother? As long as that son of Jesse is alive, you’ll never be king. Now go and get him so I can kill him!”

“But why should he be put to death?” Jonathan asked his father. “What has he done?” Then Saul hurled his spear at Jonathan, intending to kill him. So at last Jonathan realized that his father was really determined to kill David.

Jonathan left the table in fierce anger and refused to eat on that second day of the festival, for he was crushed by his father’s shameful behavior toward David.

The next morning, as agreed, Jonathan went out into the field and took a young boy with him to gather his arrows. “Start running,” he told the boy, “so you can find the arrows as I shoot them.” So the boy ran, and Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him. When the boy had almost reached the arrow, Jonathan shouted, “The arrow is still ahead of you. Hurry, hurry, don’t wait.” So the boy quickly gathered up the arrows and ran back to his master. He, of course, suspected nothing; only Jonathan and David understood the signal. Then Jonathan gave his bow and arrows to the boy and told him to take them back to town.

As soon as the boy was gone, David came out from where he had been hiding near the stone pile. Then David bowed three times to Jonathan with his face to the ground. Both of them were in tears as they embraced each other and said good-bye, especially David.

5 At last Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for we have sworn loyalty to each other in the Lord’s name. The Lord is the witness of a bond between us and our children forever.” Then David left, and Jonathan returned to the town.⁵

David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he saw him. “Why are you alone?” he asked. “Why is no one with you?”

5 David will not return to “normal life” until Saul is dead and David is king. This is a bleak road for David to walk, but it is God’s road for him.

“The king has sent me on a private matter,” David said. “He told me not to tell anyone why I am here. I have told my men where to meet me later. Now, what is there to eat? Give me five loaves of bread or anything else you have.”

“We don’t have any regular bread,” the priest replied. “But there is the holy bread, which you can have if your young men have not slept with any women recently.”

“Don’t worry,” David replied. “I never allow my men to be with women when we are on a campaign. And since they stay clean even on ordinary trips, how much more on this one!”

Since there was no other food available, **the priest gave him the holy bread**⁶—the Bread of the Presence that was placed before the Lord in the Tabernacle. It had just been replaced that day with fresh bread.

6 In giving David the bread, Ahimelech breaks with priestly custom but not with God’s Word. He rightly understands that human need is more important than Levitical observance.

Now Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s chief herdsman, was there that day, having been detained before the Lord.

David asked Ahimelech, “Do you have a spear or sword? The king’s business was so urgent that I didn’t even have time to grab a weapon!”

“I only have the sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah,” the priest replied. “It is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. Take that if you want it, for there is nothing else here.”

“There is nothing like it!” David replied. “Give it to me!”

So David escaped from Saul and went to King Achish of Gath. But the officers of Achish were unhappy about his being there. “Isn’t this David, the king of the land?” they asked. “Isn’t he the one the people honor with dances, singing,

‘Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?’”

David heard these comments and was very afraid of what King Achish of Gath might do to him. So he pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard.

Finally, King Achish said to his men, “Must you bring me a madman? We already have enough of them around here! Why should I let someone like this be my guest?”

So David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. Soon his brothers and all his other relatives joined him there. Then others began coming—men who were in trouble or in debt or who were just discontented—until **David was the captain of about 400 men**⁷.

7 David is anointed by God to be the next king over Israel, but just as much as God calls David, God calls these four hundred men to come alongside David.

Later David went to Mizpeh in Moab, where he asked the king, “Please allow my father and mother to live here with you until I know what God is going to do for me.” So David’s parents stayed in Moab with the king during the entire time David was living in his stronghold.

One day the prophet Gad told David, “Leave the stronghold and return to the land of Judah.” So David went to the forest of Hereth.

The news of his arrival in Judah soon reached Saul. At the time, the king was sitting beneath the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, holding his spear and surrounded by his officers.

“Listen here, you men of Benjamin!” Saul shouted to his officers when he heard the news. “Has that son of Jesse promised every one of you fields and vineyards? Has he promised to make you all generals and captains in his army? Is that why you have conspired against me? For not one of you told me when my own son made a solemn pact with the son of Jesse. You’re not even sorry for me. Think of it! My own son—encouraging him to kill me, as he is trying to do this very day!”

Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul’s men, spoke up. “When I was at Nob,” he said, “I saw the son of Jesse talking to the priest, Ahimelech son of Ahitub. Ahimelech consulted the Lord for him. Then he gave him food and the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”

King Saul immediately sent for Ahimelech and all his family, who served as priests at Nob. When they arrived, Saul shouted at him, “Listen to me, you son of Ahitub!”

“What is it, my king?” Ahimelech asked.

“Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me?” Saul demanded. “Why did you give him food and a sword? Why have you consulted God for him? Why have you encouraged him to kill me, as he is trying to do this very day?”

“But sir,” Ahimelech replied, “is anyone among all your servants as faithful as David, your son-in-law? Why, he is the captain of your bodyguard and a highly honored member of your household! This was certainly not the first time I had consulted God for him! May the king not accuse me and my family in this matter, for I knew nothing at all of any plot against you.”

“You will surely die, Ahimelech, along with your entire family!” the king shouted. And he ordered his bodyguards, “Kill these priests of the Lord, for they are allies and conspirators with David! They knew he was running away from me, but they didn’t tell me!” But Saul’s men refused to kill the Lord’s priests.

Then the king said to Doeg, “You do it.” So Doeg the Edomite turned on them and killed them that day, eighty-five priests in all, still wearing their priestly garments. Then he went to Nob, the town of the priests, and killed the priests’ families—men and women, children and babies—and all the cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats.

Only Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, escaped and fled to David. When he told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord, David exclaimed, “I knew it! When I saw Doeg the Edomite there that day, I knew he was sure to tell Saul. Now I have caused the death of all your father’s family. Stay here with me, and don’t be afraid. I will protect you with my own life, for the same person wants to kill us both.”⁸

REFLECTION:

God continues to place people in David’s life to help him in his time of need. Who has God placed in your life to help guide and direct you when things get hard?

8 David cannot do anything about the priests who were already murdered. He confesses his guilt in the matter and seeks forgiveness from the Lord. Now, all he can do is minister to the need in front of him—Abiathar, the surviving priest.

DAY 1 | 1 SAMUEL 23-26

The hunt for David continues. Saul unknowingly enters the cave David is hiding in, and instead of taking the opportunity to kill Saul, David chooses to trust God and not take matters into his own hands. When Saul learns about this, he acknowledges David as the future king, but this won't last for long.

One day news came to David that the Philistines were at Keilah stealing grain from the threshing floors. David asked the Lord, “Should I go and attack them?”

“Yes, go and save Keilah,” the Lord told him.

But David’s men said, “We’re afraid even here in Judah. We certainly don’t want to go to Keilah to fight the whole Philistine army!”

So David asked the Lord again, and again the Lord replied, “Go down to Keilah, for I will help you conquer the Philistines.”

So David and his men went to Keilah. They slaughtered the Philistines and took all their livestock and rescued the people of Keilah. Now when Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, he brought the ephod with him.

Saul soon learned that David was at Keilah. “Good!” he exclaimed. “We’ve got him now! God has handed him over to me, for he has trapped himself in a walled town!” So Saul mobilized his entire army to march to Keilah and besiege David and his men.

But David learned of Saul’s plan and told Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod and ask the Lord what he should do. Then David prayed, “O Lord, God of Israel, I have heard that Saul is planning to come and destroy Keilah because I am here. Will the leaders of Keilah betray me to him? And will Saul actually come as I have heard? O Lord, God of Israel, please tell me.”

And the Lord said, “He will come.”

Again David asked, “Will the leaders of Keilah betray me and my men to Saul?”

And the Lord replied, “Yes, they will betray you.”

So David and his men—about 600 of them now—left Keilah and began roaming the countryside. Word soon reached Saul that David had escaped, so he didn’t go to Keilah after all. David now stayed in the strongholds of **the wilderness and in the hill country of Ziph**¹. Saul hunted him day after day, but God didn’t let Saul find him.

One day near Horesh, David received the news that Saul was on the way to Ziph to search for him and kill him. Jonathan went to find David and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God. “Don’t be afraid,” Jonathan reassured him. “My father will never find you! You are going to be the king of Israel, and I will be next to you, as my father, Saul, is well aware.” So the two of them renewed their solemn pact before the Lord. Then Jonathan returned home, while David stayed at Horesh.

But now the men of Ziph went to Saul in Gibeath and betrayed David to him. “We know where David is hiding,” they said. “He is in the strongholds of Horesh on the hill of Hakilah, which is in the southern part of Jeshimon. Come down whenever you’re ready, O king, and we will catch him and hand him over to you!”

“The Lord bless you,” Saul said. “At last someone is concerned about me! Go and check again to be sure of where he is staying and who has seen him there, for I know

¹ God guides and protects David, but it isn’t comfortable or easy. This is an essential time for God’s work in David’s life. He became a man after God’s heart in the shepherd’s field, but he becomes a king in the wilderness.

that he is very crafty. Discover his hiding places, and come back when you are sure. Then I'll go with you. And if he is in the area at all, I'll track him down, even if I have to search every hiding place in Judah!" So the men of Ziph returned home ahead of Saul.

Meanwhile, David and his men had moved into the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah Valley south of Jeshimon. When David heard that Saul and his men were searching for him, he went even farther into the wilderness to the great rock, and he remained there in the wilderness of Maon. But Saul kept after him in the wilderness.

Saul and David were now on opposite sides of a mountain. Just as Saul and his men began to close in on David and his men, an urgent message reached Saul that the Philistines were raiding Israel again. So Saul quit chasing David and returned to fight the Philistines. Ever since that time, the place where David was camped has been called the Rock of Escape. David then went to live in the strongholds of En-gedi.

After Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David had gone into the wilderness of En-gedi. So Saul chose 3,000 elite troops from all Israel and went to search for David and his men near the rocks of the wild goats.

At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave!²

"Now's your opportunity!" David's men whispered to him. "Today the Lord is telling you, 'I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.'" So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul's robe.

But then David's conscience began bothering him because he had cut Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn't attack the Lord's anointed one, for the Lord himself has chosen him." So David restrained his men and did not let them kill Saul.³

After Saul had left the cave and gone on his way, David came out and shouted after him, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked around, David bowed low before him.

Then he shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you? This very day you can see with your own eyes it isn't true. For the Lord placed you at my mercy back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, 'I will never harm the king—he is the Lord's anointed one.' Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.

"May the Lord judge between us. Perhaps the Lord will punish you for what you are trying to do to me, but I will never harm you. As that old proverb says, 'From evil people come evil deeds.' So you can be sure I will never harm you. Who is the king of Israel trying to catch anyway? Should he spend his time chasing one who is as worthless as a dead dog or a single flea? May the Lord therefore judge⁴ which of us is right and punish the guilty one. He is my advocate, and he will rescue me from your power!"

When David had finished speaking, Saul called back, "Is that really you, my son David?" Then he began to cry. And he said to David, "You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil. Yes, you have been amazingly kind to me today,

2 This is no coincidence—it is arranged by God to test, train, and display David's godly heart.

3 David decides to spare Saul because he knows that God's promises, "You will inherit the throne of Israel." He wants the promise to be fulfilled but refuses to try and fulfill God's promise through his own disobedience.

4 Instead of finding a way out of his trial in the flesh, David does the harder thing—he trusts in God to deliver him instead of trusting in himself.

for when the Lord put me in a place where you could have killed me, you didn't do it. Who else would let his enemy get away when he had him in his power? May the Lord reward you well for the kindness you have shown me today. And now I realize that you are surely going to be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will flourish under your rule. Now swear to me by the Lord that when that happens you will not kill my family and destroy my line of descendants!"

So David promised this to Saul with an oath. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went back to their stronghold.

Now Samuel died, and all Israel gathered for his funeral. They buried him at his house in Ramah.

Then David moved down to the wilderness of Maon. There was a wealthy man from Maon who owned property near the town of Carmel. He had 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, and it was sheep-shearing time. This man's name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was crude and mean in all his dealings.

When David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep, he sent ten of his young men to Carmel with this message for Nabal: "Peace and prosperity to you, your family, and everything you own! I am told that it is sheep-shearing time. While your shepherds stayed among us near Carmel, we never harmed them, and nothing was ever stolen from them. Ask your own men, and they will tell you this is true. So would you be kind to us, since we have come at a time of celebration? Please share any provisions you might have on hand with us and with your friend David." David's young men gave this message to Nabal in David's name, and they waited for a reply.

"Who is this fellow David?" Nabal sneered to the young men. "Who does this son of Jesse think he is? There are lots of servants these days who run away from their masters. Should I take my bread and my water and my meat that I've slaughtered for my shearers and give it to a band of outlaws who come from who knows where?"

So David's young men returned and told him what Nabal had said. "Get your swords!" was David's reply as he strapped on his own. Then 400 men started off with David, and 200 remained behind to guard their equipment.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal's servants went to Abigail and told her, "David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he screamed insults at them. These men have been very good to us, and we never suffered any harm from them. Nothing was stolen from us the whole time they were with us. In fact, day and night they were like a wall of protection to us and the sheep. You need to know this and figure out what to do, for there is going to be trouble for our master and his whole family. He's so ill-tempered that no one can even talk to him!"

Abigail wasted no time. She quickly gathered 200 loaves of bread, two wineskins full of wine, five sheep that had been slaughtered, nearly a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 fig cakes. She packed them on donkeys and said to her servants, "Go on ahead. I will follow you shortly." But she didn't tell her husband Nabal what she was doing.

As she was riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, she saw David and his men coming toward her. David had just been saying, "A lot of good it did to help this fellow. We protected his flocks in the wilderness, and nothing he owned was lost or stolen.

Abigail makes her appeal with humility. She doesn't come to David as a superior (as the beautiful, rich, and privileged often do) or even as an equal; she comes to David as his humble servant.

5 But he has repaid me evil for good. May God strike me and kill me if even one man of his household is still alive tomorrow morning!"

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed low before him⁵. She fell at his feet and said, "I accept all blame in this matter, my lord. Please listen to what I have to say. I know Nabal is a wicked and ill-tempered man; please don't pay any attention to him. He is a fool, just as his name suggests. But I never even saw the young men you sent.

"Now, my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and you yourself live, since the Lord has kept you from murdering and taking vengeance into your own hands, let all your enemies and those who try to harm you be as cursed as Nabal is. And here is a present that I, your servant, have brought to you and your young men. Please forgive me if I have offended you in any way. The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting the Lord's battles. And you have not done wrong throughout your entire life.

This is the strongest point of Abigail's appeal. She says, "David, you are like a bundle that the Lord holds closely and securely to himself. Your enemies are like rocks that the LORD will sling away." This invites David to act like a man who is close to the Lord.

6 "Even when you are chased by those who seek to kill you, your life is safe in the care of the Lord your God, secure in his treasure pouch! But the lives of your enemies will disappear like stones shot from a sling!⁶ When the Lord has done all he promised and has made you leader of Israel, don't let this be a blemish on your record. Then your conscience won't have to bear the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance. And when the Lord has done these great things for you, please remember me, your servant!"

David replied to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who has sent you to meet me today! Thank God for your good sense! Bless you for keeping me from murder and from carrying out vengeance with my own hands. For I swear by the Lord, the God of Israel, who has kept me from hurting you, that if you had not hurried out to meet me, not one of Nabal's men would still be alive tomorrow morning." Then David accepted her present and told her, "Return home in peace. I have heard what you said. We will not kill your husband."⁷

David is being taught a good lesson—our hurt feelings never justify disobedience.

When Abigail arrived home, she found that Nabal was throwing a big party and was celebrating like a king. He was very drunk, so she didn't tell him anything about her meeting with David until dawn the next day. In the morning when Nabal was sober, his wife told him what had happened. As a result he had a stroke, and he lay paralyzed on his bed like a stone. About ten days later, the Lord struck him, and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise the Lord, who has avenged the insult I received from Nabal and has kept me from doing it myself. Nabal has received the punishment for his sin." Then David sent messengers to Abigail to ask her to become his wife.

When the messengers arrived at Carmel, they told Abigail, "David has sent us to take you back to marry him."

Abigail does not allow her success with David or the death of Nabal make her arrogant or bossy. She greets David's servants with humility.

8 She bowed low to the ground and responded⁸, "I, your servant, would be happy to marry David. I would even be willing to become a slave, washing the feet of his servants!" Quickly getting ready, she took along five of her servant girls as attendants, mounted her donkey, and went with David's messengers. And so she became his wife. David also married Ahinoam from Jezreel, making both of them his wives. Saul, meanwhile, had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to a man from Gallim named Palti son of Laish.

Now some men from Ziph came to Saul at Gibeah to tell him, "David is hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which overlooks Jeshimon."

So Saul took 3,000 of Israel's elite troops and went to hunt him down in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul camped along the road beside the hill of Hakilah, near Jeshimon, where David was hiding. When David learned that Saul had come after him into the wilderness, he sent out spies to verify the report of Saul's arrival.

David slipped over to Saul's camp one night to look around. Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of his army, were sleeping inside a ring formed by the slumbering warriors. "Who will volunteer to go in there with me?" David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother.

"I'll go with you," Abishai replied. So David and Abishai went right into Saul's camp and found him asleep, with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying asleep around him.

"God has surely handed your enemy over to you this time!" Abishai whispered to David. "Let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't need to strike twice!"

"No!" David said. "Don't kill him. For who can remain innocent after attacking the Lord's anointed one? Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday, or he will die of old age or in battle. The Lord forbid that I should kill the one he has anointed! But take his spear and that jug of water beside his head, and then let's get out of here!"

So David took the spear and jug of water that were near Saul's head. Then he and Abishai got away without anyone seeing them or even waking up, because the Lord had put Saul's men into a deep sleep.

David climbed the hill opposite the camp until he was at a safe distance. Then he shouted down to the soldiers and to Abner son of Ner, "Wake up, Abner!"

"Who is it?" Abner demanded.

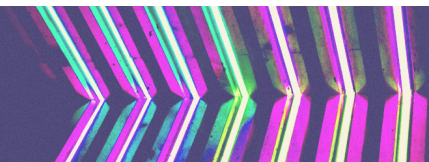
"Well, Abner, you're a great man, aren't you?" David taunted. "Where in all Israel is there anyone as mighty? So why haven't you guarded your master the king when someone came to kill him? This isn't good at all! I swear by the Lord that you and your men deserve to die, because you failed to protect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

Saul recognized David's voice and called out, "Is that you, my son David?"

And David replied, "Yes, my lord the king. Why are you chasing me? What have I done? What is my crime? But now let my lord the king listen to his servant. If the Lord has stirred you up against me, then let him accept my offering. But if this is simply a human scheme, then may those involved be cursed by the Lord. For they have driven me from my home, so I can no longer live among the Lord's people, and they have said, 'Go, worship pagan gods.' Must I die on foreign soil, far from the presence of the Lord? Why has the king of Israel come out to search for a single flea? Why does he hunt me down like a partridge on the mountains?"

Then Saul confessed, "I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong."

WEEK 3



David refuses to take the throne through murder or rebellion. He will wait until it comes to him God's way.

9 “Here is your spear, O king,” David replied. “Let one of your young men come over and get it. The Lord gives his own reward for doing good and for being loyal, and I refused to kill you even when the Lord placed you in my power, for you are the Lord’s anointed one. Now may the Lord value my life, even as I have valued yours today. May he rescue me from all my troubles.”⁹

And Saul said to David, “Blessings on you, my son David. You will do many heroic deeds, and you will surely succeed.” Then David went away, and Saul returned home.

REFLECTION:

David is committed to carrying out God’s will and not his own—this takes a lot of faith and humility. Consider how trusting God’s plan for your life is ultimately for your good and his glory.

DAY 2 | 1 SAMUEL 27-31

David flees to Philistia. He robs the neighboring cities but manages to trick the Philistines by telling them he has raided Judah itself. The Philistines prepare to attack the Israelite army, and Saul travels to Endor. He makes a sinful choice to conjure up Samuel's ghost. The Philistines prepare to attack the Israelites, and David's loyalty is questioned. They then return to Ziklag to find their homes burned, their possessions stolen, and their families kidnapped. The men pursue the guilty Amalekites and exact their revenge. Saul and his sons are killed, and the Philistines shamefully mistreat Saul's body.

But David kept thinking to himself, "Someday Saul is going to get me. The best thing I can do is **escape to the Philistines**¹. Then Saul will stop hunting for me in Israelite territory, and I will finally be safe."

1 David joins with the Philistine leader Achish and becomes a bandit

So David took his 600 men and went over and joined Achish son of Maach, the king of Gath. David and his men and their families settled there with Achish at Gath. David brought his two wives along with him—Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, Nabal's widow from Carmel. Word soon reached Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he stopped hunting for him.

One day David said to Achish, "If it is all right with you, we would rather live in one of the country towns instead of here in the royal city."

So Achish gave him the town of Ziklag (which still belongs to the kings of Judah to this day), and they lived there among the Philistines for a year and four months.

David and his men spent their time raiding the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites—people who had lived near Shur, toward the land of Egypt, since ancient times. David did not leave one person alive in the villages he attacked. He took the sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, camels, and clothing before returning home to see King Achish.

"Where did you make your raid today?" Achish would ask.

And David would reply, "Against the south of Judah, the Jerahmeelites, and the Kenites."

No one was left alive to come to Gath and tell where he had really been. This happened again and again while he was living among the Philistines. Achish believed David and thought to himself, "By now the people of Israel must hate him bitterly. Now he will have to stay here and serve me forever!"

About that time the Philistines mustered their armies for another war with Israel. King Achish told David, "You and your men will be expected to join me in battle."

"Very well!" David agreed. "Now you will see for yourself what we can do."

Then Achish told David, "I will make you my personal bodyguard for life."

Meanwhile, Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him. He was buried in Ramah, his hometown. And Saul had banned from the land of Israel all mediums and those who consult the spirits of the dead.

The Philistines set up their camp at Shunem, and Saul gathered all the army of Israel and camped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the vast Philistine army, he became frantic with fear. He asked the Lord what he should do, but the Lord refused to answer him, either

WEEK 3

Here we see the depth of Saul's fall from God and how it affects his mind. He obviously isn't thinking clearly. Once Saul rejects the truth, he becomes susceptible to the most foolish deception.

As Saul seeks the medium, he brings a curse upon himself. God said in Leviticus 20:6, "And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits . . . I will set my face against that person and cut him off from his people."

When judgment falls upon Saul, it will also trouble the people around him. His sons and all Israel will also suffer.

2 by dreams or by sacred lots or by the prophets. Saul then said to his advisers, "Find a woman who is a medium, so I can go and ask her what to do."²

His advisers replied, "There is a medium at Endor."³

So Saul disguised himself by wearing ordinary clothing instead of his royal robes. Then he went to the woman's home at night, accompanied by two of his men.

"I have to talk to a man who has died," he said. "Will you call up his spirit for me?"

3 "Are you trying to get me killed?" the woman demanded. "You know that Saul has outlawed all the mediums and all who consult the spirits of the dead. Why are you setting a trap for me?"

But Saul took an oath in the name of the Lord and promised, "As surely as the Lord lives, nothing bad will happen to you for doing this."

Finally, the woman said, "Well, whose spirit do you want me to call up?"

"Call up Samuel," Saul replied.

When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed, "You've deceived me! You are Saul!"

"Don't be afraid!" the king told her. "What do you see?"

"I see a god coming up out of the earth," she said.

"What does he look like?" Saul asked.

"He is an old man wrapped in a robe," she replied. Saul realized it was Samuel, and he fell to the ground before him.

"Why have you disturbed me by calling me back?" Samuel asked Saul.

"Because I am in deep trouble," Saul replied. "The Philistines are at war with me, and God has left me and won't reply by prophets or dreams. So I have called for you to tell me what to do."

But Samuel replied, "Why ask me, since the Lord has left you and has become your enemy? The Lord has done just as he said he would. He has torn the kingdom from you and given it to your rival, David. The Lord has done this to you today because you refused to carry out his fierce anger against the Amalekites. What's more, the Lord will hand you and the army of Israel over to the Philistines tomorrow, and you and your sons will be here with me."⁴ The Lord will bring down the entire army of Israel in defeat."

4 Saul fell full length on the ground, paralyzed with fright because of Samuel's words. He was also faint with hunger, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night.

When the woman saw how distraught he was, she said, "Sir, I obeyed your command at the risk of my life. Now do what I say, and let me give you a little something to eat so you can regain your strength for the trip back."

But Saul refused to eat anything. Then his advisers joined the woman in urging him to eat, so he finally yielded and got up from the ground and sat on the couch.

The woman had been fattening a calf, so she hurried out and killed it. She took some flour, kneaded it into dough and baked unleavened bread. She brought the meal to Saul and his advisers, and they ate it. Then they went out into the night.

The entire Philistine army now mobilized at Aphek, and the Israelites camped at the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers were leading out their troops in groups of hundreds and thousands, David and his men marched at the rear with King Achish. But the Philistine commanders demanded, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

And Achish told them, “This is David, the servant of King Saul of Israel. He’s been with me for years, and I’ve never found a single fault in him from the day he arrived until today.”

But the Philistine commanders were angry. “Send him back to the town you’ve given him!” they demanded. “He can’t go into the battle with us. **What if he turns against us in battle**⁵ and becomes our adversary? Is there any better way for him to reconcile himself with his master than by handing our heads over to him? Isn’t this the same David about whom the women of Israel sing in their dances,

‘Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?’”

So Achish finally summoned David and said to him, “I swear by the Lord that you have been a trustworthy ally. I think you should go with me into battle, for I’ve never found a single flaw in you from the day you arrived until today. But the other Philistine rulers won’t hear of it. Please don’t upset them, but **go back quietly**⁶.”

“What have I done to deserve this treatment?” David demanded. “What have you ever found in your servant, that I can’t go and fight the enemies of my lord the king?”

But Achish insisted, “As far as I’m concerned, you’re as perfect as an angel of God. But the Philistine commanders are afraid to have you with them in the battle. Now get up early in the morning, and leave with your men as soon as it gets light.”

So David and his men headed back into the land of the Philistines, while the Philistine army went on to Jezreel.

Three days later, when David and his men arrived home at their town of Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had made a raid into the Negev and Ziklag; they had crushed Ziklag and burned it to the ground. They had carried off the women and children and everyone else but without killing anyone.

When David and his men saw the ruins and realized what had happened to their families, they wept until they could weep no more. David’s two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel, were among those captured. David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the Lord his God.

Then he said to Abiathar the priest, “**Bring me the ephod!**” So Abiathar brought it. Then David asked the Lord, “Should I chase after this band of raiders? Will I catch them?”

And the Lord told him, “Yes, go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!”

So David and his 600 men set out, and they came to the brook Besor. But 200 of the men were too exhausted to cross the brook, so David continued the pursuit with 400 men.

Along the way they found an Egyptian man in a field and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and water to drink. They also gave him part of a fig cake

5 They don’t trust David, and they fear he will turn against the Philistines in battle to bring himself back into Saul’s favor.

6 David thinks he can’t be happy in the Land of Israel, but now finds that his “Philistine friends” won’t accept him either. David has no home; he is trying to live in both worlds, but he has no home in either world.

7 An ephod was a special apron that priests would wear to cover their clothing so the sacrificial blood and gore would not splash on their clothing.

and two clusters of raisins, for he hadn't had anything to eat or drink for three days and nights. Before long his strength returned.

"To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" David asked him.

"I am an Egyptian—the slave of an Amalekite," he replied. "My master abandoned me three days ago because I was sick. We were on our way back from raiding the Kerethites in the Negev, the territory of Judah, and the land of Caleb, and we had just burned Ziklag."

"Will you lead me to this band of raiders?" David asked.

In showing unexpected kindness to this Egyptian, God shows David unexpected blessing.

8 The young man replied, "If you take an oath in God's name that you will not kill me or give me back to my master, then I will guide you to them."⁸

So he led David to them, and they found the Amalekites spread out across the fields, eating and drinking and dancing with joy because of the vast amount of plunder they had taken from the Philistines and the land of Judah. David and his men rushed in among them and slaughtered them throughout that night and the entire next day until evening. None of the Amalekites escaped except 400 young men who fled on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, and he rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter, nor anything else that had been taken. David brought everything back. He also recovered all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock. "This plunder belongs to David!" they said.

Then David returned to the brook Besor and met up with the 200 men who had been left behind because they were too exhausted to go with him. They went out to meet David and his men, and David greeted them joyfully. But some evil troublemakers among David's men said, "They didn't go with us, so they can't have any of the plunder we recovered. Give them their wives and children, and tell them to be gone."

But David said, "No, my brothers! Don't be selfish with what the Lord has given us. He has kept us safe and helped us defeat the band of raiders that attacked us. Who will listen when you talk like this? We share and share alike—those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment." From then on David made this a decree and regulation for Israel, and it is still followed today.

David knows that his time among the Philistines has strained his relationships with God's people. Now he knows he must do whatever he can to put things right again.

9 When he arrived at Ziklag, David sent part of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends. "Here is a present for you, taken from the Lord's enemies," he said.⁹

The gifts were sent to the people of the following towns David had visited: Bethel, Ramoth-negev, Jattir, Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, Racal, the towns of the Jerahmeelites, the towns of the Kenites, Hormah, Bor-ashan, Athach, Hebron, and all the other places David and his men had visited.

Now the Philistines attacked Israel, and the men of Israel fled before them. Many were slaughtered on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. The fighting grew very fierce around Saul, and the Philistine archers caught up with him and wounded him severely.¹⁰

Saul knows he is going to die today, yet he has become so hardened to sin that he does not want to repent before his death.

10 Saul groaned to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me before these pagan Philistines come to run me through and taunt and torture me."

But his armor bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died beside the king. So Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer, and his troops all died together that same day.

When the Israelites on the other side of the Jezreel Valley and beyond the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and fled. So the Philistines moved in and occupied their towns.

The next day, when the Philistines went out to strip the dead, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off Saul's head and stripped off his armor. Then they proclaimed the good news of Saul's death in their pagan temple and to the people throughout the land of Philistia¹¹. They placed his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of the city of Beth-shan.

But when the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their mighty warriors traveled through the night to Beth-shan and took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall. They brought them to Jabesh, where they burned the bodies. Then they took their bones and buried them beneath the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

REFLECTION:

God continues to provide for David even in tough times. God continues to provide for us in the same way.

11 Saul's tragic death creates an opportunity for the enemies of the Lord to disgrace his name. Saul's death is used to glorify pagan gods and to mock the living God.

DAY 3 | 2 SAMUEL 1-4

An Amalekite tells David how he killed Saul to end his suffering. David kills the Amalekite and composes a lament for Saul and Jonathan. David then moves to Hebron and is anointed King of Judah and Saul's son Ish-bosheth is anointed king of the other tribes. After having a falling out with Ish-bosheth, Abner and his forces join David's side. Joab avenges his brother's death by killing Abner. David mourns for Abner and protests his own innocence.

After the death of Saul, David returned from his victory over the Amalekites and spent two days in Ziklag. On the third day a man arrived from Saul's army camp. He had torn his clothes and put dirt on his head to show that he was in mourning. He fell to the ground before David in deep respect.

"Where have you come from?" David asked.

"I escaped from the Israelite camp," the man replied.

"What happened?" David demanded. "Tell me how the battle went."

The man replied, "Our entire army fled from the battle. Many of the men are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead."

"How do you know Saul and Jonathan are dead?" David demanded of the young man.

The man answered, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear with the enemy chariots and charioteers closing in on him. When he turned and saw me, he cried out for me to come to him. 'How can I help?' I asked him.

"He responded, 'Who are you?'

"I am an Amalekite,' I told him.

"Then he begged me, 'Come over here and put me out of my misery, for I am in terrible pain and want to die.'

"So I killed him," the Amalekite told David, "for I knew he couldn't live. Then I took his crown and his armband, and I have brought them here to you, my lord."

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

Then David said to the young man who had brought the news, "Where are you from?"

And he replied, "I am a foreigner, an Amalekite, who lives in your land."

"Why were you not afraid to kill the Lord's anointed one?" David asked.

Then David said to one of his men, "Kill him!" So the man thrust his sword into the Amalekite and killed him. "You have condemned yourself," David said, "for you yourself confessed that you killed the Lord's anointed one."

Then David composed a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan¹, and he commanded that it be taught to the people of Judah. It is known as the Song of the Bow, and it is recorded in The Book of Jashar.

Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills!

Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!

1 David's sorrow is sincere and deeply felt. He crafts a song to express the depth of his feeling.

Don't announce the news in Gath,
 don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon,
 or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice
 and the pagans will laugh in triumph.
 O mountains of Gilboa,
 let there be no dew or rain upon you,
 nor fruitful fields producing offerings of grain.
 For there the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled;
 the shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil.
 The bow of Jonathan was powerful,
 and the sword of Saul did its mighty work.
 They shed the blood of their enemies
 and pierced the bodies of mighty heroes.
 How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan!
 They were together in life and in death.
 They were swifter than eagles,
 stronger than lions.
 O women of Israel, weep for Saul,
 for he dressed you in luxurious scarlet clothing,
 in garments decorated with gold.
 Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen in battle!
 Jonathan lies dead on the hills.
 How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan!²
 Oh, how much I loved you!
 And your love for me was deep,
 deeper than the love of women!
 Oh, how the mighty heroes have fallen!
 Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.

2 David's mourning for Jonathan makes more sense to us. Jonathan was David's deep friend and partner in serving God.

After this, David asked the Lord, "Should I move back to one of the towns of Judah?"

"Yes," the Lord replied.

Then David asked, "Which town should I go to?"

"To Hebron," the Lord answered.

David's two wives were Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. So David and his wives and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled in the villages near Hebron. Then the men of Judah came to David and anointed him king over the people of Judah.

When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, he sent them this message: “May the Lord bless you for being so loyal to your master Saul and giving him a decent burial. May the Lord be loyal to you in return and reward you with his unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done. Now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and loyal subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king.”

But Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, had already gone to Mahanaim with Saul’s son Ishbosheth. There he proclaimed Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel.

Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, was forty years old when he became king, and he ruled from Mahanaim for **two years**³. Meanwhile, the people of Judah remained loyal to David. David made Hebron his capital, and he ruled as king of Judah for seven and a half years.

3 For two years, David allowed Ishbosheth to reign over most of Israel. These two years show remarkable patience, long-suffering, and trust in God.

One day Abner led Ishbosheth’s troops from Mahanaim to Gibeon. About the same time, Joab son of Zeruiah led David’s troops out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. The two groups sat down there, facing each other from opposite sides of the pool.

Then Abner suggested to Joab, “Let’s have a few of our warriors fight hand to hand here in front of us.”

“All right,” Joab agreed. So twelve men were chosen to fight from each side—twelve men of Benjamin representing Ishbosheth son of Saul, and twelve representing David. Each one grabbed his opponent by the hair and thrust his sword into the other’s side so that all of them died. So this place at Gibeon has been known ever since as the Field of Swords.

A fierce battle followed that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by the forces of David.

Joab, Abishai, and Asahel—the three sons of Zeruiah—were among David’s forces that day. Asahel could run like a gazelle, and he began chasing Abner. He pursued him relentlessly, not stopping for anything. When Abner looked back and saw him coming, he called out, “Is that you, Asahel?”

“Yes, it is,” he replied.

“Go fight someone else!” Abner warned. “Take on one of the younger men, and strip him of his weapons.” But Asahel kept right on chasing Abner.

Again Abner shouted to him, “Get away from here! I don’t want to kill you. How could I ever face your brother Joab again?”

But Asahel refused to turn back, so Abner thrust the butt end of his spear through Asahel’s stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He stumbled to the ground and died there. And everyone who came by that spot stopped and stood still when they saw Asahel lying there.

When Joab and Abishai found out what had happened, they set out after Abner. The sun was just going down as they arrived at the hill of Ammah near Giah, along the road to the wilderness of Gibeon. Abner’s troops from the tribe of Benjamin regrouped there at the top of the hill to take a stand.

WEEK 3

Abner shouted down to Joab, “Must we always be killing each other? Don’t you realize that bitterness is the only result? When will you call off your men from chasing their Israelite brothers?”

Then Joab said, “God only knows what would have happened if you hadn’t spoken, for we would have chased you all night if necessary.” So Joab blew the ram’s horn, and his men stopped chasing the troops of Israel.

All that night Abner and his men retreated through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, traveling all through the morning, and didn’t stop until they arrived at Mahanaim.

Meanwhile, Joab and his men also returned home. When Joab counted his casualties, he discovered that only 19 men were missing in addition to Asahel. But 360 of Abner’s men had been killed, all from the tribe of Benjamin. Joab and his men took Asahel’s body to Bethlehem and buried him there in his father’s tomb. Then they traveled all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

That was the beginning of a long war between those who were loyal to Saul and those loyal to David. As time passed David became stronger and stronger, while Saul’s dynasty became weaker and weaker.

These are the sons who were born to David in Hebron:⁴

The oldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel.

The second was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel.

The third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur.

The fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith.

The fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital.

The sixth was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah, David’s wife.

These sons were all born to David in Hebron.

As the war between the house of Saul and the house of David went on, Abner became a powerful leader among those loyal to Saul. One day Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, accused Abner of sleeping with one of his father’s concubines⁵, a woman named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah.

Abner was furious. “Am I some Judean dog to be kicked around like this?” he shouted. “After all I have done for your father, Saul, and his family and friends by not handing you over to David, is this my reward—that you find fault with me about this woman? May God strike me and even kill me if I don’t do everything I can to help David get what the Lord has promised him! I’m going to take Saul’s kingdom and give it to David. I will establish the throne of David over Israel as well as Judah, all the way from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south.” Ishbosheth didn’t dare say another word because he was afraid of what Abner might do.

Then Abner sent messengers to David, saying, “Doesn’t the entire land belong to you? Make a solemn pact with me, and I will help turn over all of Israel to you.”

4 During David’s seven-year reign in Hebron, his six different wives gave birth to six sons. This shows that David went against God’s commandment that Israel’s king should not multiply wives to himself.

5 Ishbosheth accuses Abner of a serious crime. Taking a royal mistress is regarded as both sexual immorality and treason.

“All right,” David replied, “but I will not negotiate with you unless you bring back my wife Michal, Saul’s daughter, when you come.”

6 The fact that Abner knows these prophecies and asks the leaders of Israel to consider them means that these prophecies of David are widely known. Sadly, they are not widely respected—most of Israel is lukewarm and unenthusiastic in their embrace of David as King.

David then sent this message to Ishbosheth, Saul’s son: “Give me back my wife Michal, for I bought her with the lives of 100 Philistines.”

So Ishbosheth took Michal away from her husband, Palti son of Laish. Palti followed along behind her as far as Bahurim, weeping as he went. Then Abner told him, “Go back home!” So Palti returned.

Meanwhile, Abner had consulted with the elders of Israel. “For some time now,” he told them, “you have wanted to make David your king. Now is the time! For the Lord has said, ‘I have chosen David to save my people Israel from the hands of the Philistines and from all their other enemies.’”⁶ Abner also spoke with the men of Benjamin. Then he went to Hebron to tell David that all the people of Israel and Benjamin had agreed to support him.

When Abner and twenty of his men came to Hebron, David entertained them with a great feast. Then Abner said to David, “Let me go and call an assembly of all Israel to support my lord the king. They will make a covenant with you to make you their king, and you will rule over everything your heart desires.” So David sent Abner safely on his way.

But just after David had sent Abner away in safety, Joab and some of David’s troops returned from a raid, bringing much plunder with them. When Joab arrived, he was told that Abner had just been there visiting the king and had been sent away in safety.

Joab rushed to the king and demanded, “What have you done? What do you mean by letting Abner get away? You know perfectly well that he came to spy on you and find out everything you’re doing!”

Joab then left David and sent messengers to catch up with Abner, asking him to return. They found him at the well of Sirah and brought him back, though David knew nothing about it. When Abner arrived back at Hebron, Joab took him aside at the gateway as if to speak with him privately. But then he stabbed Abner in the stomach and killed him in revenge for killing his brother Asahel.

When David heard about it, he declared, “I vow by the Lord that I and my kingdom are forever innocent of this crime against Abner son of Ner. Joab and his family are the guilty ones. May the family of Joab be cursed in every generation with a man who has open sores or leprosy or who walks on crutches or dies by the sword or begs for food!”

7 David does not want his kingdom established by violence. He wants God to establish his kingdom and to punish his enemies. David still believes that vengeance belongs to the Lord.

So Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner because Abner had killed their brother Asahel at the battle of Gibeon.

Then David said to Joab and all those who were with him, “Tear your clothes and put on burlap. Mourn for Abner.” And King David himself walked behind the procession to the grave. They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king and all the people wept at his graveside. Then the king sang this funeral song for Abner:⁷

“Should Abner have died as fools die?
Your hands were not bound;
your feet were not chained.

No, you were murdered—
the victim of a wicked plot.”

All the people wept again for Abner. David had refused to eat anything on the day of the funeral, and now everyone begged him to eat. But David had made a vow, saying, “May God strike me and even kill me if I eat anything before sundown.”

This pleased the people very much. In fact, everything the king did pleased them! So everyone in Judah and all Israel understood that David was not responsible for Abner’s murder.

Then King David said to his officials, “Don’t you realize that a great commander has fallen today in Israel? And even though I am the anointed king, these two sons of Zeruiah—Joab and Abishai—are too strong for me to control. So may the Lord repay these evil men for their evil deeds.”

When Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, heard about Abner’s death at Hebron, he lost all courage, and all Israel became paralyzed with fear. Now there were two brothers, Baanah and Recab, who were captains of Ishbosheth’s raiding parties. They were sons of Rimmon, a member of the tribe of Benjamin who lived in Beeroth. The town of Beeroth is now part of Benjamin’s territory because the original people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim, where they still live as foreigners.

(Saul’s son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled as a child. He was five years old when the report came from Jezreel that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle. When the child’s nurse heard the news, she picked him up and fled. But as she hurried away, she dropped him, and he became crippled.)

One day Recab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to Ishbosheth’s house around noon as he was taking his midday rest. The doorkeeper, who had been sifting wheat, became drowsy and fell asleep. So Recab and Baanah slipped past her. They went into the house and found Ishbosheth sleeping on his bed. They struck and killed him and cut off his head. Then, taking his head with them, they fled across the Jordan Valley through the night. When they arrived at Hebron, they presented Ishbosheth’s head to David. “Look!” they exclaimed to the king. “Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of your enemy Saul who tried to kill you. Today the Lord has given my lord the king revenge on Saul and his entire family!”

But David said to Recab and Baanah, “The Lord, who saves me from all my enemies, is my witness. Someone once told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ thinking he was bringing me good news. But I seized him and killed him at Ziklag. That’s the reward I gave him for his news! How much more should I reward evil men who have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed? Shouldn’t I hold you responsible for his blood and rid the earth of you?”

So David ordered his young men to kill them, and they did. They cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies beside the pool in Hebron. Then they took Ishbosheth’s head and buried it in Abner’s tomb in Hebron.

REFLECTION:

David finally gets what he was promised—to be King of Judah. Even through great blessing, there comes great suffering and lament. God is with us through the high of highs and low of lows.

DAY 1 | 2 SAMUEL 5-7

David experiences success because the Lord is with him and directs his steps. David doesn't take any of the credit and praises God. Look for David's humility and worship of God.

Then all the tribes of Israel went to David at Hebron and told him, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, when Saul was our king, you were the one who really led the forces of Israel. And the Lord told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be Israel's leader.'"

So there at Hebron, King David made a covenant before the Lord with all the elders of Israel. And they anointed him king of Israel.

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in all. He had reigned over Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and from Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

David then led his men to Jerusalem to fight against the Jebusites, the original inhabitants of the land who were living there. The Jebusites taunted David, saying, "You'll never get in here! Even the blind and lame could keep you out!" For the Jebusites thought they were safe. But David captured the fortress of Zion, which is now called the City of David.

On the day of the attack, David said to his troops, "I hate those 'lame' and 'blind' Jebusites. Whoever attacks them should strike by going into the city through the water tunnel." That is the origin of the saying, "The blind and the lame may not enter the house."

So David made the fortress his home, and he called it the City of David. He extended the city, starting at the supporting terraces and working inward. And David became more and more powerful, because the Lord God of Heaven's Armies was with him.

Then King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar timber and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built David a palace. And David realized that the Lord had confirmed him as king over Israel and had blessed his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more concubines and wives, and they had more sons and daughters. These are the names of David's sons who were born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel, they mobilized all their forces to capture him. But David was told they were coming, so he went into the stronghold. The Philistines arrived and spread out across the valley of Rephaim. So David asked the Lord, "Should I go out to fight the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord replied to David, "Yes, go ahead. I will certainly hand them over to you."

So David went to Baal-perazim and defeated the Philistines there. "The Lord did it!" David exclaimed. "He burst through my enemies like a raging flood!" So he named that place Baal-perazim (which means "the Lord who bursts through"). The Philistines had abandoned their idols there, so David and his men confiscated them.

But after a while the Philistines returned and again spread out across the valley of Rephaim. And again David asked the Lord what to do. “Do not attack them straight on,” the Lord replied. “Instead, circle around behind and attack them near the poplar trees. When you hear a sound like marching feet in the tops of the poplar trees, be on the alert! That will be the signal that the Lord is moving ahead of you to strike down the Philistine army.” So David did what the Lord commanded, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer. **After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more concubines and wives, and they had more sons and daughters.**¹

Then David again gathered all the elite troops in Israel, 30,000 in all. He led them to Baalah of Judah to bring back the Ark of God, which bears the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab’s house, which was on a hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab’s sons, were guiding the cart that carried the Ark of God. Ahio walked in front of the Ark. David and all the people of Israel were celebrating before the Lord, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out his hand and steadied the Ark of God. Then the Lord’s anger was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him dead because of this. So Uzzah died right there beside the Ark of God.²

David was angry because the Lord’s anger had burst out against Uzzah. He named that place Perez-uzzah (which means “to burst out against Uzzah”), as it is still called today.

David was now afraid of the Lord, and he asked, “How can I ever bring the Ark of the Lord back into my care?” So David decided not to move the Ark of the Lord into the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-edom of Gath. The Ark of the Lord remained there in Obed-edom’s house for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom and his entire household.

Then King David was told, “The Lord has blessed Obed-edom’s household and everything he has because of the Ark of God.” So David went there and brought the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with a great celebration. After the men who were carrying the Ark of the Lord had gone six steps, David sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams’ horns.

But as the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she was filled with contempt for him.

They brought the Ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the special tent David had prepared for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. When he had finished his sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. Then he gave to every Israelite man and woman in the crowd a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people returned to their homes.

When David returned home to bless his own family, Michal, the daughter of Saul, came out to meet him. She said in disgust, “How distinguished the king of Israel

1 God may have allowed polygamy to protect and provide for the women who otherwise may have been left destitute. A man would take multiple wives and serve as the provider and protector of all of them. It is important to note that allowance is not the same as approval.

2 It may seem like God is harsh because Uzzah is just keeping the Ark from falling. Exodus 25:14-15 tells us the proper way to carry the Ark is by hand with poles and not on a cart. Numbers 4:15 makes it clear that no one should touch the Ark.

looked today, shamelessly exposing himself to the servant girls like any vulgar person might do!”

David retorted to Michal, “I was dancing before the Lord, who chose me above your father and all his family! He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the Lord, so I celebrate before the Lord. Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, even to be humiliated in my own eyes! But those servant girls you mentioned will indeed think I am distinguished!” So Michal, the daughter of Saul, remained childless throughout her entire life.

When King David was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all the surrounding enemies, the king summoned Nathan the prophet. “Look,” David said, “I am living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out there in a tent!”

Nathan replied to the king, “Go ahead and do whatever you have in mind, for the Lord is with you.”

But that same night the Lord said to Nathan,

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord has declared: Are you the one to build a house for me to live in? I have never lived in a house, from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until this very day. I have always moved from one place to another with a tent and a Tabernacle as my dwelling. Yet no matter where I have gone with the Israelites, I have never once complained to Israel’s tribal leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, “Why haven’t you built me a beautiful cedar house?”’”

“Now go and say to my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies has declared: I took you from tending sheep in the pasture and selected you to be the leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before your eyes. Now I will make your name as famous as anyone who has ever lived on the earth! And I will provide a homeland for my people Israel, planting them in a secure place where they will never be disturbed. Evil nations won’t oppress them as they’ve done in the past, starting from the time I appointed judges to rule my people Israel. And I will give you rest from all your enemies.

“Furthermore, the Lord declares that he will make a house for you—a dynasty of kings! For when you die and are buried with your ancestors, I will raise up one of your descendants, your own offspring, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will secure his royal throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will correct and discipline him with the rod, like any father would do. But my favor will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from your sight. Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.”

So Nathan went back to David and told him everything the Lord had said in this vision.

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and prayed,

“Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And now, Sovereign Lord, in addition to everything else, you speak of giving your servant a lasting dynasty! Do you deal with everyone this way, O Sovereign Lord?

“What more can I say to you? You know what your servant is really like, Sovereign Lord. Because of your promise and according to your will, you have done all these great things and have made them known to your servant.

“How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you. We have never even heard of another God like you! What other nation on earth is like your people Israel? What other nation, O God, have you redeemed from slavery to be your own people? You made a great name for yourself when you redeemed your people from Egypt. You performed awesome miracles and drove out the nations and gods that stood in their way. You made Israel your very own people forever, and you, O Lord, became their God.

“And now, O Lord God, I am your servant; do as you have promised concerning me and my family. Confirm it as a promise that will last forever. And may your name be honored forever so that everyone will say, ‘The Lord of Heaven’s Armies is God over Israel!’ And may the house of your servant David continue before you forever.

“O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, God of Israel, I have been bold enough to pray this prayer to you because you have revealed all this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you—a dynasty of kings!’ For you are God, O Sovereign Lord. Your words are truth, and you have promised these good things to your servant. And now, may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you. For you have spoken, and when you grant a blessing to your servant, O Sovereign Lord, it is an eternal blessing!”

REFLECTION:

David humbly receives God’s “no.” He recognizes how far God brought him—from tending sheep to the leader of his people. He didn’t earn that promotion, so he wasn’t entitled and didn’t demand anything of God. The same is true for us. How do you respond to God’s “no”? Are you able to be grateful for what he has done for you, or are you entitled and upset?

DAY 2 | 2 SAMUEL 8-10

These chapters serve as a brief picture of what God wants to give his people. They enjoy success against their enemies and they have a just King. Look for God's kindness towards Israel.

After this, David defeated and subdued the Philistines by conquering Gath, their largest town. David also conquered the land of Moab. He made the people lie down on the ground in a row, and he measured them off in groups with a length of rope. He measured off two groups to be executed for every one group to be spared. The Moabites who were spared became David's subjects and paid him tribute money.

David also destroyed the forces of Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when Hadadezer marched out to strengthen his control along the Euphrates River. David captured 1,000 chariots, 7,000 charioteers, and 20,000 foot soldiers. He crippled all the chariot horses except enough for 100 chariots.

When Arameans from Damascus arrived to help King Hadadezer, David killed 22,000 of them. Then he placed several army garrisons in Damascus, the Aramean capital, and the Arameans became David's subjects and paid him tribute money. So the Lord made David victorious wherever he went.

David brought the gold shields of Hadadezer's officers to Jerusalem, along with a large amount of bronze from Hadadezer's towns of Tebah and Berothai.

When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had destroyed the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to congratulate King David for his successful campaign. Hadadezer and Toi had been enemies and were often at war. Joram presented David with many gifts of silver, gold, and bronze.

King David dedicated all these gifts to the Lord, as he did with the silver and gold from the other nations he had defeated— from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek—and from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

So David became even more famous when he returned from destroying 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He placed army garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became David's subjects. In fact, the Lord made David victorious wherever he went.

So David reigned over all Israel and did what was just and right for all his people. Joab son of Zeruiah was commander of the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the royal historian. Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were the priests. Seraiah was the court secretary. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was captain of the king's bodyguard. And David's sons served as priestly leaders.

One day David asked, "Is anyone in Saul's family still alive—anyone to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul's servants. "Are you Ziba?" the king asked.

"Yes sir, I am," Ziba replied.

The king then asked him, "Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them."

Ziba replied, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive. He is crippled in both feet."

"Where is he?" the king asked.

“In Lo-debar,” Ziba told him, “at the home of Makir son of Ammiel.”

So David sent for him and brought him from Makir’s home. His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan’s son and Saul’s grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low to the ground in deep respect. David said, “Greetings, Mephibosheth.”

Mephibosheth replied, “I am your servant.”

“Don’t be afraid!” David said. “I intend to show kindness to you because of my promise to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the property that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will eat here with me at the king’s table!”

Mephibosheth bowed respectfully and exclaimed, “Who is your servant, that you should show such kindness to a dead dog like me?”

Then the king summoned Saul’s servant Ziba and said, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for your master’s household. But Mephibosheth, your master’s grandson, will eat here at my table.” (Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

Ziba replied, “Yes, my lord the king; I am your servant, and I will do all that you have commanded.” And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly at David’s table, like one of the king’s own sons.

Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. From then on, all the members of Ziba’s household were Mephibosheth’s servants. And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, lived in Jerusalem and ate regularly at the king’s table.

Some time after this, King Nahash of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun became king. David said, “I am going to show loyalty to Hanun just as his father, Nahash, was always loyal to me.” So David sent ambassadors to express sympathy to Hanun about his father’s death.

But when David’s ambassadors arrived in the land of Ammon, the Ammonite commanders said to Hanun, their master, “Do you really think these men are coming here to honor your father? No! David has sent them to spy out the city so they can come in and conquer it!” So Hanun seized David’s ambassadors and shaved off half of each man’s beard, cut off their robes at the buttocks, and sent them back to David in shame.

When David heard what had happened, he sent messengers to tell the men, “Stay at Jericho until your beards grow out, and then come back.” For they felt deep shame because of their appearance.

When the people of Ammon realized how seriously they had angered David, they sent and hired 20,000 Aramean foot soldiers from the lands of Beth-rehob and Zobah, 1,000 from the king of Maacah, and 12,000 from the land of Tob. When David heard about this, he sent Joab and all his warriors to fight them. The Ammonite troops came out and drew up their battle lines at the entrance of the city gate, while the Arameans from Zobah and Rehob and the men from Tob and Maacah positioned themselves to fight in the open fields.

When Joab saw that he would have to fight on both the front and the rear, he chose some of Israel’s elite troops and placed them under his personal command to fight the Arameans in the fields. He left the rest of the army under the command of his brother

Abishai, who was to attack the Ammonites. “If the Arameans are too strong for me, then come over and help me,” Joab told his brother. “And if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come and help you. Be courageous! Let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. May the Lord’s will be done.”

When Joab and his troops attacked, the Arameans began to run away. And when the Ammonites saw the Arameans running, they ran from Abishai and retreated into the city. After the battle was over, Joab returned to Jerusalem.

The Arameans now realized that they were no match for Israel. So when they regrouped, they were joined by additional Aramean troops summoned by Hadadezer from the other side of the Euphrates River. These troops arrived at Helam under the command of Shobach, the commander of Hadadezer’s forces.

When David heard what was happening, he mobilized all Israel, crossed the Jordan River, and led the army to Helam. The Arameans positioned themselves in battle formation and fought against David. But again the Arameans fled from the Israelites. This time David’s forces killed 700 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers, including Shobach, the commander of their army. When all the kings allied with Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they surrendered to Israel and became their subjects. After that, the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites.

REFLECTION:

It is interesting that in the middle of two bloody military campaigns, David pauses to show kindness to the family of the man who tried to kill him. What do you think about David’s desire “to show God’s kindness to them”?

DAY 3 | 2 SAMUEL 11-14

If chapters 8-10 represent things going the way God intended, then chapters 11-14 represent the opposite. The stories we are going to read today are difficult to stomach. It is important to remember that the Bible simply tells us what happened and does not condone this behavior.

In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of **Uriah the Hittite**.” Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, “I’m pregnant.”

Then David sent word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent him to David. When Uriah arrived, David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. Then he told Uriah, “Go on home and relax.” David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace. But Uriah didn’t go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance with the king’s palace guard.

When David heard that Uriah had not gone home, he summoned him and asked, “What’s the matter? Why didn’t you go home last night after being away for so long?”

Uriah replied, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and my master’s men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing.”

“Well, stay here today,” David told him, “and tomorrow you may return to the army.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then he couldn’t get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance with the king’s palace guard.

So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, “Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed.” So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy’s strongest men were fighting. And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

Then Joab sent a battle report to David. He told his messenger, “Report all the news of the battle to the king. But he might get angry and ask, ‘Why did the troops go so close to the city? Didn’t they know there would be shooting from the walls? Wasn’t Abimelech son of Gideon killed at Thebez by a woman who threw a millstone down on him from the wall? Why would you get so close to the wall?’ Then tell him, ‘Uriah the Hittite was killed, too.’”

So the messenger went to Jerusalem and gave a complete report to David. “The enemy came out against us in the open fields,” he said. “And as we chased them back

1 2 Samuel 23:39 says that Uriah the Hittite is one of David’s elite warriors. That means that David knows him and still chooses to take this action.

to the city gate, the archers on the wall shot arrows at us. Some of the king's men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite."

"Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged," David said. "The sword devours this one today and that one tomorrow! Fight harder next time, and conquer the city!"

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the Lord was displeased with what David had done.

So the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man owned a great many sheep and cattle. The poor man owned nothing but one little lamb he had bought. He raised that little lamb, and it grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing an animal from his own flock or herd, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and prepared it for his guest."

David was furious. "As surely as the Lord lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man! The Lord, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. I gave you your master's house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah the Hittite with the sword of the Ammonites and stolen his wife. From this time on, your family will live by the sword because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own.

"This is what the Lord says: Because of what you have done, I will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man before your very eyes, and he will go to bed with them in public view. You did it secretly, but I will make this happen to you openly in the sight of all Israel."

Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."²

Nathan replied, "Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin. Nevertheless, because you have shown utter contempt for the word of the Lord by doing this, your child will die."³

After Nathan returned to his home, the Lord sent a deadly illness to the child of David and Uriah's wife. David begged God to spare the child. He went without food and lay all night on the bare ground. The elders of his household pleaded with him to get up and eat with them, but he refused.

Then on the seventh day the child died. David's advisers were afraid to tell him. "He wouldn't listen to reason while the child was ill," they said. "What drastic thing will he do when we tell him the child is dead?"

When David saw them whispering, he realized what had happened. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

2 After being confronted by Nathan, David repents in the same words as as Saul (1 Samuel 15), but without Saul's excuses. David models how to repent.

3 We should be troubled by this verse. It is terrible that David's wickedness is responsible for the death of the child! And this is God's doing? Indeed it is. King David's sin is like all human sin. It has consequences. We cannot always understand the consequences, and there are certainly times when we hate the consequences.

Then David got up from the ground, washed himself, put on lotions, and changed his clothes. He went to the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord. After that, he returned to the palace and was served food and ate.

His advisers were amazed. “We don’t understand you,” they told him. “While the child was still living, you wept and refused to eat. But now that the child is dead, you have stopped your mourning and are eating again.”

David replied, “I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, ‘Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me.”

Then David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and slept with her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and David named him Solomon. The Lord loved the child and sent word through Nathan the prophet that they should name him Jedidiah (which means “beloved of the Lord”), as the Lord had commanded.

Meanwhile, Joab was fighting against Rabbah, the capital of Ammon, and he captured the royal fortifications. Joab sent messengers to tell David, “I have fought against Rabbah and captured its water supply. Now bring the rest of the army and capture the city. Otherwise, I will capture it and get credit for the victory.”

So David gathered the rest of the army and went to Rabbah, and he fought against it and captured it. David removed the crown from the king’s head, and it was placed on his own head. The crown was made of gold and set with gems, and it weighed seventy-five pounds. David took a vast amount of plunder from the city. He also made slaves of the people of Rabbah and forced them to labor with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, and to work in the brick kilns. That is how he dealt with the people of all the Ammonite towns. Then David and all the army returned to Jerusalem.

Now David’s son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. And Amnon, her half brother, fell desperately in love with her. Amnon became so obsessed with Tamar that he became ill. She was a virgin, and Amnon thought he could never have her.

But Amnon had a very crafty friend—his cousin Jonadab. He was the son of David’s brother Shimea. One day Jonadab said to Amnon, “What’s the trouble? Why should the son of a king look so dejected morning after morning?”

So Amnon told him, “I am in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom’s sister.”

“Well,” Jonadab said, “I’ll tell you what to do. Go back to bed and pretend you are ill. When your father comes to see you, ask him to let Tamar come and prepare some food for you. Tell him you’ll feel better if she prepares it as you watch and feeds you with her own hands.”

So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. And when the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, “Please let my sister Tamar come and cook my favorite dish as I watch. Then I can eat it from her own hands.” So David agreed and sent Tamar to Amnon’s house to prepare some food for him.

When Tamar arrived at Amnon’s house, she went to the place where he was lying down so he could watch her mix some dough. Then she baked his favorite dish for him. But when she set the serving tray before him, he refused to eat. “Everyone get out of here,” Amnon told his servants. So they all left.

Then he said to Tamar, “Now bring the food into my bedroom and feed it to me here.” So Tamar took his favorite dish to him. But as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, “Come to bed with me, my darling sister.”

“No, my brother!” she cried. “Don’t be foolish! Don’t do this to me! Such wicked things aren’t done in Israel. Where could I go in my shame? And you would be called one of the greatest fools in Israel. Please, just speak to the king about it, and he will let you marry me.”

But Amnon wouldn’t listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her. Then suddenly Amnon’s love turned to hate, and he hated her even more than he had loved her. “Get out of here!” he snarled at her.

“No, no!” Tamar cried. “Sending me away now is worse than what you’ve already done to me.”

But Amnon wouldn’t listen to her. He shouted for his servant and demanded, “Throw this woman out, and lock the door behind her!”

So the servant put her out and locked the door behind her. She was wearing a long, beautiful robe, as was the custom in those days for the king’s virgin daughters. But now Tamar tore her robe and put ashes on her head. And then, with her face in her hands, she went away crying.

Her brother Absalom saw her and asked, “Is it true that Amnon has been with you? Well, my sister, keep quiet for now, since he’s your brother. Don’t you worry about it.” So Tamar lived as a desolate woman in her brother Absalom’s house.

When King David heard what had happened, he was very angry. And though Absalom never spoke to Amnon about this, he hated Amnon deeply because of what he had done to his sister.

Two years later, when Absalom’s sheep were being sheared at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king’s sons to come to a feast. He went to the king and said, “My sheep-shearers are now at work. Would the king and his servants please come to celebrate the occasion with me?”

The king replied, “No, my son. If we all came, we would be too much of a burden on you.” Absalom pressed him, but the king would not come, though he gave Absalom his blessing.

“Well, then,” Absalom said, “if you can’t come, how about sending my brother Amnon with us?”

“Why Amnon?” the king asked. But Absalom kept on pressing the king until he finally agreed to let all his sons attend, including Amnon. So Absalom prepared a feast fit for a king.

Absalom told his men, “Wait until Amnon gets drunk; then at my signal, kill him! Don’t be afraid. I’m the one who has given the command. Take courage and do it!” So at Absalom’s signal they murdered Amnon. Then the other sons of the king jumped on their mules and fled.

As they were on the way back to Jerusalem, this report reached David: “Absalom has killed all the king’s sons; not one is left alive!” The king got up, tore his robe, and threw himself on the ground. His advisers also tore their clothes in horror and sorrow.

But just then Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimea, arrived and said, "No, don't believe that all the king's sons have been killed! It was only Amnon! Absalom has been plotting this ever since Amnon raped his sister Tamar. No, my lord the king, your sons aren't all dead! It was only Amnon." Meanwhile Absalom escaped.

Then the watchman on the Jerusalem wall saw a great crowd coming down the hill on the road from the west. He ran to tell the king, "I see a crowd of people coming from the Horonaim road along the side of the hill."

"Look!" Jonadab told the king. "There they are now! The king's sons are coming, just as I said."

They soon arrived, weeping and sobbing, and the king and all his servants wept bitterly with them. And David mourned many days for his son Amnon.

Absalom fled to his grandfather, Talmi son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. He stayed there in Geshur for three years. And King David, now reconciled to Amnon's death, longed to be reunited with his son Absalom.

Joab realized how much the king longed to see Absalom. So he sent for a woman from Tekoa who had a reputation for great wisdom. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning; wear mourning clothes and don't put on lotions. Act like a woman who has been mourning for the dead for a long time. Then go to the king and tell him the story I am about to tell you." Then Joab told her what to say.

When the woman from Tekoa approached the king, she bowed with her face to the ground in deep respect and cried out, "O king! Help me!"

"What's the trouble?" the king asked.

"Alas, I am a widow!" she replied. "My husband is dead. My two sons had a fight out in the field. And since no one was there to stop it, one of them was killed. Now the rest of the family is demanding, 'Let us have your son. We will execute him for murdering his brother. He doesn't deserve to inherit his family's property.' They want to extinguish the only coal I have left, and my husband's name and family will disappear from the face of the earth."

"Leave it to me," the king told her. "Go home, and I'll see to it that no one touches him."

"Oh, thank you, my lord the king," the woman from Tekoa replied. "If you are criticized for helping me, let the blame fall on me and on my father's house, and let the king and his throne be innocent."

"If anyone objects," the king said, "bring him to me. I can assure you he will never harm you again!"

Then she said, "Please swear to me by the Lord your God that you won't let anyone take vengeance against my son. I want no more bloodshed."

"As surely as the Lord lives," he replied, "not a hair on your son's head will be disturbed!"

"Please allow me to ask one more thing of my lord the king," she said.

"Go ahead and speak," he responded.

She replied, "Why don't you do as much for the people of God as you have promised to do for me? You have convicted yourself in making this decision, because you have refused to bring home your own banished son. All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God

does not just sweep life away; instead, he devises ways to bring us back when we have been separated from him.

“I have come to plead with my lord the king because people have threatened me. I said to myself, ‘Perhaps the king will listen to me and rescue us from those who would cut us off from the inheritance God has given us. Yes, my lord the king will give us peace of mind again.’ I know that you are like an angel of God in discerning good from evil. May the Lord your God be with you.”

“I must know one thing,” the king replied, “and tell me the truth.”

“Yes, my lord the king,” she responded.

“Did Joab put you up to this?”

And the woman replied, “My lord the king, how can I deny it? Nobody can hide anything from you. Yes, Joab sent me and told me what to say. He did it to place the matter before you in a different light. But you are as wise as an angel of God, and you understand everything that happens among us!”

So the king sent for Joab and told him, “All right, go and bring back the young man Absalom.”

Joab bowed with his face to the ground in deep respect and said, “At last I know that I have gained your approval, my lord the king, for you have granted me this request!”

Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king gave this order: “Absalom may go to his own house, but he must never come into my presence.” So Absalom did not see the king.

Now Absalom was praised as the most handsome man in all Israel. He was flawless from head to foot. He cut his hair only once a year, and then only because it was so heavy. When he weighed it out, it came to five pounds! He had three sons and one daughter. His daughter’s name was Tamar, and she was very beautiful.

Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years, but he never got to see the king. Then Absalom sent for Joab to ask him to intercede for him, but Joab refused to come. Absalom sent for him a second time, but again Joab refused to come. So Absalom said to his servants, “Go and set fire to Joab’s barley field, the field next to mine.” So they set his field on fire, as Absalom had commanded.

Then Joab came to Absalom at his house and demanded, “Why did your servants set my field on fire?”

And Absalom replied, “Because I wanted you to ask the king why he brought me back from Geshur if he didn’t intend to see me. I might as well have stayed there. Let me see the king; if he finds me guilty of anything, then let him kill me.”

So Joab told the king what Absalom had said. Then at last David summoned Absalom, who came and bowed low before the king, and the king kissed him.

REFLECTION:

In these chapters, sin is clearly on display. What do these chapters reveal about the sinful capacity of humanity? Apart from God’s grace, we are all capable of this kind of sin. Have you recognized your capacity for sin?

DAY 1 | 2 SAMUEL 15-17

David never intervenes in the sinful chaos of his family, and that leads to personal cost—one of his own sons, Absalom, usurps the throne. As you read, look at how David is determined to continue honoring and submitting to the Lord.

After this, Absalom bought a chariot and horses, and he hired fifty bodyguards to run ahead of him. He got up early every morning and went out to the gate of the city. When people brought a case to the king for judgment, Absalom would ask where in Israel they were from, and they would tell him their tribe. Then Absalom would say, “You’ve really got a strong case here! It’s too bad the king doesn’t have anyone to hear it. I wish I were the judge. Then everyone could bring their cases to me for judgment, and I would give them justice!”

When people tried to bow before him, Absalom wouldn’t let them. Instead, he took them by the hand and kissed them. Absalom did this with everyone who came to the king for judgment, and so he stole the hearts of all the people of Israel.

After four years, Absalom said to the king, “Let me go to Hebron to offer a sacrifice to the Lord and fulfill a vow I made to him. For while your servant was at Geshur in Aram, I promised to sacrifice to the Lord in Hebron if he would bring me back to Jerusalem.”

“All right,” the king told him. “Go and fulfill your vow.”

So Absalom went to Hebron. But while he was there, he sent secret messengers to all the tribes of Israel to stir up a rebellion against the king. “As soon as you hear the ram’s horn,” his message read, “you are to say, ‘Absalom has been crowned king in Hebron.’” He took 200 men from Jerusalem with him as guests, but they knew nothing of his intentions. While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, one of David’s counselors who lived in Giloh. Soon many others also joined Absalom, and the conspiracy gained momentum.

A messenger soon arrived in Jerusalem to tell David, “All Israel has joined Absalom in a conspiracy against you!”

“Then we must flee at once, or it will be too late!” David urged his men. “Hurry! If we get out of the city before Absalom arrives, both we and the city of Jerusalem will be spared from disaster.”

“We are with you,” his advisers replied. “Do what you think is best.”

So the king and all his household set out at once. He left no one behind except ten of his concubines to look after the palace. The king and all his people set out on foot, pausing at the last house to let all the king’s men move past to lead the way. There were 600 men from Gath who had come with David, along with the king’s bodyguard.

Then the king turned and said to Ittai, a leader of the men from Gath, “Why are you coming with us? Go on back to King Absalom, for you are a guest in Israel, a foreigner in exile. You arrived only recently, and should I force you today to wander with us? I don’t even know where we will go. Go on back and take your kinsmen with you, and may the Lord show you his unfailing love and faithfulness.”

But Ittai said to the king, “I vow by the Lord and by your own life that I will go wherever my lord the king goes, no matter what happens—whether it means life or death.”

In Israel's history, people have used the Ark of God as a sort of good luck charm because blessing tends to follow where it goes. David doesn't do this. He sends it to its proper place—with God's people.

David replied, "All right, come with us." So Ittai and all his men and their families went along.

Everyone cried loudly as the king and his followers passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley and then went out toward the wilderness.

Zadok and all the Levites also came along, carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until everyone had passed out of the city.

Then the king instructed Zadok to take the Ark of God back into the city. "If the Lord sees fit," David said, "he will bring me back to see the Ark and the Tabernacle again. But if he is through with me, then let him do what seems best to him."¹

The king also told Zadok the priest, "Look, here is my plan. You and Abiathar should return quietly to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan. I will stop at the shallows of the Jordan River and wait there for a report from you." So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to the city and stayed there.

David walked up the road to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning. And the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they climbed the hill. When someone told David that his adviser Ahithophel was now backing Absalom, David prayed, "O Lord, let Ahithophel give Absalom foolish advice!"

When David reached the summit of the Mount of Olives where people worshiped God, Hushai the Arkite was waiting there for him. Hushai had torn his clothing and put dirt on his head as a sign of mourning. But David told him, "If you go with me, you will only be a burden. Return to Jerusalem and tell Absalom, 'I will now be your adviser, O king, just as I was your father's adviser in the past.' Then you can frustrate and counter Ahithophel's advice. Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, will be there. Tell them about the plans being made in the king's palace, and they will send their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan to tell me what is going on."

So David's friend Hushai returned to Jerusalem, getting there just as Absalom arrived.

When David had gone a little beyond the summit of the Mount of Olives, Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, was waiting there for him. He had two donkeys loaded with 200 loaves of bread, 100 clusters of raisins, 100 bunches of summer fruit, and a wineskin full of wine.

"What are these for?" the king asked Ziba.

Ziba replied, "The donkeys are for the king's people to ride on, and the bread and summer fruit are for the young men to eat. The wine is for those who become exhausted in the wilderness."

"And where is Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson?" the king asked him.

"He stayed in Jerusalem," Ziba replied. "He said, 'Today I will get back the kingdom of my grandfather Saul.'"

"In that case," the king told Ziba, "I give you everything Mephibosheth owns."

"I bow before you," Ziba replied. "May I always be pleasing to you, my lord the king."

As King David came to Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, from the same clan as Saul's family. He threw stones at the king

and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded him. "Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. "The Lord is paying you back for all the bloodshed in Saul's clan. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, for you are a murderer!"

"Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" Abishai son of Zeruiah demanded. "Let me go over and cut off his head!"

"No!" the king said. "Who asked your opinion, you sons of Zeruiah! If the Lord has told him to curse me, who are you to stop him?"

Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, "My own son is trying to kill me. Doesn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses today." So David and his men continued down the road, and Shimei kept pace with them on a nearby hillside, cursing and throwing stones and dirt at David.

The king and all who were with him grew weary along the way, so they rested when they reached the Jordan River.

Meanwhile, Absalom and all the army of Israel arrived at Jerusalem, accompanied by Ahithophel. When David's friend Hushai the Arkite arrived, he went immediately to see Absalom. "Long live the king!" he exclaimed. "Long live the king!"

"Is this the way you treat your friend David?" Absalom asked him. "Why aren't you with him?"

"I'm here because I belong to the man who is chosen by the Lord and by all the men of Israel," Hushai replied. "And anyway, why shouldn't I serve you? Just as I was your father's adviser, now I will be your adviser!"

Then Absalom turned to Ahithophel and asked him, "What should I do next?"

Ahithophel told him, "Go and sleep with your father's concubines, for he has left them here to look after the palace. Then all Israel will know that you have insulted your father beyond hope of reconciliation, and they will throw their support to you." So they set up a tent on the palace roof where everyone could see it, and Absalom went in and had sex with his father's concubines.

Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice, just as David had done. For every word Ahithophel spoke seemed as wise as though it had come directly from the mouth of God.

Now Ahithophel urged Absalom, "Let me choose 12,000 men to start out after David tonight. I will catch up with him while he is weary and discouraged. He and his troops will panic, and everyone will run away. Then I will kill only the king, and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride returns to her husband. After all, it is only one man's life that you seek. Then you will be at peace with all the people." This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

But then Absalom said, "Bring in Hushai the Arkite. Let's see what he thinks about this." When Hushai arrived, Absalom told him what Ahithophel had said. Then he asked, "What is your opinion? Should we follow Ahithophel's advice? If not, what do you suggest?"

“Well,” Hushai replied to Absalom, “this time Ahithophel has made a mistake. You know your father and his men; they are mighty warriors. Right now they are as enraged as a mother bear who has been robbed of her cubs. And remember that your father is an experienced man of war. He won’t be spending the night among the troops. He is probably already hidden in some pit or cave. And when he comes out and attacks and a few of your men fall, there will be panic among your troops, and the word will spread that Absalom’s men are being slaughtered. Then even the bravest soldiers, though they have the heart of a lion, will be paralyzed with fear. For all Israel knows what a mighty warrior your father is and how courageous his men are.

“I recommend that you mobilize the entire army of Israel, bringing them from as far away as Dan in the north and Beersheba in the south. That way you will have an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore. And I advise that you personally lead the troops. When we find David, we’ll fall on him like dew that falls on the ground. Then neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. And if David were to escape into some town, you will have all Israel there at your command. Then we can take ropes and drag the walls of the town into the nearest valley until every stone is torn down.”

Notice that even in this dark time, God is still in control.

2 Then Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “Hushai’s advice is better than Ahithophel’s.” For the Lord had determined to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, which really was the better plan, so that he could bring disaster on Absalom!²

Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, what Ahithophel had said to Absalom and the elders of Israel and what he himself had advised instead. “Quick!” he told them. “Find David and urge him not to stay at the shallows of the Jordan River tonight. He must go across at once into the wilderness beyond. Otherwise he will die and his entire army with him.”

Jonathan and Ahimaaz had been staying at En-rogel so as not to be seen entering and leaving the city. Arrangements had been made for a servant girl to bring them the message they were to take to King David. But a boy spotted them at En-rogel, and he told Absalom about it. So they quickly escaped to Bahurim, where a man hid them down inside a well in his courtyard. The man’s wife put a cloth over the top of the well and scattered grain on it to dry in the sun; so no one suspected they were there.

When Absalom’s men arrived, they asked her, “Have you seen Ahimaaz and Jonathan?”

The woman replied, “They were here, but they crossed over the brook.” Absalom’s men looked for them without success and returned to Jerusalem.

Then the two men crawled out of the well and hurried on to King David. “Quick!” they told him, “cross the Jordan tonight!” And they told him how Ahithophel had advised that he be captured and killed. So David and all the people with him went across the Jordan River during the night, and they were all on the other bank before dawn.

When Ahithophel realized that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey, went to his hometown, set his affairs in order, and hanged himself. He died there and was buried in the family tomb.

David soon arrived at Mahanaim. By now, Absalom had mobilized the entire army of Israel and was leading his troops across the Jordan River. Absalom had appointed Amasa as commander of his army, replacing Joab, who had been commander under David. (Amasa was Joab’s cousin. His father was Jether, an Ishmaelite. His mother, Abigail daughter of Nahash, was the sister of Joab’s mother, Zeruah.) Absalom and the Israelite army set up camp in the land of Gilead.

When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was warmly greeted by Shobi son of Nahash, who came from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and by Makir son of Ammiel from Lodebar, and by Barzillai of Gilead from Rogelim. They brought sleeping mats, cooking pots, serving bowls, wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, butter, sheep, goats, and cheese for David and those who were with him. For they said, “You must all be very hungry and tired and thirsty after your long march through the wilderness.”

REFLECTION:

David refuses to use the Ark of God as a good luck charm. How are you tempted to use God as a good luck charm to get what you want?

DAY 2 | 2 SAMUEL 18-20

There is a lot of tension for David in today's chapters. He will return to being king, but at the cost of his son's death. While everyone celebrates, he mourns. Watch for how he extends kindness and mercy to people who don't deserve it.

David now mustered the men who were with him and appointed generals and captains to lead them. He sent the troops out in three groups, placing one group under Joab, one under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and one under Ittai, the man from Gath. The king told his troops, "I am going out with you."

But his men objected strongly. "You must not go," they urged. "If we have to turn and run—and even if half of us die—it will make no difference to Absalom's troops; they will be looking only for you. You are worth 10,000 of us, and it is better that you stay here in the town and send help if we need it."

"If you think that's the best plan, I'll do it," the king answered. So he stood alongside the gate of the town as all the troops marched out in groups of hundreds and of thousands.

And the king gave this command to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai: "For my sake, deal gently with young Absalom." And all the troops heard the king give this order to his commanders.

So the battle began in the forest of Ephraim, and the Israelite troops were beaten back by David's men. There was a great slaughter that day, and 20,000 men laid down their lives. The battle raged all across the countryside, and more men died because of the forest than were killed by the sword.

During the battle, Absalom happened to come upon some of David's men. He tried to escape on his mule, but as he rode beneath the thick branches of a great tree, his hair got caught in the tree. His mule kept going and left him dangling in the air. One of David's men saw what had happened and told Joab, "I saw Absalom dangling from a great tree."

"What?" Joab demanded. "You saw him there and didn't kill him? I would have rewarded you with ten pieces of silver and a hero's belt!"

"I would not kill the king's son for even a thousand pieces of silver," the man replied to Joab. "We all heard the king say to you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake, please spare young Absalom.' And if I had betrayed the king by killing his son—and the king would certainly find out who did it—you yourself would be the first to abandon me."

"Enough of this nonsense," Joab said. Then he took three daggers and plunged them into Absalom's heart as he dangled, still alive, in the great tree. Ten of Joab's young armor bearers then surrounded Absalom and killed him.

Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and his men returned from chasing the army of Israel. They threw Absalom's body into a deep pit in the forest and piled a great heap of stones over it. And all Israel fled to their homes.

During his lifetime, Absalom had built a monument to himself in the King's Valley, for he said, "I have no son to carry on my name." He named the monument after himself, and it is known as Absalom's Monument to this day.

Then Zadok's son Ahimaaz said, "Let me run to the king with the good news that the Lord has rescued him from his enemies."

"No," Joab told him, "it wouldn't be good news to the king that his son is dead. You can be my messenger another time, but not today."

Then Joab said to a man from Ethiopia, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The man bowed and ran off.

But Ahimaaz continued to plead with Joab, "Whatever happens, please let me go, too."

"Why should you go, my son?" Joab replied. "There will be no reward for your news."

"Yes, but let me go anyway," he begged.

Joab finally said, "All right, go ahead." So Ahimaaz took the less demanding route by way of the plain and ran to Mahanaim ahead of the Ethiopian.

While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates of the town, the watchman climbed to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked, he saw a lone man running toward them. He shouted the news down to David, and the king replied, "If he is alone, he has news."

As the messenger came closer, the watchman saw another man running toward them. He shouted down, "Here comes another one!"

The king replied, "He also will have news."

"The first man runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok," the watchman said.

"He is a good man and comes with good news," the king replied.

Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "Everything is all right!" He bowed before the king with his face to the ground and said, "Praise to the Lord your God, who has handed over the rebels who dared to stand against my lord the king."

"What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?"

Ahimaaz replied, "When Joab told me to come, there was a lot of commotion. But I didn't know what was happening."

"Wait here," the king told him. So Ahimaaz stepped aside.

Then the man from Ethiopia arrived and said, "I have good news for my lord the king. Today the Lord has rescued you from all those who rebelled against you."

"What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?"

And the Ethiopian replied, "May all of your enemies, my lord the king, both now and in the future, share the fate of that young man!"

The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to the room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son."

Word soon reached Joab that the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom. As all the people heard of the king's deep grief for his son, the joy of that day's victory was turned into deep sadness. They crept back into the town that day as though they were ashamed and had deserted in battle. The king covered his face with his hands and kept on crying, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Then Joab went to the king's room and said to him, "We saved your life today and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and your wives and concubines. Yet you act like this, making us feel ashamed of ourselves. You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that your commanders and troops mean nothing to you. It seems that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased. Now go out there and congratulate your troops, for I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than ever before."

So the king went out and took his seat at the town gate, and as the news spread throughout the town that he was there, everyone went to him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites who had supported Absalom fled to their homes. And throughout all the tribes of Israel there was much discussion and argument going on. The people were saying, "The king rescued us from our enemies and saved us from the Philistines, but Absalom chased him out of the country. Now Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, is dead. Why not ask David to come back and be our king again?"

Then King David sent Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, to say to the elders of Judah, "Why are you the last ones to welcome back the king into his palace? For I have heard that all Israel is ready. You are my relatives, my own tribe, my own flesh and blood! So why are you the last ones to welcome back the king?" And David told them to tell Amasa, "Since you are my own flesh and blood, like Joab, may God strike me and even kill me if I do not appoint you as commander of my army in his place."

Then Amasa convinced all the men of Judah, and they responded unanimously. They sent word to the king, "Return to us, and bring back all who are with you."

So the king started back to Jerusalem. And when he arrived at the Jordan River, the people of Judah came to Gilgal to meet him and escort him across the river. Shimei son of Gera, the man from Bahurim in Benjamin, hurried across with the men of Judah to welcome King David. A thousand other men from the tribe of Benjamin were with him, including Ziba, the chief servant of the house of Saul, and Ziba's fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed down to the Jordan to meet the king. They crossed the shallows of the Jordan to bring the king's household across the river, helping him in every way they could.

As the king was about to cross the river, Shimei fell down before him. "My lord the king, please forgive me," he pleaded. "Forget the terrible thing your servant did when you left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. I know how much I sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel to greet my lord the king."

Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord's anointed king!"

"Who asked your opinion, you sons of Zeruiah!" David exclaimed. "Why have you become my adversary today? This is not a day for execution, for today I am once again the king of Israel!" Then, turning to Shimei, David vowed, "Your life will be spared."

Now Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, came down from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not cared for his feet, trimmed his beard, or washed his clothes since the day the king left Jerusalem. "Why didn't you come with me, Mephibosheth?" the king asked him.

Mephibosheth replied, “My lord the king, my servant Ziba deceived me. I told him, ‘Saddle my donkey so I can go with the king.’ For as you know I am crippled. Ziba has slandered me by saying that I refused to come. But I know that my lord the king is like an angel of God, so do what you think is best. All my relatives and I could expect only death from you, my lord, but instead you have honored me by allowing me to eat at your own table! What more can I ask?”

“You’ve said enough,” David replied. “I’ve decided that you and Ziba will divide your land equally between you.”

“Give him all of it,” Mephibosheth said. “I am content just to have you safely back again, my lord the king!”

Barzillai of Gilead had come down from Rogelim to escort the king across the Jordan. He was very old—eighty years of age—and very wealthy. He was the one who had provided food for the king during his stay in Mahanaim. “Come across with me and live in Jerusalem,” the king said to Barzillai. “I will take care of you there.”

“No,” he replied, “I am far too old to go with the king to Jerusalem. I am eighty years old today, and I can no longer enjoy anything. Food and wine are no longer tasty, and I cannot hear the singers as they sing. I would only be a burden to my lord the king. Just to go across the Jordan River with the king is all the honor I need! Then let me return again to die in my own town, where my father and mother are buried. But here is your servant, my son Kimham. Let him go with my lord the king and receive whatever you want to give him.”

“Good,” the king agreed. “Kimham will go with me, and I will help him in any way you would like. And I will do for you anything you want.” So all the people crossed the Jordan with the king. After David had blessed Barzillai and kissed him, Barzillai returned to his own home.

The king then crossed over to Gilgal, taking Kimham with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel escorted the king on his way.

But all the men of Israel complained to the king, “The men of Judah stole the king and didn’t give us the honor of helping take you, your household, and all your men across the Jordan.”

The men of Judah replied, “The king is one of our own kinsmen. Why should this make you angry? We haven’t eaten any of the king’s food or received any special favors!”

“But there are ten tribes in Israel,” the others replied. “So we have ten times as much right to the king as you do. What right do you have to treat us with such contempt? Weren’t we the first to speak of bringing him back to be our king again?” The argument continued back and forth, and the men of Judah spoke even more harshly than the men of Israel.

There happened to be a troublemaker there named Sheba son of Bicri, a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Sheba blew a ram’s horn and began to chant:

“Down with the dynasty of David!

We have no interest in the son of Jesse.

Come on, you men of Israel,

back to your homes!”

So all the men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba son of Bicri. But the men of Judah stayed with their king and escorted him from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

When David came to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to look after the palace and placed them in seclusion. Their needs were provided for, but he no longer slept with them. So each of them lived like a widow until she died.

Then the king told Amasa, “Mobilize the army of Judah within three days, and report back at that time.” So Amasa went out to notify Judah, but it took him longer than the time he had been given.

Then David said to Abishai, “Sheba son of Bicri is going to hurt us more than Absalom did. Quick, take my troops and chase after him before he gets into a fortified town where we can’t reach him.”

So Abishai and Joab, together with the king’s bodyguard and all the mighty warriors, set out from Jerusalem to go after Sheba. As they arrived at the great stone in Gibeon, Amasa met them. Joab was wearing his military tunic with a dagger strapped to his belt. As he stepped forward to greet Amasa, he slipped the dagger from its sheath.

“How are you, my cousin?” Joab said and took him by the beard with his right hand as though to kiss him. Amasa didn’t notice the dagger in his left hand, and Joab stabbed him in the stomach with it so that his insides gushed out onto the ground. Joab did not need to strike again, and Amasa soon died. Joab and his brother Abishai left him lying there and continued after Sheba.

One of Joab’s young men shouted to Amasa’s troops, “If you are for Joab and David, come and follow Joab.” But Amasa lay in his blood in the middle of the road, and Joab’s man saw that everyone was stopping to stare at him. So he pulled him off the road into a field and threw a cloak over him. With Amasa’s body out of the way, everyone went on with Joab to capture Sheba son of Bicri.

Meanwhile, Sheba traveled through all the tribes of Israel and eventually came to the town of Abel-beth-maacah. All the members of his own clan, the Bicrites, assembled for battle and followed him into the town. When Joab’s forces arrived, they attacked Abel-beth-maacah. They built a siege ramp against the town’s fortifications and began battering down the wall. But a wise woman in the town called out to Joab, “Listen to me, Joab. Come over here so I can talk to you.” As he approached, the woman asked, “Are you Joab?”

“I am,” he replied.

So she said, “Listen carefully to your servant.”

“I’m listening,” he said.

Then she continued, “There used to be a saying, ‘If you want to settle an argument, ask advice at the town of Abel.’ I am one who is peace loving and faithful in Israel. But you are destroying an important town in Israel. Why do you want to devour what belongs to the Lord?”

And Joab replied, “Believe me, I don’t want to devour or destroy your town! That’s not my purpose. All I want is a man named Sheba son of Bicri from the hill country of Ephraim, who has revolted against King David. If you hand over this one man to me, I will leave the town in peace.”

“All right,” the woman replied, “we will throw his head over the wall to you.” Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off Sheba’s head and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the ram’s horn and called his troops back from the attack. They all returned to their homes, and Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

Now Joab was the commander of the army of Israel. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was captain of the king’s bodyguard. Adoniram was in charge of forced labor. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the royal historian. Sheva was the court secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests. And Ira, a descendant of Jair, was David’s personal priest.

REFLECTION:

In spite of losing his son, David responds with mercy and kindness to multiple people—some of whom deserve to be punished. They don’t deserve the mercy they receive. The same is true for you in relation to God. How can you be encouraged by the mercy God gives you?

DAY 3 | 2 SAMUEL 21-24

This is the end of 2 Samuel and David's life. Notice that David praises God until the end of his life.

You can read this story
in Joshua 9

1 There was a famine during David's reign that lasted for three years, so David asked the Lord about it. And the Lord said, "The famine has come because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."¹

So the king summoned the Gibeonites. They were not part of Israel but were all that was left of the nation of the Amorites. The people of Israel had sworn not to kill them, but Saul, in his zeal for Israel and Judah, had tried to wipe them out. David asked them, "What can I do for you? How can I make amends so that you will bless the Lord's people again?"

"Well, money can't settle this matter between us and the family of Saul," the Gibeonites replied. "Neither can we demand the life of anyone in Israel."

"What can I do then?" David asked. "Just tell me and I will do it for you."

2 Then they replied, "It was Saul who planned to destroy us, to keep us from having any place at all in the territory of Israel. So let seven of Saul's sons be handed over to us, and we will execute them before the Lord at Gibeon, on the mountain of the Lord."²

Deuteronomy 24:16
forbids children being
put to death for the
actions of their fathers.
The narrator never says
that God approves of
this decision.

"All right," the king said, "I will do it." The king spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was Saul's grandson, because of the oath David and Jonathan had sworn before the Lord. But he gave them Saul's two sons Armoni and Mephibosheth, whose mother was Rizpah daughter of Aiah. He also gave them the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, the wife of Adriel son of Barzillai from Meholah. The men of Gibeon executed them on the mountain before the Lord. So all seven of them died together at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Then Rizpah daughter of Aiah, the mother of two of the men, spread burlap on a rock and stayed there the entire harvest season. She prevented the scavenger birds from tearing at their bodies during the day and stopped wild animals from eating them at night. When David learned what Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, he went to the people of Jabesh-gilead and retrieved the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan. (When the Philistines had killed Saul and Jonathan on Mount Gilboa, the people of Jabesh-gilead stole their bodies from the public square of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them.) So David obtained the bones of Saul and Jonathan, as well as the bones of the men the Gibeonites had executed.

Then the king ordered that they bury the bones in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father, at the town of Zela in the land of Benjamin. After that, God ended the famine in the land.

Once again the Philistines were at war with Israel. And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted. Ishbi-benob was a descendant of the giants; his bronze spearhead weighed more than seven pounds, and he was armed with a new sword. He had cornered David and was about to kill him. But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue and killed the Philistine. Then David's men declared, "You are not going out to battle with us again! Why risk snuffing out the light of Israel?"

After this, there was another battle against the Philistines at Gob. As they fought, Sibbecai from Hushah killed Saph, another descendant of the giants.

During another battle at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair from Bethlehem killed the brother of Goliath of Gath. The handle of his spear was as thick as a weaver's beam!

In another battle with the Philistines at Gath, they encountered a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all, who was also a descendant of the giants. But when he defied and taunted Israel, he was killed by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea.

These four Philistines were descendants of the giants of Gath, but David and his warriors killed them.

David sang this song to the Lord on the day the Lord rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. He sang:

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;
my God is my rock, in whom I find protection.

He is my shield, the power that saves me,
and my place of safety.

He is my refuge, my savior,
the one who saves me from violence.

I called on the Lord, who is worthy of praise,
and he saved me from my enemies.

“The waves of death overwhelmed me;
floods of destruction swept over me.

The grave wrapped its ropes around me;
death laid a trap in my path.

But in my distress I cried out to the Lord;
yes, I cried to my God for help.

He heard me from his sanctuary;
my cry reached his ears.

“Then the earth quaked and trembled.
The foundations of the heavens shook;
they quaked because of his anger.

Smoke poured from his nostrils;
fierce flames leaped from his mouth.

Glowing coals blazed forth from him.

He opened the heavens and came down;
dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.

Mounted on a mighty angelic being, he flew,
soaring on the wings of the wind.

WEEK 5

He shrouded himself in darkness,
 veiling his approach with dense rain clouds.
A great brightness shone around him,
 and burning coals blazed forth.
The Lord thundered from heaven;
 the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot arrows and scattered his enemies;
 his lightning flashed, and they were confused.
Then at the command of the Lord,
 at the blast of his breath,
the bottom of the sea could be seen,
 and the foundations of the earth were laid bare.
“He reached down from heaven and rescued me;
 he drew me out of deep waters.
He rescued me from my powerful enemies,
 from those who hated me and were too strong for me.
They attacked me at a moment when I was in distress,
 but the Lord supported me.
He led me to a place of safety;
 he rescued me because he delights in me.
The Lord rewarded me for doing right;
 he restored me because of my innocence.
For I have kept the ways of the Lord;
 I have not turned from my God to follow evil.
I have followed all his regulations;
 I have never abandoned his decrees.
I am blameless before God;
 I have kept myself from sin.
The Lord rewarded me for doing right.
 He has seen my innocence.
“To the faithful you show yourself faithful;
 to those with integrity you show integrity.
To the pure you show yourself pure,
 but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.
You rescue the humble,

but your eyes watch the proud and humiliate them.

O Lord, you are my lamp.

The Lord lights up my darkness.

In your strength I can crush an army;
with my God I can scale any wall.

“God’s way is perfect.

All the Lord’s promises prove true.

He is a shield for all who look to him for protection.

For who is God except the Lord?

Who but our God is a solid rock?

God is my strong fortress,
and he makes my way perfect.

He makes me as surefooted as a deer,
enabling me to stand on mountain heights.

He trains my hands for battle;
he strengthens my arm to draw a bronze bow.

You have given me your shield of victory;
your help has made me great.

You have made a wide path for my feet
to keep them from slipping.

“I chased my enemies and destroyed them;
I did not stop until they were conquered.

I consumed them;
I struck them down so they did not get up;
they fell beneath my feet.

You have armed me with strength for the battle;
you have subdued my enemies under my feet.

You placed my foot on their necks.
I have destroyed all who hated me.

They looked for help, but no one came to their rescue.
They even cried to the Lord, but he refused to answer.

I ground them as fine as the dust of the earth;
I trampled them in the gutter like dirt.

“You gave me victory over my accusers.
You preserved me as the ruler over nations;

people I don't even know now serve me.
Foreign nations cringe before me;
as soon as they hear of me, they submit.
They all lose their courage
and come trembling from their strongholds.
"The Lord lives! Praise to my Rock!
May God, the Rock of my salvation, be exalted!
He is the God who pays back those who harm me;
he brings down the nations under me
and delivers me from my enemies.
You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies;
you save me from violent opponents.
For this, O Lord, I will praise you among the nations;
I will sing praises to your name.
You give great victories to your king;
you show unfailing love to your anointed,
to David and all his descendants forever."
These are the last words of David:
"David, the son of Jesse, speaks—
David, the man who was raised up so high,
David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob,
David, the sweet psalmist of Israel.
"The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me;
his words are upon my tongue.
The God of Israel spoke.
The Rock of Israel said to me:
'The one who rules righteously,
who rules in the fear of God,
is like the light of morning at sunrise,
like a morning without clouds,
like the gleaming of the sun
on new grass after rain.'
"Is it not my family God has chosen?
Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me.
His agreement is arranged and guaranteed in every detail.

He will ensure my safety and success.
 But the godless are like thorns to be thrown away,
 for they tear the hand that touches them.
 One must use iron tools to chop them down;
 they will be totally consumed by fire.”

These are the names of David’s mightiest warriors. The first was Jashobeam the Hacmonite, who was leader of the Three—the three mightiest warriors among David’s men. He once used his spear to kill 800 enemy warriors in a single battle.

Next in rank among the Three was Eleazar son of Dodai, a descendant of Ahoah. Once Eleazar and David stood together against the Philistines when the entire Israelite army had fled. He killed Philistines until his hand was too tired to lift his sword, and the Lord gave him a great victory that day. The rest of the army did not return until it was time to collect the plunder!

Next in rank was Shammah son of Agee from Harar. One time the Philistines gathered at Lehi and attacked the Israelites in a field full of lentils. The Israelite army fled, but Shammah held his ground in the middle of the field and beat back the Philistines. So the Lord brought about a great victory.

Once during the harvest, when David was at the cave of Adullam, the Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. The Three (who were among the Thirty—an elite group among David’s fighting men) went down to meet him there. David was staying in the stronghold at the time, and a Philistine detachment had occupied the town of Bethlehem.

David remarked longingly to his men, “Oh, how I would love some of that good water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem.” So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David. But he refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out as an offering to the Lord. “The Lord forbid that I should drink this!” he exclaimed. “This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me.” So David did not drink it. These are examples of the exploits of the Three.

Abishai son of Zeruiah, the brother of Joab, was the leader of the Thirty. He once used his spear to kill 300 enemy warriors in a single battle. It was by such feats that he became as famous as the Three. Abishai was the most famous of the Thirty and was their commander, though he was not one of the Three.

There was also Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant warrior from Kabzeel. He did many heroic deeds, which included killing two champions of Moab. Another time, on a snowy day, he chased a lion down into a pit and killed it. Once, armed only with a club, he killed an imposing Egyptian warrior who was armed with a spear. Benaiah wrenched the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with it. Deeds like these made Benaiah as famous as the Three mightiest warriors. He was more honored than the other members of the Thirty, though he was not one of the Three. And David made him captain of his bodyguard.

Other members of the Thirty included:

Asahel, Joab’s brother;

Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;
Shammah from Harod;
Elika from Harod;
Helez from Pelon;
Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;
Abiezer from Anathoth;
Sibbecai from Hushah;
Zalmon from Ahoah;
Maharai from Netophah;
Heled son of Baanah from Netophah;
Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah (in the land of Benjamin);
Benaiah from Pirathon;
Hurai from Nahale-gaash;
Abi-albon from Arabah;
Azmaveth from Bahurim;
Eliabba from Shaalbon;
the sons of Jashen;
Jonathan son of Shagee from Harar;
Ahiam son of Sharar from Harar;
Eliphelet son of Ahasbai from Maacah;
Eliam son of Ahithophel from Giloh;
Hezro from Carmel;
Paarai from Arba;
Igal son of Nathan from Zobah;
Bani from Gad;
Zelek from Ammon;
Naharai from Beeroth, the armor bearer of Joab son of Zeruiah;
Ira from Jattir;
Gareb from Jattir;
Uriah the Hittite.

On the surface, it seems like God causes David to sin. We know that can't be true because of what it says in James 1:13-15. In the version of this story told in 1 Chronicles 21, it says that the Lord allows Satan to tempt David. So it seems like God uses evil agents to accomplish his purposes.

3

There were thirty-seven in all.

Once again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he caused David to harm them by taking a census. "Go and count the people of Israel and Judah," the Lord told him.³

So the king said to Joab and the commanders of the army, “Take a census of all the tribes of Israel—from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south—so I may know how many people there are.”

But Joab replied to the king, “May the Lord your God let you live to see a hundred times as many people as there are now! But why, my lord the king, do you want to do this?”

But the king insisted that they take the census, so Joab and the commanders of the army went out to count the people of Israel. First they crossed the Jordan and camped at Aroer, south of the town in the valley, in the direction of Gad. Then they went on to Jazer, then to Gilead in the land of Tahtim-hodshi and to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon. Then they came to the fortress of Tyre, and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went south to Judah as far as Beersheba.

Having gone through the entire land for nine months and twenty days, they returned to Jerusalem. Joab reported the number of people to the king. There were 800,000 capable warriors in Israel who could handle a sword, and 500,000 in Judah.

But after he had taken the census, David’s conscience began to bother him. And he said to the Lord, “I have sinned greatly by taking this census. Please forgive my guilt, Lord, for doing this foolish thing.”⁴

4 The sin is pride/trust in self vs. trust in God.

The next morning the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, who was David’s seer. This was the message: “Go and say to David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will inflict it on you.’”

So Gad came to David and asked him, “Will you choose three years of famine throughout your land, three months of fleeing from your enemies, or three days of severe plague throughout your land? Think this over and decide what answer I should give the Lord who sent me.”

“I’m in a desperate situation!” David replied to Gad. “But let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great. Do not let me fall into human hands.”

So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel that morning, and it lasted for three days. A total of 70,000 people died throughout the nation, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south. But as the angel was preparing to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented and said to the death angel, “Stop! That is enough!” At that moment the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

When David saw the angel, he said to the Lord, “I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are as innocent as sheep—what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family.”

That day Gad came to David and said to him, “Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”

So David went up to do what the Lord had commanded him. When Araunah saw the king and his men coming toward him, he came and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. “Why have you come, my lord the king?” Araunah asked.

David replied, “I have come to buy your threshing floor and to build an altar to the Lord there, so that he will stop the plague.”

“Take it, my lord the king, and use it as you wish,” Araunah said to David. “Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and you can use the threshing boards and ox yokes for

WEEK 5



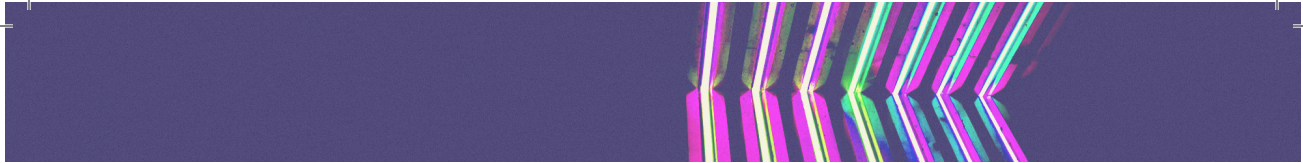
wood to build a fire on the altar. I will give it all to you, Your Majesty, and may the Lord your God accept your sacrifice.”

But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on buying it, for I will not present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing.” So David paid him fifty pieces of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen.

David built an altar there to the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the Lord answered his prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

REFLECTION:

In chapter 22, David praises God because he realizes that all he accomplished is because of God. When God works on your behalf, does this kind of praise come out of you? When was the last time you praised God like this?



I M M E R S E

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