

# TUNE MY HEART



*a devotional companion to the  
5 Day Bible Narrative Reading Plan*

**April—June 2026**

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus taught in John 15 that his disciples will abide in Christ by having Christ's words abide in them. Someone who abides in Christ will produce much spiritual fruit for our Lord. Psalm 1 describes the blessed man as one who delights in the Word of God. The blessed person is rooted in the Scriptures and will flourish like a tree with deep roots near planted near abundant water. From cover to cover the Bible teaches that growing, mature Christians will be deeply anchored in the Word of God. That is our prayer for you, dear reader.

Many Christians desire to be better students of the Bible, yet don't know the general story of Scripture. From Genesis to Revelation, God is telling one big story. The 5 Day Bible Narrative Reading Plan, created by our brother Scott Aniol at G3 Ministries, is designed to take readers through the major narratives of Scripture as well as the Psalms and Proverbs over the course of one year. The plan is designed for only five readings a week, with the weekend set apart for catching up on missed days and preparing your heart for corporate worship. This devotional is designed to accompany this particular Bible reading plan.

Whether you've read the Bible many times before or are reading it for the first time, we trust this resource will be helpful to you. As you grow in seeing God at work in his big story, we pray you will grow in your love and knowledge of Christ. May you abide in Jesus as his words abide in you.



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FOR GOD    FOR THE CHURCH    FOR THE WORLD

God's lavish grace extends to even the worst of sinners, and for that we are thankful. Today's reading might cause us to question God's mercy. We find the name of Jephthah listed among the faithful in Hebrews 11, but after reading Joshua 10–12 we might wonder why.

Chapter 10 sets the stage for the Jephthah story. The cycle continues, "the sons of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (10:6) They are worshipping false gods—seven nations are listed showing the completeness of their idolatry. Yahweh's anger burns against Israel. God punishes Israel: he "sold them into the hands of the Philistines" (10:7). The people cry out in repentance, and the chapter ends with the nation wondering who will deliver them. Enter Jephthah. We're told Jephthah is an illegitimate child (Why is this happening in Israel? This sounds like the sins of the nations!), and his half-brothers reject him. When trouble arises the people seek Jephthah out to be their head, but there is no mention of God raising up Jephthah. Jephthah seems at first to be diplomat but eventually the battle comes.

The Spirit of the Lord is on Jephthah (11:29), but this does not mean everything Jephthah does is righteous. God anoints Jephthah for the specific task of leading Israel in this season. Yahweh gives the enemy into his hand (11:32) and victory is won, but that is not the focus of the narrative. The focus is on Jephthah's vow to sacrifice if the Lord will give him victory in battle. At best this reflects Jephthah's misunderstanding of offering your best to God. At worst Jephthah is mixing pagan theology with the worship of God. Jephthah thinks he must keep the foolish vow he made, but the law in Leviticus actually provided a way to honor God and not keep a foolish or rash vow. Jephthah keeps a vow he never should have made, and no one stops him. In those days there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

The need for a king is amplified when a fight breaks out between the tribes. Jephthah's diplomacy is now gone, and he creates a test to sniff out any enemy outsiders from their midst. The people of God are turning on each other and destroying one another. The Bible does not say that Jephthah's rule brought rest to the land. Things are going from bad to worse in Israel. Israel did not deserve deliverance, and Jephthah sure doesn't seem to deserve to be listed among the faithful. And yet our King Jesus extends mercy to someone like Jephthah?! And you? And me? God is faithful, even when we are not.

## *Tuesday, April 7*

Read: Judges 13–14

Does God use sinful people for his sovereign purposes? To that question the story of Samson shouts a resounding, “Yes!” We’ve seen the cycle so many times in the book of Judges, and yet something is different this time. Yet again the people of Israel do what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh (because they’re doing what is right in their own eyes). Yet again they are handed over to an enemy nation; this time it’s the Philistines. But this time we’re not told that the people cried out in repentance to God. We’re not told that God will send a deliverer. The scene just shifts its focus to the birth of Samson.

As he’s done before God brings about a miraculous birth, and this child is to be set apart from birth. He’s going to be set apart for life as a Nazarite in service to God. Numbers 6 teaches us that the Nazarite vow is normally voluntary and temporary, and the special spiritual service is marked by avoiding all alcohol, all contact with the dead, and any cutting of the hair. This will be important to remember as we evaluate Samson; even here we see that Samson’s vow will be lifelong and is placed upon him in the womb. Samson’s mother is told before his birth that he will be a deliverer of Israel. This supernatural birth announcement brought by the angel of Yahweh sets up Samson for a marvelous beginning in ministry. Perhaps he will fare better than so many judges before him.

The story fasts forward to Samson being old enough to take a wife, and who does he choose? A Philistine woman! No Israelite should marry a Philistine; certainly not a Nazarite groom. Samson’s parents know that it’s not right for him to marry this Philistine woman, but what is Samson’s motivation in verse 3? “Take her for me, for she is right in my eyes.” Yet God is working sovereignly behind the scenes, even while Samson is breaking his Nazarite vows. He’s touching a dead animal carcass. He’s throwing a wedding feast, which likely involves alcohol. Samson’s spiritual stock is dropping rapidly.

The story of Samson has only begun. We often hold up Samson as a hero to children, probably because the story is fascinating and filled with his feats of strength. But to view Samson as a hero, we have to ignore a lot of the text. His promising start is already marked by many red flags, yet here again we have someone listed in the Hebrews 11 Hall of Faith. Perhaps our focus should be on the gracious God who continues to deliver his people in spite of their repeated sins.

Psalm 17 is simply identified as a prayer of David. We're not given any insight into David's life circumstances when he wrote this prayer. It is a prayer for vindication—a prayer for God to judge rightly when the whole world gets it wrong. Like David, we can trust the Lord and approach him confidently in prayer.

Where do you turn when the world turns against you? David cries out to God in verse 1. He prays “Hear me, O Yahweh. Give heed to my cry. Give ear to my prayer.” Like a defendant before a judge, David is pleading his case. David does not claim to be perfect, but he is standing before the judge with integrity. He has withstood the Lord's investigation. “You have tested, you have visited, you have tried me” (17:3). David has avoided the path of the violent and clung to the path of God (17:4–5). He is confident that God will not only hear him, but God will act. God will answer his prayers and show his lovingkindness.

David's prayer of confidence shifts to a prayer for protection in verses 8–12. Like a mother bird protects her babies, David wants to be hidden in the shadow of God's wings. Like we treasure and protect the organ that gives us sight—our eyes—David wants to be kept as the “apple” of God's eye. David knows that there is safety with the Lord, and that's where he wants to be (17:8). His wicked, deadly enemies are after him. David describes his enemies in verses 10–12. They are hard-hearted and arrogant. They have no pity. They are circling their prey like a lion eager to tear into its next meal.

How do we think about the need for protection from enemies? How do we deal with the enemies of life? David's prayer for protection in verses 8–12 is now seen through the lens of his confidence in the Lord as righteous judge as he prayed in verses 1–7. Those two streams form the river of the remainder of his prayer in verses 13–15. His focus does not remain on his circumstances, but he focuses on his covenant keeping God. David began his prayer in verse 1 by addressing God as Yahweh, the personal covenantal name of God. As David begins the conclusion of his prayer, he again speaks to God as Yahweh. His prayer is possible because he is in a covenantal relationship with the true Judge of the universe. Likewise, our prayers are not only possible but heard and answered according to God's perfect will because we are in relationship with God through Jesus Christ. David ends his prayer with the same confidence we have today through Christ.

## *Thursday, April 9*

### Read: Judges 15

When we last left Samson, his bride had been given away to his best friend on his wedding day. Can you imagine?! Remarkably Samson exercises patience and waits until an appropriate time to try and return to his new wife. Samson's father-in-law is certainly sneaky and his excuse seems rather thin, but doesn't he remind us of someone else? Jacob the deceiver had been also deceived on his wedding day and was offered his bride's sister as a consolation prize. Samson is not here a deceiver but a destroyer. Using the fiery weapon of foxes or jackals, he causes great financial loss to the Philistines. Had Samson been tricked and mistreated by his father-in-law? Of course. Was Samson justified in responding the way he did? Of course not. And yet God is still working to defeat the enemy Philistines, even through a flawed leader like Samson. When the enemy realizes who has committed this act of economic terrorism, they bring the very punishment that Samson's wife had wanted to avoid when she tricked him into revealing the answer to the riddle: she and her father are burned alive. Samson's revenge is swift and severe.

The Philistines invade Judah in response to Samson's fury. You would think his national kinsmen would be grateful for Samson's defeat of some of the Philistines, but the opposite is true. The men of Judah confront Samson: "Do you not know that these people rule over us?" (15:11). It seems that Judah has become comfortable with their dominion by the Philistines. Isn't that just like us? We grow comfortable with our sins and forget the freedom available to us through Christ. God has sent a deliverer to Israel, but it seems like they're not interested. Not only do the men of Judah not want Samson's help, they want to hand him over to the Philistines. We're even given details about the rope to show how secure Samson is supposed to be. Yet no ropes can bind him because God is not through with him. The Spirit of Yahweh comes upon Samson to empower him for this act of judgment upon the enemies of God, the Philistines. Those fresh ropes were nothing against the strength of God in Samson. The Philistines are no match against the jawbone of the donkey in Samson's hands. Samson as God's executioner may have a strange weapon, but his strength is sure as the Spirit of God upon him.

God miraculously provides for unworthy Samson as he is used for God's glory. He can certainly use you and me, as well. Verse 20 might lead you to think the Samson story is over, but it is only the end of Act I.

Samson's story comes to a dramatic conclusion in Judges 16. His sins become more vivid as he encounters multiple sinful women, but his strength seems to be on greater display. Samson's lover Delilah makes a Judas-like deal with the Philistines, and she seeks ways to betray him. As a reader, we want to scream at Samson, "Why are you putting up with this? She's obviously trying to trap you!" Each time Delilah springs her snare, Samson breaks free from the trap of the Philistines. Until the day that Delilah wears Samson down. She annoys his soul to death, and she springs the final trap. Whatever Samson thought when he told Delilah all that was in his heart, it seems certain that he did not know that Yahweh would leave him. That's exactly what happened. Samson's sins have found him out, and his sins ensnare him, enslave him, and grind him. Samson does get one final victory over the Philistines, but his motivation seems to be personal vindication, not the vindication of Yahweh. Yet God continues to use sinful people for his sovereign purposes.

The rest of the book of Judges is marked by further illustrations of the resounding theme: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes." The rotten seeds planted by so many of the judges bear deadly fruit in these illustrations. The enemies have been outside of Israel in chapters 2–16, but the enemies in the rest of the book are within. It is their idolatry and their false worship that is the nation's greatest downfall. The book leaves the reader desperately longing for the King who is to come.

Perhaps it is helpful at this conclusion of reading most of the book of Judges to ponder Hebrews 11 for a moment. We have already made note that Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah are all included in the long list of the faithful in Hebrews 11. After reading these narratives, we may wonder why. Yet when we read that famous chapter in context, we begin to see that all of the faithful in Hebrews 11 were also severely flawed. The sermon of Hebrews is not preaching that we should emulate each of these people in their actions. In other words, don't live like Samson! Rather your faith should be like theirs in this sense: our faith looks to the promises of God, not ourselves. We must lay aside the sins we saw throughout Judges, because they can entangle us as easily as they entangled Samson and Jephthah. We must fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith who is also the true judge and true king. We must consider him and not grow weary. Look to Christ!

## *Monday, April 13*

Read: Psalms 19–20

We can know God because he has revealed himself to us. If God had not revealed himself to us, we could not know him, at least not personally. David explains this in Psalm 19. When we speak about how God has revealed himself to us, we speak in two categories: general revelation and special revelation. Verses 1–6 paint a beautiful picture of general revelation. Creation is speechless but it is telling a story. The heavens are telling about the glory of God. The skies above are proclaiming his handiwork. Even day and night tell a story, but it is a silent story. Paul explains in Romans 1 that the invisible attributes of God—the very existence of God—can be understood from creation. This is general revelation, and this is enough to condemn all people for rejecting or denying the existence of God. The earth itself lets us know that there is a God, but how can we know him personally? For that we need special revelation.

God has indeed revealed himself to us in a particular or special way, and he has done it through his word. David uses a variety of words to describe what we often simply refer to as the Bible: law, testimony, precepts, commandment, fear, and the judgments of Yahweh. There is a depth and richness to God's words to us. David declares the glories of God's revelation of himself to us. The words of God are perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, and true. And it's not the case that God has spoken and his words are lovely, but they have no impact on us. Did you notice the effects of God's revelation? The Scriptures restore the soul, make the simple wise, cause our hearts to rejoice, enlighten the eyes, endure forever, and are righteous altogether. What an infinitely priceless treasury we have received because God has chosen to reveal himself to us. God has spoken. He has made himself known to us. Now how should we respond to his special revelation?

In verse 10, David suggests that the Bible is more valuable than your most valuable possessions and more delightful than the tastiest experiences this world offers. Do we live our lives as if this were true? Do we treasure the Bible this way, or do David's words sound a bit extreme to us? Not only is God's Word to be appreciated, but it is to be applied. God's Word warns us and protects us. It shows us our sins, protects us from further sins, and shows us how to have our sins forgiven, ultimately through Christ. Because God has revealed himself to us and because his words are as wonderful as we've seen, our prayer should be David's prayer in verse 14. Is that your prayer today?

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RAMAH MONTHLY

God's Word does not deal with spiritual matters only; it is intensely practical. This is perhaps most obvious in the book of Proverbs. As we have already noted, many of the proverbs are credited to Solomon and are written from the perspective of a father to a son. How greatly we suffer when we neglect this practical wisdom from the Bible. How greatly we suffer when fathers fail to pass on God's wisdom concerning the practical everyday matters of life. How greatly we suffer when we children fail to obey the wisdom passed down to us.

Solomon first speaks to the matter of securing a friend or neighbor's debt. He certainly would advise his son to not get in this situation in the first place, but the wise father does not assume that his children will always listen and obey. He teaches his son what to do after he has found himself in the situation he should have avoided in the first place. The son should have never taken responsibility for someone else's debt, but when he does he should make it his highest priority to escape this burden which is comparable to death. The proverbs always speak plainly about the dangers of debt and encourage wise dealings with money. Related to this, Solomon encourages his son to learn hard work and diligence from an unlikely place: the ant. Twice he warns the lazy sluggard to build a good work ethic and escape the poverty (and debt) that otherwise awaits. Solomon then warns his son against being worthless and wicked. The varied and repeated sins that he warns against will lead to a life broken beyond healing (6:15) if not avoided.

All that Solomon has mentioned so far in Proverbs 6 is intensely practical, but can anything be more practical than his warnings against sexual sin in the remainder of chapters 6 and 7? We live in a time when sexual sin tempts the youngest among us, and the oldest cannot escape. Our world preys upon the most vulnerable and attempts to lure them into immorality and assumes the strongest are secretly addicted to some form of sexual sin. This is why Solomon's warning is so important, a warning that he ultimately failed to live by in his own life. The Bible stresses that this teaching will lead us and watch over us and preserve life (6:22–23). Specifically, these instructions will protect against adultery, but the underlying principles extend to every form of sexual sin conceived in our wicked hearts. Read God's words carefully and apply them to your own life. They will convict you, but may they also comfort you. Be reminded that no matter how deep your sexual stains may go, our Savior forgives, cleanses, and restores.

## *Wednesday, April 15*

Read: Proverbs 8

For a second time in the book of Proverbs, we are given an extended section that praises the value of wisdom and exhorts the reader to seek wisdom at all costs. In verses 1–3, wisdom is personified as a woman standing in the streets calling out to all who will listen. Her message makes up the rest of chapter 8; some have divided the chapter into five sections. We see in verse 4–5 her address in her speech. Wisdom calls out to all mankind, but especially the simple-minded and foolish. In verses 6–11, wisdom declares that she will speak noble things. Right things. True things. Righteous things. The value of wisdom’s teachings is worth more than silver, gold, and even jewels. All of our earthly desires pale in comparison to the value of wisdom, because without wisdom we are not able to make wise and godly decisions about these earthly things. We read it over and over again in the Bible, but do we really live this way? Do we really believe that God’s Word is this valuable? Do we really think that God’s way of thinking is so true and perfect that we must race to it in the same way that we race to the news or social media to learn the world’s way of thinking? God help us.

Verses 12–21 form the next section and emphasize that wisdom is marked with prudence, knowledge, and discretion. Knowing what wisdom knows will cause us to think like God. When we think like God we will love what he loves and hate what he hates. Thinking rightly about the Lord is sometimes called “the fear of the Lord” in the Bible. Even as we saw the warning against being worthless and wicked in 6:12–19, wisdom tells us in 7:13 that understanding this hatred of evil is to have the proper fear of Yahweh. Wisdom guides the simple and foolish as much as it guides kings and rulers and princes.

Not only is wisdom given a voice like a person throughout this chapter, but in verses 22–31 wisdom is pictured as being with Yahweh back at creation. Cults like the Jehovah’s Witnesses teach that this passage says God created Jesus. This is actually an ancient heresy we must reject. However, we must also acknowledge that Jesus is wisdom personified. When we look at Jesus Christ, we see the wisdom of God taken on human flesh. Many of the lofty passages about Jesus in the New Testament show us that not only is Jesus truly God, he is the walking talking wisdom of God. Therefore, the final appeal of 8:32–36 is ultimately an appeal to listen to Christ.

Against the dark background of the book of Judges emerges the shining portrait of God’s providence in the book of Ruth. As horrible as things were in the days of the judges, God was faithfully preserving his remnant (the small group of faithful Israelites in the midst of an otherwise faithless nation), but ultimately he was preserving his Messiah.

The story begins with a family from the tribe of Judah who leaves the promised land to go to the pagan land of Moab. This is enemy territory. Why would Elimelech lead his family to leave Bethlehem? There was no bread in “the house of bread” as Bethlehem’s name means. After a decade in Moab, Naomi has lost her sons and her husband, but gained two daughters-in-law. Word reaches her that God has provided food in Bethlehem once again, so she makes preparations to return home. Daughter-in-law Ruth, who is a Moabite woman and has no part in the people of God, converts to the faith of Naomi and returns to Bethlehem with her. Naomi returns broken and bitter. Her first assessment is that she left Bethlehem full but is returning empty. We know that she actually left empty (remember the famine) and is returning mostly empty. She does have a faithful daughter-in-law with her. In the providence of God it is through this daughter-in-law that Naomi’s story will change. The book of Ruth is the story of going from emptiness to fullness due to the lovingkindness of God.

Ruth the Moabite but is now a follower of Yahweh seems to be familiar with his law, because she seeks to go into the fields to glean enough grain for her and Naomi. God’s law provided for people in their exact situation. During this time of the judges, Ruth finds not a wicked man but a godly man named Boaz. The author tips us off that God is orchestrating this entire scene even as the text reads in 2:3 as if this were all a coincidence. Of all the fields Ruth could have found, she just so happened to come to Boaz’s field. He treats Ruth kindly and even prays that Yahweh will bless Ruth for her treatment of Naomi. Little does Boaz realize that he will be the answer to his own prayer. Ruth is also oblivious to God’s plan, but Naomi is beginning to get the picture. God is indeed going to fill empty Naomi and Ruth. He will care for them. He will provide. And he will do it through his redeemer. Do you really believe that you can trust God even in the darkest of circumstances? Do you know his great redeemer?

## *Friday, April 17*

Read: Ruth 3–4

Reminders of God's faithfulness energizes our faith. Naomi returned to Bethlehem bitter against God, but she has seen the signs of Yahweh's faithful working on behalf of her and Ruth. Now she is encouraged by the possibility of Boaz being the kinsman redeemer for their family, and she instructs Ruth on how to pursue this opportunity. In a scene that seems strange to us, Ruth visits Boaz during the night at the threshing floor. While nothing inappropriate happens, the possibility of scandal does seem to be present, but Boaz and Ruth both act righteously. He promises to serve as kinsman redeemer if a nearer relative does not redeem her. Boaz continues to generously care for these widows, and Naomi is confident in his integrity in the matter.

In another humorous nod to God's detailed sovereignty over this entire story, Boaz just so happens to run into this nearer kinsman in 4:1. We're given greater understanding of what exactly a kinsman redeemer will do in 4:5. A kinsman redeemer rescues a family's land when debt or other circumstances might cause it to be removed from the family. Remember that the land was not merely property but their inheritance in the covenant of God. The kinsman redeemer will also help father a child in the name of a deceased childless relative in order for the family name to continue. The nearer kinsman weighs the prospect and determines that it is simply financially unfeasible for him to be the redeemer. This is not described as a sin but as a simple fact: this will be a costly redemption. 4:13 contains five crisp verbs that move the story forward rapidly. Boaz and Ruth are married and have a son thanks to the Giver of Life. Naomi's fortunes have been reversed. She began the story empty but she is now full thanks to the faithfulness of God and her daughter-in-law Ruth. This child is so closely associated with the blessing of Naomi that the child is even identified as her own. What generous care God has provided for the once-bitter Naomi.

The story began with a list of names and now ends with an even longer list of names, but the names are important. This snapshot of a faithful family in the dark days of judges is not just any family. This is the family of King David. The faithful Moabitess Ruth is not only the great-grandmother of a king, she is in the family tree of King Jesus. The generosity of Boaz in his costly redemption of Ruth is but a picture of the even greater redemption brought by our Kinsman Redeemer, Jesus of Bethlehem. Praise the Lord for he has redeemed us.

We've seen in the days of the judges that there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. We've been encouraged that God was faithfully preserving his remnant in those dark days. As we begin the books of Samuel, we see those ideas blend together. Israel will have a king on the throne, but first we're introduced to one more major character: Samuel. We first meet his parents who remind us of many characters we've already met, particularly Samson. Will this new judge fare better than he fared? Father Elkanah's two wives are struggling in much the same way that Leah and Rachel struggled. As we've seen many times, God is the one who opens and closes the womb. In another miraculous birth, God gives them a special son Samuel whom Hannah commits to serving the Lord. In a lavish offering at the boy's weaning, this mother who prayed so fervently for a child now entrusts him to the care and service of Yahweh. The prayers Hannah prayed in bitterness and sorrow are not preserved in Scripture, but the marvelous prayer of chapter 2 is preserved. Many themes for the entire two-volume book of Samuel are present in Hannah's prayer. It serves as a companion to Mary's prayer in Luke 1.

While Hannah is portrayed as a godly mother, the priest Eli is not commended. His sons are worthless; they are doing what is right in their own eyes according to their own customs instead of obeying the Lord's commands of priests. These "priests" are preying upon the people they're supposed to serve. Aging Eli warns his sons, but it is too little and too late. Yahweh announces that he intends to bring an end to the house of Eli. The faithless priests will die, but God will raise up a faithful priest. How different from Eli's sons is Hannah's son. See the boy Samuel serving in the temple; he's even dressed like a little priest! He's growing in stature and in favor with God and with man.

Young Samuel is probably around twelve years old in chapter three, but he sees God more clearly than old Eli. The priest of God cannot see the things of God, spiritually and literally. Eli's sons did not know the Lord at all (2:12), but Samuel does not know him yet (3:7). In another dramatic scene of calling, God reveals himself to Samuel. God is with Samuel in his conception, his childhood, and his calling; God will be with Samuel through his death. Christ has promised to be with Christians in an even greater way (Matt 28:20). What an encouraging introduction to the prophet Samuel.

## *Tuesday, April 21*

Read: 1 Samuel 4; Psalm 21

God has spoken to and through his prophet Samuel. Looking at the end of chapter 3 and the beginning of chapter 4, the words of Samuel and the word of Yahweh become almost indistinguishable. We were told in 3:1 that the word of the Lord was not frequent in those days, but that is changing with the calling of Samuel. Or is it?

Chapters 4–6 describe another saga in the ongoing battle with the Philistines. We saw the Philistine in several stories in Judges, but things should be better now with a word from the Lord, right? Careful attention has been given to Samuel in the first three chapters, but now we won't see him until chapter 7. Israel is still not seeking God. They seem to be treating the ark of the covenant as a good luck charm instead of the earthly place where the presence of God dwells. Worse still, Eli's sons are right there with the ark, and we haven't heard anything good about them yet. This isn't looking good for Israel! The Philistines rally and fight courageously in battle against Israel. Verses 10 and 11 spell out the dramatic consequences for the people of God. It seems shocking that the ark of the covenant can be captured, but the author saves the most important thing for the end of the sentence: The two sons of Eli died, that is, Hophni and Phinehas. God has kept his word and is bringing an end to the house of Eli.

A man from the tribe of Benjamin runs from the battle to bring the news to the people of Shiloh. His appearance tells the story before he opens his mouth. It seems Eli has so little influence that the man tells the town before he even tells the priest. The messenger makes a four-fold announcement: The army has fled. They have been defeated. His sons are dead. The ark is captured. We might expect Eli's sorrow to be greatest over the death of his sons, but it is the announcement about the capture of the ark that brings about his death. Heavy Eli has weighed down Israel long enough. The old priest has judged Israel forty years, an echo from the book of Judges and another reminder that there is still no king in Israel. Phinehas's wife sees the situation more clearly than Eli ever did. She hears of the death of her father-in-law as well her husband, but it is the capture of the ark that grieves her most. With her dying words, she declares the glory of God has left Israel. Are things any better now than they were in Judges? The people need a king.

In Hannah's prayer that previewed the books of Samuel, she prayed for Yahweh to judge the ends of the earth (2:10). Judgment upon Israel began in chapter 4, but now the focus is on the nations, particularly the Philistines. The Philistines parade the ark of God like a trophy of war back to their temple for Dagon. To the Philistine mind, their victory over Israel is a sure sign that their god Dagon has defeated the God of Israel. He who sits in the heavens laughs (Psalm 2) and the narrator is laughing as well. He keeps repeating the word "behold" as if to say, "Would you look at that, there's Dagon falling down. Whoops, there he goes again. Oh my, looky there—his head and hands are cut off." The feet of the wicked are being cut off and the adversaries of Yahweh are being broken to pieces (2:9–10).

Not only does God make a mockery of the Philistine god Dagon, he puts his hand against the Philistine people of Ashdod. His hand is so heavy against his enemies that eventually the people cry, "Get this ark out of here before we all die." The city is thrown into turmoil, and where do they turn? Their fortune-tellers and sorcerers. When we consider the best response their spiritual advisers have to offer, we understand that the Philistine's biggest problem is not the tumors but their spiritual darkness. They know some things about God, but they do not know him. The Philistines create this test to determine if the God of Israel is actually the source of their problems. If a nursing cow that has never pulled a cart actually ignores its calf and pulls the cart to this particular city, then they will feel confident that Yahweh is at work. The text makes it clear that the cows go against their natural instincts and pull the cart directly to Beth–Shemesh. This is a Levite city given to the family of Kohath, and they were assigned the responsibility of caring for the "holy things" including the ark (see Num 4:4, 15). This should be good news; they should know what to do with the ark. The Philistines are glad to be rid of the ark, but now the ark brings judgment upon the men of Beth–Shemesh. No matter how sincere their intentions may have been, they disobeyed God's clearly prescribed method of worship. They mishandled the ark when God had clearly told them what to do.

How many times must we be reminded that God cares how he is worshipped? The pagan Philistines seemed to figure it out faster than the people of God. Will we learn the lesson?

## *Thursday, April 23*

Read: 1 Samuel 7:3–8:22

After twenty years of silence, the text tells us that Samuel leads the people to repent. Like Jacob (Gen 25:2) and Joshua (Josh 24:14, 23) before him, Samuel leads the people to rid themselves of their sin. His language is similar to that of Paul in the New Testament: the people are to put off their idolatry and put on their love of Yahweh. It's never about getting rid of sins only; Christians are also to actively pursue the new way of life we have in Christ. Israel had thought they would be blessed by God by moving the ark of the covenant into battle with them; it turns out they actually needed simply to move back toward God (repent!). We need this reminder as much as they did. Look at the blessings of their repentance in 7:14. All that Israel had lost at the hands of the Philistines in the previous chapters are now restored by the hand of God. It's not that they could manipulate God through the ark; they needed to walk in repentance and faith.

Time marches on and an uncertain number of years have passed as chapter 8 begins. Samuel is getting older (although he doesn't die until chapter 25), and he appoints his sons to join him in serving Israel. Sadly his sons are no better than Eli's sons. The people come to Samuel and demand that he appoint a king over Israel. It's important for us to understand that the act of having a king is not itself a sin. Moses predicted back in Deuteronomy 17:14 that Israel would have a king one day. The problem is the phrase "like the nations." Israel wants earthly security in an earthly king just like everyone else, but Israel is not like everyone else. They have a unique covenant relationship with the one, true, living God. They were so quick to raise their Ebenezer stone in chapter 7 (a testimony to their dependence on God), but in chapter 8 they are looking to an earthly king to be their help and strength.

Samuel warns the people about the kind of king they will have. Six times he says the king will take and take, and he will take the very best. The people want a king so badly now, but the day will soon come when they regret their choice. The one they want to deliver them will actually oppress them. Isn't it always that way when we reject the word of the Lord? They will live with the choices they make. As the chapter ends, we're left to wonder: who will be this king like the nations?

The people have demanded and the Lord has permitted—Israel will have a king like the nations. What will this king be like? Chapter 9 introduces us to young, tall, handsome Saul. His pedigree seems to be solid. Someone has pointed out that only the enemies of Israel are ever described by their height, but here we're told that Saul is taller than everyone else. He even looks like a king like the nations. However, the first picture we get of Saul is not very king-like. Israel has a rich history of being led by shepherds (think of Abraham and Moses), but future king Saul can't even find big, loud donkeys! This future king of God's people seems wholly unfamiliar with God's prophet. Remember that "all Israel" has heard about Samuel (3:20; 4:1); everyone except Saul it seems. However, God hasn't forgotten his people, and he providentially brings Saul and Samuel together to meet. As chapter 9 ends, Saul seems oblivious to the honor Samuel is showing him as the soon-to-be king of Israel.

Samuel tells Saul that God will provide a three-part sign to confirm to Saul the word of the Lord: Saul will be king. Each successive part of the sign will be bigger and more spiritual. First, two men from Saul's family, the tribe of Benjamin, will come to him with a certain message. Secondly, three pilgrims on their way to worship God will greet Saul in a way indicating his special status. The third and largest portion of the sign involves a group of prophets prophesying. When these three consecutive events take place, the Spirit of Yahweh rushes on Saul just like with the judges of old. The Spirit is anointing Saul for the specific task of serving as king.

When Samuel calls the people together to announce Saul as king, he first reminds them that God has been faithful yet they rejected him. As the time for the big announcement arrives, the people are looking for their new king. Yet he cannot be found! There will be many times in the days ahead when King Saul's leadership will not be found. The people pray and God tells them where their new king is: hiding among the baggage! Some brave warrior he seems to be. Yet Samuel proclaims that ultimately Yahweh has chosen Saul to be king. The people have demanded a king, but God is sovereign over the people's demands. As his coronation ends, there are both supporters of the new king as well as worthless men who are blind to the work of God in choosing a king. How will this new king like the nations respond to the word of the Lord?

## *Monday, April 27*

Read: 1 Samuel 1–3

Israel demanded “a king who may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles” (8:20). They now have a king in Saul, and the time has come for him to fight their battles as we see in chapter 11. Nahash the Ammonite makes a heinous threat to the people of Jabesh-Gilead. The people need the leadership of their king, but he’s down home on the farm. The Spirit of God rushes upon Saul, but notice that the personal name of God (Yahweh) is not used. This might concern us. Saul uses a dreadful tactic like a judge to rally the troops, but as king he rallies the troops on a national level. He essentially makes them an offer they can’t refuse. Saul achieves a decisive victory in battle, and the crowd goes wild. Their king has fought for them in battle! The supporters of Saul want to punish the worthless fellows of 10:27 who scoffed at Saul. The new leader refuses to execute his political opponents, and declares to the people Yahweh has brought salvation for Israel. So far, so good Saul.

The focus shifts back to Samuel in chapter 12. He seems to be giving a farewell address although he still has years of service to Israel left. Judge Samuel puts himself on trial before the people asking them to bring evidence of any charges against him. Samuel has been a faithful prophet, but he is not like a king. Kings take but Samuel has taken nothing from the people. Samuel is weighed in the balance and found innocent. Now it’s time for Israel to go on trial. Samuel recounts their history, noting that God has been faithful before they came into the promised land and he has been faithful in the promised land. Every defeat Israel has experienced has been because of their sin, not because of any weakness in God. When faced with another enemy they could not defeat on their own, the people asked for a king rather than crying out to God for deliverance. Saul’s name means “asked for;” The people who asked for a king got exactly what they asked for when they got Saul.

Remember it’s not the act of having a king that is sinful for Israel; it is the motivation of their heart. They failed to trust Yahweh. The people seem to realize the seriousness of their sin in 12:19. They ask Samuel to pray for God to not strike them dead for their sins! Oh that we would take sin seriously. The chapter ends on an ominous note. Israel is at a crossroads. Will the nation trust and obey God? Will the king? Will you?

Israel officially has a king like the nations. Saul has been privately anointed by Samuel, publicly selected by God, and affirmed by the people. Saul has gone before Israel in battle and won. Things seem to be going well. Battle breaks out with the Philistines as it has so many times before and will again. Saul marches with his army once again, but they are greatly afraid with trembling. Saul and the army wait for Samuel for a week. They need him to arrive and make offerings to the Yahweh. Israel wants the Lord's blessing in battle, but they are getting tired of waiting. Saul, who is king but not priest, impatiently offers the burnt offering himself without Samuel. To be fair to Saul, kings could offer sacrifices under certain circumstances, but Samuel has already instructed him to wait. Samuel's word is as good as the word of the Lord.

Immediately Samuel arrives, and Saul is busted. Like his father Adam before him, Saul starts to pass the blame. It's the soldiers' fault. It's Samuel's fault. It's the enemy's fault. It's definitely not Saul's fault, at least according to his way of thinking. Saul sounds no better than the judges of Israel before him. He is using the offerings like a good luck charm. Does that sound familiar? Remember the misuse of the ark of the covenant in chapter 4. How often are we like Saul? We fail to take responsibility for our own sins. We look for someone else to blame. It couldn't have been our own fault, we swear.

Verses 13 and 14 are pivotal in Saul's story. In just two verses, Samuel clearly indicts Saul. The commands of Yahweh are emphasized four times in these two verses. Saul has not obeyed the commands of the Lord. As a result of his sin, his kingdom will not continue. The kingdom of Saul is over before it fully gets started. Remember that obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings consequences. Saul's consequences will become clearer as the text progresses, but Saul is not seeking after the Lord with all of his heart. Saul follows Saul's heart. Soon enough God will choose a king after God's own heart.

Psalm 72 seems to be a coronation psalm associated with Solomon. The psalm has high hopes for the earthly king. We know that Saul fails as king and we are already anticipating in our reading the day that David will become king. However, David, too, will fail. Solomon will fail. Ultimately, we need the greater Son of David who will rule justly forevermore. The psalm is properly understood as extending past the earthly king to the Messiah King, Jesus Christ.

## *Wednesday, April 29*

Read: 1 Samuel 14

Things aren't going well with the king like the nations. Maybe there's another option. Chapter 14 focuses on Saul's son Jonathan who also defeats the Philistines, but Jonathan is not like his father Saul. Chapter 13 left us with Israel being outgunned and outnumbered by their enemies. This chapter begins with Saul and his men hiding in a cave. Look at who is with Saul—it's Eli's grandson dressed like a priest! The house of Eli has ended. This man has no business pretending to be a priest, nor serving the king of God's chosen people. Things aren't well with Saul. How are things with Jonathan?

Jonathan tells his servant he wants to go into battle. Jonathan is literally between a rock and hard place. He is between the gleaming crag and the thorny crag and he somehow must make it to the top. Jonathan's plan defies all military logic. There is no element of surprise. He avoids the easy attack and embraces the difficult attack. Why? Because his confidence is not in himself but in Yahweh. The son is not like his father. Jonathan's trust in God is rewarded, and the enemy camp is thrown into so much confusion that victory is won. Notice verse 23: Yahweh saved Israel that day.

The contrast between Saul and Jonathan grows darker. Saul is not looking so much like a king as he looks like a judge, and that's not a good thing. He makes a foolish vow which reminds us of Jephthah's foolish vow, and that ended in his daughter's death. When Jonathan finds out his father's command, he compares his father with Achan who troubled Israel. Saul makes a foolish vow that makes it harder for the soldiers to fight because they are growing weak. Victory could have been greater had the men been stronger. When Saul hears that his son is the great offender against his command, he is resolved to carry out the foolish vow just like Jephthah. This time someone stops the vow from being carried out. The people of Israel take Saul's words and throw them back to him: As Yahweh lives, you will not kill Jonathan!

Saul is quickly learning the limitations of the throne. Kings can lead into battle, but they can also fail or diminish the ability for victory. Kings can build altars, but they can't guarantee God's will. Kings can talk big, but they can't always carry out their rash vows! Doesn't Jonathan stand out as a far better candidate for the throne than his father? Yet, God did not make a mistake when he allowed Saul to ascend the throne. God is still busy working out his perfect plans for his people.

The termination notice was sent out in chapter 13: Saul is fired. His kingdom will not continue (13:14). Yet Saul is still on the throne, and he will remain on the throne long past his usefulness. God is sovereign over both Saul's sentence and its timing. Saul is rejected firmly for a second time in chapter 15. The words of Samuel communicate the words of Yahweh: Devote to destruction the Amalekites. The Amalekites plundered Israel back in Exodus 17, but now Saul gets to be the Lord's executioner. Like Joshua was told at Jericho, Saul is told to show no mercy to the Amalekites. God's Word is really clear, but does Saul obey?

Saul is victorious in battle, but he is not faithful in victory. The text gives a double emphasis in 15:8–9: Saul took Agag alive; Saul and the people spared his life. Saul kept the best for himself and only sacrificed to the Lord the despised and worthless things. This is what we might expect from a king like the nations, but not the king of the people of God. Yahweh grieves Saul's sinfulness as king and Samuel shares the same grief. Word reaches Samuel that Saul has built a monument to himself, which leads Samuel to travel to see Saul face-to-face. When he arrives Saul shamelessly tells Samuel that he has actually obeyed the commands of God. The bleating sheep and the lowing oxen tell a different story! Saul tries to say that he has saved the best for the Lord, but God had already told Saul what to do. Saul has not listened to the voice of Yahweh. He pretends that he was going to sacrifice to the Lord, but Samuel preaches: obedience is better than sacrifice!

Saul seems to be attempting to repent, but it is too little, too late. He is confessing to Samuel rather than Yahweh. He is blaming the people for his sin rather than taking responsibility and truly repenting. Samuel makes clear for the second time that just as Saul rejected God, God has rejected Saul. The kingdom will be torn from him no matter how many excuses he makes or how much he pleads. It's important that we understand exactly why the Lord is ripping the kingdom from Saul. It's not merely because he sins. David later sins famously, but there's a difference between David and Saul: repentance. David repents just as openly as he sinned. Saul denies responsibility and refuses to repent. If we learn anything from the life of Saul, let it be the necessity of repentance.

## *Friday, May 1*

Read: 1 Samuel 16

The king like the nations has been thoroughly disqualified. Saul was told that Yahweh would seek a man after his own heart, a neighbor better than Saul (13:14; 15:28). Now we get the first glimpses of this better neighbor, David. It will be a long journey to the throne. The people chose their first king, but now God has provided for himself the king after his own heart, a king of God's own choosing. Samuel is sent to the family of Jesse, but he must act wisely to avoid the wrath of Saul. After all, he's carrying the king-anointing oil. Samuel must also try to think wisely: which son of Jesse will be the king? Samuel seems to think like most ordinary people would think and he evaluates the potential successors to the throne based on their external appearances. Which son is the oldest? Who looks like a king? Who carries himself like a king?

God will have none of that logic. We're told that Yahweh looks upon the heart. It's significant that the most spiritual man in Israel was still trying to evaluate future kings based on appearances and worldly standards like age. Saul checked all the appearance boxes. Remember how tall and king-like he looked. It's time to consider the king's heart, which of course only God fully knows. Samuel's expectations seem like anyone else's, but they are wrong. When we first lay eyes on David, he too is handsome like Saul. Perhaps these external appearances truly don't matter at all. But David is not like Saul in key ways. When we first met Saul, he was an incompetent donkey wrangler, but David is faithfully shepherding the flock out in the field. Israel needs a faithful shepherd.

Samuel anoints David right there on the spot, and the Spirit of God rushes upon David like it rushed upon previous judges, but we're told that the Spirit is on David permanently. This is true, of course, of every Christian today. We have the Spirit and he will never leave us or forsake us. David is now the king of Israel. Or is he? He's only been anointed in front of his family. No one else in the nation knows. David doesn't go clear the throne and take his rightful seat. Instead we see David sent into the house of the enemy: Saul. Now that Saul doesn't have God's spirit, he is terrorized by an evil spirit—sent from God! The only relief Saul receives is through the ministry of young David. Could it be that the new king of Israel will not only fight their physical battles but also their spiritual battles? Doesn't this David point us to the greater David, our true King?

The story of David and Goliath is one of the most famous in the Old Testament, and yet also one of the most misunderstood. Ripped from its context, this story becomes merely a pep talk to help us fight the battles of life. In context, we see David as the young man of God's own choosing who will be king of Israel. God's hand is upon David and not upon the current occupant of the throne, Saul. From this chosen king David will come the promised King Jesus Christ.

Those familiar enemies the Philistines have gathered to fight against Israel once again. Shouldn't the nation be ok this time? Don't they have a king to fight their battles for them (8:20)? The chapter begins in stalemate, but then we meet the Philistine's champion, the giant Goliath. We see his impressive stature, but then we remember that Saul was head and shoulders taller than everyone else in Israel (10:23). We see Goliath's impressive supplies and resources, but then we remember that the royal family had better weapons than anyone else in the nation (13:22). Goliath is a man of war from his youth, but Saul has led the nation in previous victorious battles. If Goliath is looking for an opponent to fight, Saul would seem to be the man for the job. But God does not look on outward appearances like we do; Yahweh looks upon the heart.

The narrative shifts the focus back to young David who seems to be serving both Saul and his father. By the end of story it's clear that, above all else, David is serving the living God. By outward appearances, David should not stand a chance against Goliath. His brother doesn't think so. Saul doesn't think so. Goliath certainly doesn't think so. Goliath looks at David's outward appearances and curses David in disgust. The champion deserves a more worthy challenger than this child! That's how the world sees the situation, but it's not how God sees it. David's stature and resources are greater than Goliath's because David is fighting in the name of Yahweh of hosts! The battle is the Lord's, and he doesn't save with sword and spear. Goliath may carry impressive weapons but the only sword he wields in battle is his filthy tongue. The text keeps emphasizing how Goliath the Philistine is cursing the God of Israel and his servant David. Goliath may curse in the name of his gods, but he ends up just like his god Dagon (5:4)—dead with his head cut off! The Bible does inspire us to faithfulness with heroic characters like David, but make no mistake: the battle is the Lord's.

## *Tuesday, May 5*

Read: 1 Samuel 18; Psalm 18

David is the talk of the whole nation after his victory over Goliath. Everyone loves David! Saul loves David (for now). Jonathan loves David. Michal loves David. The people love David. This unknown shepherd boy is now being sung about and celebrated by women in the streets: David is an even greater warrior than Saul ever was! You can imagine what Saul thinks about that. From the day he hears the people's praises of David, Saul's love for him turns to jealousy, anger, and suspicion. From that day forward, Saul is looking for a way to be rid of David.

Perhaps Saul has found a path to be done with David through his own family. David is no longer at home with his father Jesse and his brothers; he's been taken to live in the king's house. After all, kings like the nation are takers (8:11). Saul won't have a path to David through Jonathan, his own son who should one day be heir to the throne. Jonathan gives his princely robe and armor to David in a foreshadowing of his complete recognition that David will be the rightful king of Israel (23:17).

Perhaps Saul's path to victory will come through his daughters. After David is swindled out of marriage to Saul's oldest daughter Merab, he finds himself engaged to another of Saul's daughters, Michal. Doesn't this sound like Laban's plotting against Jacob with Leah and Rachel? Someone has said that Saul is planning for a wedding but hoping for a funeral! Saul is willing to use not one but two of his daughters in this plot against David. Saul names a dangerously high dowry price in order to marry Michal, but David bravely doubles that price. This would have been a very dangerous (not to mention grotesque) mission, yet it becomes clear again that the Lord is with David and not with Saul. Saul's fear of David increases over the course of the chapter (compare 18:12 and 18:28–29), and Saul's fear is rooted in knowing that Yahweh is no longer with him but with David instead. The result: Saul is David's enemy and seeks to harm him every chance he gets. The inscription of Psalm 18 seems to point to the day when David's struggles with Saul will be over, but for now the strife will continue. God will indeed bless his people through the king of God's own choosing, but for now the people's choice is going to harm the people. The final king of God's own choosing, Christ Jesus will not be a burden to the people but a blessing. He will give us rest. Look to Christ this day.

The Bible has been clear that the Lord is with David. Yahweh has chosen David not Saul. You might think this means David will have no difficulty ascending the throne in place of Saul. David should be safe since the favor of the Lord rests on him, right? However, just as we've seen previously, being in the center of God's will is not automatically the physically safest place.

Saul's hatred has grown to the point that he openly tells his servants and his son Jonathan that David must die. Saul must not know of or understand Jonathan's delight in David. They are godly, kindred spirits in an increasingly ungodly royal household. Jonathan reminds his father of how God used David to deliver the nation as a whole but also the king personally. Doesn't Saul remember rejoicing in the victory God brought through David? For a brief time, Saul does remember. He listens to Jonathan, and David is welcomed safely back into the royal household. Verse 7 ends as if things are back to normal in the palace, but we already get the idea that Saul is unstable and untrustworthy.

God has already announced blessing upon David and judgment upon Saul. Yahweh sends a harmful or evil spirit upon Saul as a seal of judgment on this king who has already rejected God. For the third time, Saul tries to spear David to death and fails. David escapes but perhaps not for long. He goes home that night and his new wife warns him that he must escape quickly. Those closest to Saul seem unwilling to betray David into his hand. Jonathan loves and wants to protect David. Michal loves and wants to protect David. In Michal's elaborate plot to deceive Saul's men, we hear echoes of Jacob's story and his wives deceiving their father with a household idol. Both times a wife is willing to deceive her father because she's unwilling to betray her husband. Once again David escapes, but we hear his prayer and his reliance upon God in Psalm 59.

1 Samuel 19 ends with a strange scene. Remember that God has rejected Saul and the Spirit of God no longer rests on Saul. The final time that Saul is anointed by the Spirit, it is a scene of judgment. Saul's messengers must obey God and not Saul. The Spirit leads Saul to strip off the royal robes in a humiliating reminder that the kingdom has been stripped from Saul and will be given to David. Words that once rang out at Saul's anointing as king now ring out in humiliation. What a picture of the lesson from Daniel 2:21, that God "removes kings and establishes kings."

## *Thursday, May 7*

Read: 1 Samuel 20; Psalm 52

Saul has been rejected by God and temporarily stripped of his royal robes as a picture of how he will be permanently stripped from the kingdom. Our narrative reading shifts back to David, but Saul looms large in the background. David seeks out his best friend Jonathan to try and understand why Saul seeks his life. Jonathan seems to be unaware of David's near-death experience when he escaped only with the help of his wife. David reminds Jonathan that his father may not be completely truthful or transparent with him because of Jonathan's deep affection for David. The two begin to plan a way to test Saul and find out his true intentions once and for all.

As we read Jonathan and David's conversation, we can't help but notice their loyalty. Not only loyalty to one another but loyalty to Yahweh. Saul's conversations sound nothing like his son's. Saul knows that Yahweh is with David, and this moves him to fear and anger. Jonathan also knows that God is with David, but this moves him to praise and trust God. What a difference knowing the lovingkindness of God can make in a relationship, a home, and a kingdom.

We must note that, based on verse 17, some modern commentators try to suggest there is something more than brotherly love between David and Jonathan. Of course the Bible says nothing of the sort, and the text does not support this idea at all. This recent idea is clearly proposed only to justify sins that are popular today but clearly condemned in Scripture from cover to cover. Rather than looking to David and Jonathan to justify wickedness, their relationship serves as a godly example for male friendship. Any man would count a friendship like this as a blessing from God.

The plan to expose Saul is working as expected. His anger is kindled against his own son due to his hatred of David. Saul gets so angry at Jonathan's defense of David that he attempts to slay his own son. It seems Saul always has a spear in hand ready to attack anyone who attempts to stand in his way. Jonathan understands what this means, and he grieves. He doesn't grieve for himself, but he grieves for David. What a friend.

Look how God keeps preserving and protecting his king. God has spoken and his will will be done. David will be on the throne; Saul cannot harm him. God has promised to be with David, and he is. Saints, remember that Christ has promised to be with you always, and he will be. God always keeps his promises.

Sometimes life just seems backwards. The Lord has left Saul and is clearly with David, yet David is running for his life from Saul. David goes to see the priest for help, but the priest happens to be the great-grandson of Eli. Remember that the priesthood was ripped from Eli's family just as the kingdom has been ripped from Saul's family. This is the present situation for Israel: the king of God's own choosing is on the run for his life while the nation is run by a rejected king and a rejected family of priests. Everyone is still doing what is right in their own eyes. It seems like this could be true of David as well because he seems to be lying to the priest even though the Bible never condemns him for it. David's men receive food, and the story is even used by Jesus in the Gospels as an illustration of how God desires mercy even more than he desires sacrifice. Perhaps everything will work out after all, we might think as we read. But standing in the shadows of the story in verse 7 is Doeg the Edomite. The narrator is tipping us off that we should pay attention to him.

David and his men are freshly fed and armed with weapons so they go to . . . enemy territory?! This seems backwards, but they go to Goliath's homeland. Much to David's surprise he is recognized. So much for hiding. Out of fear David pretends to be insane. He seems to give a worthy performance, so much so that the Philistine king does not welcome him and sends him away. This strange experience stood out in David's mind so much that it is the historical foundation for at least two Psalms—both Psalm 34 and 56.

Ejected and dejected from Gath, David takes refuge in a cave named Refuge (Adullam). The scene shifts to Saul who is back home at Gibeath, and there's that spear in his hand again. This can't be good. Saul sits under the tree giving a sob story about how everyone is out to get him. Notice that the details in Saul's story don't line up with the details we've already read in the record. Who's voice is that? Doeg! He explains that even the priests seem to be against Saul. Doeg's lies feed Saul's insanity. When no one will fulfill Saul's wicked orders against the priests, up steps Doeg ready to murder for the king.

What a backwards picture we get in these two chapters. There is a king in Israel, but everyone is still doing what is right in his own eyes. How desperately God's people need the king of God's own choosing.

## *Monday, May 11*

Read: 1 Samuel 23–24; Psalm 57

How different is David from Saul? When we last saw Saul he was using a Gentile (Doeg the Edomite) to kill the people of God (the priests Saul ordered to be slaughtered). Our story begins with David protecting the people of God from the Gentile Philistines. The differences don't end there. We see David inquiring of the Lord for wisdom, while Saul takes the Lord's name in vain by saying something about God that is not true. God has not given David into Saul's hand because David is Yahweh's chosen king of Israel. David's response to Saul's pursuit is prayer. How different he is from the king like the nations.

Psalm 54 is rooted in this next scene in 1 Samuel 23 where the people of Ziph report to Saul that David is in their midst. A cat and mouse game continues on the mountain with David trying to escape from Saul. Could the giant slayer not have held his own in a battle with the king? Of course he could; David doesn't want to fight Saul. It seems that David is trusting the Lord to place him on the throne according to God's timeline, not his own. God providentially rescues David when the Philistines attack and Saul is pulled away to fight that front. David survives til another day.

Saul had sworn that God was giving David into his hand, but now it seems that God is giving Saul into David's hand. He and his men are hiding in a cave when Saul enters the dark, cool space to use the bathroom. It seems this moment must be from God. His men certainly think so. Rather than killing Saul, David simply cuts off a corner of his robe. We would think this is a harmless thing, but do you remember when Samuel tore Saul's robe, signifying that the kingdom was being torn away from him? The king's robe is now unfit for service, and, of course, so is the king. David is immediately convicted of this rebellion against God's authority over him through Saul. Not only does David regret his sin, but he repents of his sin in a vulnerable way. How different is David from Saul. He reveals himself to Saul and confesses what he has done. David's confession also demonstrates to Saul that he is not a threat to the king. If David had wanted to kill Saul, he had his chance! Instead he entrusts himself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23) and pleads for God's mercy (Psalm 57). Saul seems to be temporarily repentant, but it will not last. How different is David from Saul!

If we considered 1 Samuel 24–26 as a unit, we might notice that the section is bookended with episodes of David sparing Saul's life. Those accounts are remarkable enough, but in the middle of that section (chapter 25) we see how David could have responded to Saul. David's encounter with Nabal is so different from how David has treated Saul, yet it shows us that David is capable of responding with anger and vengeance. So far David has been presented in an almost spotless fashion here in Samuel. He seems almost perfect! However, the story of David and Nabal warns us that there are concerns with David's character.

The story begins with a rich fool, for that is what Nabal means. Nabal is about to come into greater wealth because it is time to shear the sheep and sell the wool. It seems that David and his men have been serving as a protective force for Nabal's shepherds, and now it is time for Nabal to pay his security bill. David sends his men to collect this hospitality or payment on a feast day when it would have been easy for Nabal to settle up, but that is not what happens. When Pharaoh didn't want to obey the voice of Moses and let God's people go, he pretended to be ignorant and asked, "Who is Yahweh?" When he wants to refuse his obligation, Nabal asks the similar question, "Who is David?" David's blessing is met by Nabal's reviling.

Everything we've learned so far about Nabal hasn't been good, but David's response should alarm us. His hasty decision to take up the sword seems like something Saul would do. David seems determined to take vengeance on Nabal and his men until he encounters Nabal's wife Abigail. She has been described as discerning and beautiful, but her character begins to shine as she skillfully negotiates with David, sparing her husband's life. While Nabal pretends to have never heard of the soon-to-be king of Israel, Abigail seems to have spiritual understanding concerning God's blessing upon David. Abigail's quick-thinking diplomacy seems to have avoided a range war between her husband and the soon-to-be king. Abigail even offers herself as a substitute for her husband. David calms down after meeting and talking with Abigail, but the warning has already been given. He is clearly capable of rash sin.

The warning grows louder at the chapter's end. The narrator is clear: David has multiple wives. Kings take many wives for themselves, but not the one after God's own heart. Shouldn't we expect David to walk in greater faithfulness to God's word? The warning has been given: perhaps David won't end well after all.

## *Wednesday, May 13*

Read: 1 Samuel 26–27; Psalm 37

Chapter 26 reads much like its twin in Chapter 24, but they are separate historical events. The Ziphites don't want David in their midst and seem eager to sell him out to Saul. Saul's forces outnumber David's 5 to 1, but David has an opportunity to strike one night while Saul is sleeping. Just like back in the cave, Abishai suggests to David that God's hand is at work in giving David this opportunity and that Saul should be killed. Some people will spiritualize anything, but David will not fall prey to this temptation. Once again, David will entrust himself to God and not harm Saul as the appointed authority in Israel at the time.

God has sent a deep sleep on Saul's camp which makes David and Abishai's brave mission possible. After making it out of the camp safely, David calls out to Abner and the camp and engages in a bit of biblical smack talk: "You all were asleep on the job! I could have killed the king if I wanted to!" As before David is trying to make the point that he's not out to harm Saul. Therefore, why does Saul keep pursuing him? David has been forced out of his homeland, the only place where he can rightfully worship Yahweh.

Saul again offers short-lived repentance. Isn't this a reminder that outward signs out of repentance are not always trustworthy indicators of someone's heart? Time will tell. David respectfully listens to Saul, but 27:1 shows that he doesn't actually trust him. David seeks refuge among the Philistines again, but in a less dramatic fashion than before. At an appropriate time, David asks the king of Gath for his own space to be out of sight and out of mind. This allows David to finally enjoy a season of rest, sixteen months of peace from the pursuit of Saul.

David is far enough away from the capital city that Achish really doesn't know what David is doing out there. He gives the impression to the Philistines that he is attacking the friends of Israel, which would make him an even greater outcast and enemy of Saul. In fact, David is attacking the enemies of Israel and ensuring that word is not getting back to the capital. The chapter ends with the Philistine king seeming to be confident in David's loyalty, while in reality the opposite is true.

Psalm 37 is an acrostic poem by David with the overall theme of trusting in God despite circumstances with enemies. David lives that message out when he lives with the Philistines but his heart is still with his people Israel. His confidence indeed is in the Lord.

The tension is building in the conflict between David and Saul, and it is nearing a climax. The anointed king, David, is living with the enemy Philistines while the rejected king, Saul, is failing the nation. The Philistines have decided to make war against Israel, and the natural expectation is that the subject David will follow the Philistine king Achish into battle. Meanwhile back in Israel, Saul is trembling in fear and not preparing for battle. Saul asks Yahweh for direction, but the Lord does not answer him. Saul had previously ejected the mediums from the land of God's people for they are wicked in the eyes of God, but in desperation Saul seeks out a medium. Perhaps she can help him know how he will fare in battle. This medium now lives in the land of the Philistines at En-dor but Saul is willing to risk his life and enter enemy territory just to get any help he can in this fight against the Philistines.

Do you see how far Saul has fallen? We've seen time and again that God is removing the kingdom from him and that he is not fit for the throne. This king like the nations actually removes his own royal robes this time in order to try and disguise himself before the medium. All because he is afraid. Saul was afraid and hid in the baggage when he was announced as king. Saul was afraid of Goliath. He is afraid of David. Saul is afraid of all of the wrong things; he does not fear God. He even blasphemes the name of God by making a promise in Yahweh's name, a promise that Saul has no right to make. Saul makes his request of the medium, and she is shocked as much as we are that this one time her attempt to speak to the dead actually works. She's been a charlatan up until this point, but God miraculously allows the spirit of Samuel to appear before her and Saul. Saul begins to worship Samuel, and we're reminded that neither the Philistine witch or the Israelite king knows how to rightly relate to God.

Saul wanted a message of encouragement from Samuel, but Samuel simply reaffirms to him that God has already spoken. The kingdom has been torn from Saul, and he will die within 24 hours. Because of the words of Samuel, Saul is more fearful than ever before. At the beginning of our journey with Saul, he feasted with the priest Samuel because he was being anointed as king. At the end of Saul's life on earth, he is feasting with a witch as a completely failed king. How far he has fallen.

## *Friday, May 15*

Read: 1 Samuel 29–30

What does Saul have to show for his reign as king? Not much. The Philistines are gathered for battle against Israel at Aphek. Where did the Philistines gather for battle against Israel back in chapter 4 when Eli was still the priest and the people were looking for a king? Aphek. Israel as a nation is no better off at the end of Saul's reign than when he began.

The Philistines are preparing for battle, and it seems David will join in with them. Perhaps he would have had not some of the commanders rejected him for battle. They knew the risk was too high that David might try to win favor with Saul by turning on Achish. Even in David's conversation with the king, he's not particularly clear. It seems David is purposefully being ambiguous. Does he really intend to fight against Israel? God mercifully protects David from this choice, and the text doesn't comment on David's behavior.

David and his men return home to Ziklag only to find that there's been an attack by the Amalekites. Remember how Saul was supposed to destroy them completely and he disobeyed. Saul's sins are still having negative consequences. David and his men find that their city has been burned, and their wives and children have been taken. In their grief the people even begin to turn on David and blame him. The man after God's own heart doesn't turn on his people but turns to God and strengthens himself in Yahweh. We see David praying to God and receiving an answer from God, unlike Saul.

After getting help from an abandoned Amalekite servant in locating these enemies, David is victorious in battle. We know that David is not alone in this victory. He has 400 men with him, but notice how often David is mentioned by name in 30:16–31. The narrator is emphasizing that David is victorious in battle. He is the king who can save his people. He is the king who can rescue his wives and those taken from their homes. He is the king who brings back the spoils from battle. Nothing is missing; all is recovered under the leadership of David. We even see a glimpse of how David will rule righteously when he begins to divide the spoils. He wisely sends thank-you gifts from the spoils to those towns who had hosted he and his men throughout all of their wanderings. David is endearing himself to the people.

This is the kind of king Israel needs. This is the kind of king we have to a far greater degree in Christ. He is able to save his bride. He is able to save his people from their sins.

The people demanded a king. They were warned that it would not go well for them, but the people demanded a king. There lies their king on the battlefield. He has not fought their battles for them. He has not led them in righteousness. He has not brought blessings on the land. There lies Saul on the battlefield, badly wounded. The kingdom has been torn from him. His sons are dead. He has repeatedly sinned against God. Where is Saul's concern? With himself. He selfishly pleads for his life to be ended prematurely. No matter that God can do great miracles in battle. No matter that the Lord numbers our days. No matter that Saul still has life in his body. Saul is only focused on Saul. And Saul wants to die.

Saul's armor-bearer is more righteous than he and refuses to take Saul's life, so Saul murders himself. When the dust of the battle settles, the household of Saul has ended. The army of Israel flees. They have lost the battle. They have lost their king. They have lost their land. All thanks to the actions of Saul. He is beheaded by the Philistines, but this isn't the only beheading we've seen in this book. The head on the statue of the Philistine god Dagon was cut off. The head of Goliath was cut off. Now the head of Saul is cut off. So often Saul has lived like a Philistine and now he dies like a Philistine. So much for a king like the nations.

The Book of 1 Samuel is not intended to be separated from the Book of 2 Samuel. Most likely the length of the available parchment scrolls in that day dictated how much could be contained in one book, but we do find ourselves at a natural transition point in the narrative. We've seen the consequences Saul has brought upon the nation. How will David fare? How will he act now that Saul is truly gone? Will the man after God's own heart continue to pursue God's heart and obey God's will? The text will tell. For now, we're left to reflect.

Reading Psalm 76 in connection with the conclusion of 1 Samuel will provide further light on the Saul situation. Psalm 110, the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament, provides even further food for thought. This psalm of David leaves us looking for an even greater king than David. Our hopes are high for this earthly king, but we know that ultimately he will fail. We, and Israel, need an even greater king than David. We need the king who will rule and reign forever. We need King Jesus.

## *Tuesday, May 19*

Read: 2 Samuel 1–2; Proverbs 9

King Saul is dead. Long live King David. Now that his threat to the throne is gone, how will David respond? We might expect David to rejoice. After all, Saul has unjustly pursued him for a long time. Instead, David models Proverbs 24:17: “When your enemy falls, do not be glad, And when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice.” Maybe the new king of Israel won’t be a king like the nations.

Isn’t it ironic that Saul lost his kingdom because he was unfaithful in dealing with the Amalekites, and an Amalekite claims to have aided Saul in his death? David seems to accept this man’s story as true, but the narrator told us in 1 Samuel 31 that Saul took his own life. Perhaps this sojourner in Israel did help Saul, but it seems clear that he is trying to use the situation to his advantage. The new king of Israel has just returned from faithfully executing the enemy Amalekites as God demanded. Perhaps this man can gain favor for himself by convincing David that he was responsible for the death of his enemy. Not only does David not rejoice in the news of Saul’s death, he executes this liar for his participation in Saul’s death. David publicly mourns Saul’s death, and he teaches the nation how they should mourn under these circumstances. Certainly David could have focused on all of Saul’s sins and how he ultimately failed the nation. Instead he focuses on the good things Saul did. David praises both wicked Saul and loyal Jonathan. As David begins his ascent to the throne, he can do so with a clear conscience. He has not harmed Saul or attempted to grab the throne by force. He has patiently waited on the Lord.

The new king of Israel is still living in exile in the beginning of chapter 2, but God answers David’s prayers and gives him clear direction. The tribe of Judah anoints and recognizes David as their king. The rest of the nation is not yet ready. Saul’s commander Abner tries to play king-maker and continue the kingdom under a puppet-king, Saul’s only surviving son Ish-bosheth. David’s nephew Joab leads the forces of David. The impact from this battle in the earliest days of David’s reign will still be felt after David’s death. The stage is set for a blood feud over the death of Joab’s brother Asahel. Watch David carefully over the next few chapters to see if he will be as faithful in victory as he was in exile. Will this king of God’s own choosing reign differently than the king like the nations?

*“Now the war between the house of Saul and the house of David was long; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually.”*

2 Samuel 3:1

Our reading begins with an excellent summary statement. The war will wage throughout these two chapters, but we’re already told the outcome: David will grow stronger and stronger. But did you notice the red flags that immediately follow? David has multiplied wives (against Deuteronomy 17:17). A big family may look fitting for a king like the nations, but big problems will soon arise from this sin. Meanwhile, we watch David carefully with victory in view but trouble close at hand.

One threat to David’s reign is Saul’s remaining son who is supported by Abner, the strong general. When Ish-bosheth makes (possibly false) charges against Abner, he vows to swap his loyalties to David. It seems that, like father like son, Ish-bosheth is not reading reality correctly when he accuses his greatest supporter. Abner quickly begins to prove his loyalty to David and works to unite the nation under their new king. However, Joab does not trust Abner at all, and when he finds out David’s intentions to welcome Abner, Joab begins to scold his new king like a child. He then begins to plot behind his uncle’s back and eventually does murder Abner. Yet again David does not lead the nation to rejoice but to mourn this “prince and great man” (3:38). Joab seems uncontrollable. He should have been punished by David but the king doesn’t seem to have that power. The tension between David and Joab will come up again and again.

Those who might oppose David’s ascent to the throne are being removed one by one. Saul. Jonathan. Abner. Now Ish-bosheth. Only the crippled child Mephibosheth (Jonathan’s son) remains as a non-threat to David. It would be easy for David’s political opponents to murmur that he took the throne by force, but the Bible makes clear this isn’t true. David didn’t raise a hand against God’s anointed Saul. He certainly didn’t harm his closest friend Jonathan. David didn’t order the death of Abner and publicly mourned his loss. He grieved in such a way that the whole nation knew this was not his plan or goal. When the two men bring word of Ish-bosheth’s death, they are greeted with the same execution that came against the one who brought news of Saul’s death.

David has patiently waited upon God’s timing, but now he is recognized by the entire nation as king. He will be shepherd over the people of Israel. God’s timetable is always trustworthy. His plans are always good, even when we don’t understand.

## *Thursday, May 21*

Read: 1 Chronicles 11:1–25

What would you do first if you became king? David has many opportunities to think about this question. He was first anointed by Samuel as king in a small, private ceremony. Later the tribe of Judah anointed David as king over them. Finally the entire nation is uniting under David as shepherd and ruler of all of Israel. They make a covenant with David recognizing that Samuel had already announced the word of the Lord to them a long time ago—David is the king of God's own choosing.

What is David's first act as king of the united kingdom? To choose a capital. Where does David choose? The ancient fortress of Jebus, better known as Jerusalem. It seems this is the same place where Melchizedek, king of Salem, called home during the days of Abraham (Gen 14:18). It's where Abraham was prepared to offer his son Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen 22:2), and where Solomon will later build the temple (2 Chron 3:1). Israel had captured the city during the days of Joshua, but did not drive out the Jebusites (Josh 15:63), resulting in David needing to capture Mount Zion in his day. Joab's valiant effort in battle leads to him becoming the commander of David's army. Now that the city is conquered and repairs are begun, David continues to become greater. Jerusalem will become greater. David wisely chooses this location because it unites the previously divided portions of the nation and can be well protected as a fortress. Much history takes place and will take place in this ancient city, but ultimately we know that earthly Jerusalem is not our final destination. We are looking for the new Jerusalem, the greater heavenly city. This is all possible because of the greater David, King Jesus.

Verses 10–25 tell of David's mighty men. How we wish we had more details! Jashobeam, how did you kill 300 men at one time? Eleazar, tell us how you stood your ground. David, what's the deal with the water? What are these elite forces, the thirty and the three? These are the kinds of questions that fascinate us, but also might cause us to miss the point. Who declared that David would be king and that these mighty men would support David? Yahweh did (11:10). Who gave them spectacular victory in battle? Yahweh did (11:14). The Lord is still the hero of the story. Surely these mighty men had great physical strength and natural giftings, but God used these mighty men for his purposes. That ought to encourage us, for the same God can use us today for his purposes according to the natural giftings he has given us as well.

One of David's highest priorities in his earliest days as king is the worship of Yahweh. He knows it is time for the ark of God to be properly back among the people of God. Remember how in the days of Eli the ark was used simply as a good luck charm. It was actually captured by the Philistines, and that's when we saw the downfall (and beheading) of their false god Dagon. You may remember how the Philistines used mama cows to return the ark to the land of Israel, but the ark has remained in Kiriath-jearim since then (see 1 Samuel 5–6). The king after God's own heart is concerned for the proper worship of Yahweh and knows the ark must come home, all the way.

After everyone agrees that it is time for the ark to return, the preparations begin. Everything is looking good: there's the ark on a new cart. There's all Israel celebrating before God with all their strength. What a great day! Until the oxen stumble. Until Uzzah reaches out his hand to stop the ark from falling. Until the anger of Yahweh burns and Uzzah dies. What happened? Things were going so well! Everyone had the best of intentions. Wasn't David doing a noble thing?

David failed to consult the word of God. He made the same mistake that was made twenty years earlier. The ark was not to be carried on a cart, but rather the Levites were to carry it on poles (see Ex 25:12–15). This may sound like a little thing to us, but it is God's word. His holiness is all-consuming, no matter our sincerity or best of intentions. This is a lesson that Uzzah failed to understand. It is a lesson that David and Israel must learn quickly. It is a lesson we must learn while there's time.

David is too afraid to continue the mission that day, so the ark stays with Obed-edom for three months. Finally David is ready to fulfill the mission according to the word of Yahweh. This time the mission is successful. This time David not only has the right motives but also the right obedience.

*“Since it is our tendency to take grace for granted, my guess is that God found it necessary from time to time to remind Israel that grace must never be assumed. On rare but dramatic occasions He showed the dreadful power of His justice. He killed Nadab and Abihu. He killed Uzzah. He commanded the slaughter of the Canaanites. It is as if He were saying, “Be careful. While you enjoy the benefits of My grace, don't forget My justice. Don't forget the gravity of sin. Remember that I am holy.”*”

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1 R.C. Sproul, *Classic Teachings on the Nature of God: The Holiness of God*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), 95.

## Monday, May 25

Read: 2 Samuel 7–8

The second scroll of Samuel has been action-packed thus far. Everything slows down in chapter 7. This is a Hebrew way of emphasizing that what takes place in this passage is a big deal. The drama is revealed through a speech by God himself, the longest speech he has given since Mount Sinai. David desires to build Yahweh a proper “house,” a proper place for his earthly display of his glory to abide. His logic is this: “Here I am living in a mansion while God is living in a shack.” This seems to reflect David’s heart to worship God rightly as we saw concerning the ark.

The Lord communicates to David through the prophet Nathan that this is not necessary. In fact, God has happily walked with his people since the garden of Eden, from the exodus, through the wilderness, and even down to David’s day. Not once has God complained that his earthly accommodations were not good enough. In words with many echoes of the covenant with Abraham, God also covenants with David (see 23:5 for the language of “everlasting covenant”). Some of these promises will be fulfilled in David’s lifetime, but notice that others will not be fulfilled until after David’s death.

*<sup>12</sup>“When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup>“He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>“I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will reprove him with the rod of men and the strikes from the sons of men, <sup>15</sup> but My lovingkindness shall not be removed from him, as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup>“And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.” ’ ’*

*2 Samuel 7:12–16 (LSB)*

Think back on the big storyline of Scripture. We’ve been looking for a promised seed since the garden, and we have moved through the story all the way to David. God makes important promises to David, but also says that some of these promises will be fulfilled for a son of David. Some of these promises clearly apply to Solomon who built the Lord a house (temple) and received the chastisement of God when he sinned. However, some of these promises must be fulfilled ultimately in Christ. The throne of Solomon ended, but Jesus’s throne will never end. His kingdom will endure forever.

David's life seems to be full of victory. He has finally ascended the throne of Israel. God has given David rest from his enemies. The ark has been brought back to Israel. God has made an everlasting covenant with him. David seems unstoppable. Some people show their true nature in seasons of difficulty while others are faithful in wartime but not faithful in peace. We've seen David come through seasons of great difficulty. How will he be in this season of peace?

David was faithful and righteous in the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, and Ish-bosheth, but now he continues to show lovingkindness to the family of the man who tried to kill him. David has promised both Saul (1 Sam 24:21–22) and Jonathan (1 Sam 20:15–17, 42) that he would continue to show steadfast love to the house of Saul even after Saul's death and David became king. David goes above and beyond, he goes out of his way looking for a descendant of the house of Saul, but notice he does this especially because of his friendship with Jonathan. We met this descendant, Mephibosheth, back in 4:4 where it was clear that he would not challenge David for the throne. It would not have been uncommon at that time for a king to eliminate (kill) all potential opposition to the throne. Not only does David not kill Mephibosheth, but he treats him with lavish grace. This crippled man has nothing to offer this wealthy king, and yet David shows abundant, generous mercy towards him, even welcoming him into the family like a son. David is unlike Saul. David is unlike us. David is like Jesus.

David is merciful towards someone who has not wronged him like Mephibosheth, but what about someone who has wronged him like the Ammonites in chapter 10? Mephibosheth welcomes David's kindness, but Hanun rejects the kindness of David. Remember how rashly David acted towards Nabal in 1 Samuel 25. David's men are shamed in a far greater way before the Ammonites than they were before Nabal. This time David does not act rashly but instead is measured and just in his response. Even as David does what is right, his reign does seem to be marked by war instead of peace.

Psalm 23 is one of the most comforting and familiar passages in the Old Testament. David the Shepherd–King recognizes that Yahweh is the ultimate shepherd who leads, provides for, and protects his sheep. The goodness and loving kindness that David showed Mephibosheth is only a tiny glimpse of that shown to us by God. Of course, the ultimate way this is shown to us is through the great shepherd Jesus Christ.

## *Wednesday, May 27*

Read: 2 Samuel 11; Proverbs 10

Things have been going so well with David. He's been growing stronger and stronger. His kingdom seems to be flourishing. Sure, we've seen a few red flags along the way (remember his multiple wives and how one of those wives had a household idol), but all-in-all David has been far better than the king like the nations. The avalanche of sin that has been forming in David's soul comes crashing down in chapter 11, and it will damage and destroy so much around him.

The narrator reminds us that David should have been out in battle that spring, yet he's at home lounging around when naptime should have been over. Do you remember the pattern of sin we first saw in our mother Eve in the garden? She saw, she desired, she took, and she ate. Achan saw, desired, and took in Judges 7. This same pattern haunts David who sees what he should not see, desires what he should not desire, and takes what he should not take. This is something a king like the nations would do. From David's spontaneous sin of lust that gave birth to full-grown adultery, now a child has been conceived.

Like we so often do, David tries to cover his sin. He sends for this woman's husband. He attempts to send him home to his wife, hoping he'll receive a hero's welcome and cover David's sinful tracks. Instead this Hittite shows more faithfulness than the king of Israel! The hero of Israel must continue to adapt his plans to cover his crimes until he finally sends Uriah into the heat of battle to die a hero's death.

Notice how God is entirely absent from this narrative. David is acting alone. Sinfully. David tries to be encouraging to the commander of his army over this evil, but God sees the evil of what David has done. David's sins cannot be hidden. David's sins will find him out.

“David created this temptation by neglecting his duty as the Lord's king. As is true of so many other occasions in life, David should have been leading the battle, not relaxing at home. Thomas Watson said, ‘An idle person is the devil's tennis ball, which he bandies up and down with temptation till at last the ball goes out of play.’ In many ways the whole Christian life is the time for battle, and there is no discharge in this conflict. The enemy of the soul is constantly on the prowl, looking for places to attack. It is imperative that we do not neglect our duty to be on guard, to be equipped with the armor and arsenal God has provided, and to fight the good fight<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Beeke, *Family Worship Bible Guide*, 202.

When Saul and Jonathan died, David lamented, “How the mighty have fallen.” Isn’t that an appropriate lament over David’s sin? David, who has been so mighty and so noble, has fallen deeply into sin. We read today of David’s repentance, but it only took place because God graciously sent a prophet. In chapter 11, there was a lot of sending: David sent Joab into battle. He sent messengers for Bathsheba. She sent and told David that she was pregnant. David sent word to Joab. Joab sent Uriah into battle. Now chapter 12 begins with God sending Nathan to David. We may not realize it, but it is always God’s grace that causes us to see our sin and brings conviction over our sins in our lives.

Nathan builds up the drama of “the man” until David’s sympathy for the poor man and anger towards the rich man erupts. David recognizes the injustice and demands the death of the rich man. Nathan connects the dots of the parable: you are the man, David! The prophet’s parable of the poor shepherd convicts the former shepherd boy who is now supposed to shepherd the people of God. David has failed personally but also professionally as king. Samuel had warned that kings like the nations would take, take, and take. David has taken. What consequences David has unintentionally brought upon his house. God had promised that the throne would not depart from David’s house (and that promise is still true), but now God also says that the sword will not depart from David’s house. The kingdom is not going to be united in the way it was before, and it will eventually even be officially divided. The punishment Yahweh describes will play out over upcoming chapters.

How do you respond when confronted with your sin? We’ve seen in our journey of the Bible many times where people try to deny their sin or blame their sin on others. Not David. The king after God’s own heart simply acknowledges, “I have sinned against Yahweh.” This may sound like too simple of a confession, as if David might just be saying he has sinned to get out of it and over it. Psalm 51 shows us the depth of David’s repentance. We see him heartbroken over his sin, but here’s the good news: Yahweh puts away David’s sin! He forgives!

David will still face earthly consequences for his sins, and that begins with the death of this child. David expresses confidence in God even in one of the most horrible of circumstances. We see the fruit of David’s repentance in several ways, including him being back where should be: leading the people of God into victory.

## *Friday, May 29*

Read: 2 Samuel 13; Proverbs 11

David has done evil in the sight of Yahweh, and now evil is going to rise out of David's house. This is the majority of what we will read in David's story in the chapters ahead. 2 Samuel 13–20 focuses on these horrible episodes in the life of David and his family. The Book of Samuel began with Eli's wicked sons and their father's passive lack of leadership. We saw the same in Samuel's life, and that is part of why the people demanded a king. They wanted a ruler who did not have wicked sons. We will sadly watch as David's family is ripped apart as a result of David's sin, and David will stand by and essentially do nothing.

Amnon has wicked desires but also a wicked friend with wicked advice. Oh how important it is that we surround ourselves with godly friends who give godly advice. Amnon follows the crafty, shrewd advice of Jonadab, and David unknowingly facilitates this scheme. Half-sister Tamar strongly resists in verse 12, saying “no” four times. She pleads her case, warning about what will happen to both of them if Amnon gets his desires. Tragically, Amnon does not listen. By brute force he violates his sister. Like the dark story of Dinah in Genesis 34, one man's lust leads to an explosion of sorrow throughout a family but eventually a nation.

As a sad side note, modern interpreters sometimes try to minimize Bathsheba's participation in David's sin in the previous episode, suggesting that David violated Bathsheba in the same way that Amnon violates Tamar. The text does not say in chapter 11 what it says so clearly in chapter 13: Tamar resisted but Amnon violated. However, we would be foolish to not also notice that while David may not have committed an identical sin, David failed to heed the advice that his own son would later give in Proverbs (advice that Solomon himself later failed to heed). The danger of sexual sin is always crouching at the door seeking to devour. Fathers must not only warn their sons, but also model sexual integrity. In this way David most certainly failed his sons with his multitude of wives and his sin with Bathsheba.

When King David hears of all that has happened, the text says he was very angry. This would lead us to expect him to do something about it, to bring justice for his daughter and punish his wicked son. Sadly only brother Absalom seems interested in vindicating Tamar, but he does it by murder. David seems helpless to do anything to lead or correct his family. Doesn't this sound like a king like the nations? Aren't we still looking for a better king?

David's family is falling apart, and it won't be long until it seems like his kingdom is, too. Amnon has violated Tamar. Absalom has murdered Amnon. Years have passed while Absalom is living with his mother's father. David has done nothing. Joab decides it is time to do something.

Joab knows that David is focused on the matter with Absalom which almost certainly is causing him to neglect other matters of the kingdom. To fix the problem Joab hires an actress to come and tell a parable to David. Nathan's parable was sent from God. That was plain to David then, and it is plain to us now. Joab's parable is not nearly as clear. What starts with echoes of Cain and Abel quickly becomes the story of David's family. The king seems to become suspicious at some point and is certainly suspicious by verses 18–20. To some degree, Joab's plan works. David does allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but he is not welcomed back into the royal house. The bottom line seems to be David's passive ruling. Neither as father nor as king is David willing to do what needs to be done. He is unwilling to punish Absalom as he deserves, but he is also unwilling to fully forgive his son as he seems to want.

Father and son are reunited in the same location, but not reconciled into the same home. The text begins to focus on Absalom in such a way that should concern us. We know Absalom's prior sins, but now we're beginning to see a pattern. We read of Absalom's appearance and we're reminded of Saul's description in 1 Samuel 9:1–2. Both men are described as praiseworthy for their appearance. There was no one in Israel more handsome than Saul, and now there is no one in Israel more handsome than Absalom. Even as Saul was described as a head taller than everyone else, David's son is described by the hair on top of his head. We know how Saul turned out, and now we have greater reason to suspect that things will not end well with Absalom.

The royal prince is essentially exiled at home. His father will not see him. Absalom believes it would have been better to keep living with grandpa than to have moved back home under these conditions. In a Joab-like move, he sets Joab's field on fire in order to gain an audience with his father. After at least five years of silence, father and son are reunited in presence if not in word or spirit. Will this reconciliation last? Will peace return to the house of David? What will the son of David do?

## *Tuesday, June 2*

Read: 2 Samuel 15; Psalm 3

Sometimes the words of history echo down to our present situation in a way that seizes our attention. Samuel's words from 1 Samuel 8:11 ought to be ringing out in the reader's ears. Absalom is building up his royal resume, taking chariots and horses and an entourage. He is battling for the throne in a public relations campaign at the city gate, and he appears to be winning. Absalom makes himself look relatable and humble, stealing the hearts of those he meets. This is only the beginning of his battle for the throne. The next portion of his plan involves an insincere sacrifice in Hebron, which takes him out of Jerusalem without drawing attention to his leaving. David's last recorded words to his son are, "Go in peace." The rest of Absalom's days on earth will not be peaceful, as he does not know the peace of Yahweh.

Absalom's conspiracy is growing stronger and he appears to have taken the kingdom from David. He appears to have gained support of some men who were there simply for the sacrifices, but this causes others to join in with this new administration in Israel. Absalom even gains the counsel of Ahithophel, who happens to be Bathsheba's grandfather. He has served David well, but perhaps he's looking for revenge? When David gets this news, he prays that God would overrule the normally wise counsel of Ahithophel.

The appearance of Absalom's strength begins to convince even David. When he hears of his son's rebellion, he decides he must flee in order to survive. He ran from the first Saul, and now as a much older man he can run from this Saul. Something doesn't add up. David thinks that Absalom has stolen the kingdom, but did you notice how many people marched by in support of David? It's hard to believe that the nation has turned on him in quite the way that David thinks. The king is convinced he must flee, and he is unwilling to use the ark of the covenant as a good luck charm like in days past. He trusts that God will make plain whose side the Lord is on. The priests will remain in Jerusalem to carry on with their responsibilities, but also to continue to serve the king as spies. David's spy network grows with Hushai, his friend, going to Jerusalem.

We see David ascending the Mount of Olives with people following him in a funeral-like procession. Psalm 3 explores David's mind during this time. We will see another rejected king ascending the Mount of Olives one day. His rejection will lead to resurrection. The death of the greater king David will truly bring peace.

David is no stranger to life on the run. He escaped Saul's pursuit for many years, but David moved from the wilderness to the palace. Now everything seems to be going backwards as he is once again running for his life, this time escaping his own son. David's path away from the promised land and into the wilderness is marked by a variety of interesting characters.

The fleeing king first meets Ziba who serves Mephibosheth, the surviving member of Saul's family. David has shown grace to Mephibosheth, but now the king must wonder if that was in vain, although it seems certain that Ziba is lying. Next, David meets Shimei who doesn't merely serve the house of Saul but is a member of the house of Saul. He rails against David saying that all the things critics said about the king were true. God is finally punishing David, Shimei says. The king after God's own heart does not deny the charges or defend himself. He entrusts himself to the one who judges justly (1 Pet 2:23).

The scene shifts back to Absalom entering Jerusalem with Ahithophel just as David's friend Hushai enters the city. The narrative focuses on competing counsel from Ahithophel and Hushai. Remember that Ahithophel is Bathsheba's grandfather, but also a trusted counselor. Everyone, including David and Absalom, view his counsel in the same way they view the trustworthy word of God. Ahithophel offers two sets of advice, the first being that Absalom act like a king by taking the king's female servants as his own. The second piece of advice involves a battle plan that would end the war with David that very evening. This seems like good counsel to the long-haired prince and his advisors, but Absalom also wants to hear from David's dear friend Hushai who seems to have betrayed David but actually is speaking in flowery language that can be interpreted multiple ways. Hushai's plan buys time and eventually puts Absalom in the center of attention but also the line of fire. Absalom and his counselors weigh the advice and reject the normally-trusted Ahithophel and go with David's friend Hushai. However, the text makes clear that this is all Yahweh's doing. The Lord will defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel for his own purposes. Absalom's sins will lead to his downfall. God will see to it.

Wise Ahithophel sees that his counsel is not being followed. This means that David will continue to be king and he will eventually be numbered with the rebels and executed. Instead, he chooses to take his own life prematurely. Both Ahithophel and Absalom keep pointing us to Judas. The Lord is still with David as he prepares for the battle for the kingdom.

## *Thursday, June 4*

Read: 2 Samuel 18; Psalm 45

The many years of cold war between Absalom and David is headed towards open war with the survivor taking the throne. Verses 1–5 include David's battle plan, but his real focus is toward his son and threat to the throne. Everyone hears David order Joab and his commanders, "Deal gently with my son." Whether out of love or guilt or something else, David does not desire the death of his son although he does desire for the conflict to be over.

The battle actually receives little attention in the text with the trees seeming to be the fiercest warrior of all. The forest devours more warriors than the actual battle, but a great oak ensnares the chief target Absalom. His long flowing hair that brought so much pride is now the means of his downfall. One of David's men sees Absalom and reports back to Joab. Joab is shocked and outraged that the rebel prince wasn't killed on the spot, but this unnamed man was unwilling. He sounds a lot like David did when he had the opportunity to kill Saul. Joab heard David's commands, but he does not care. Joab will do what is right in his own eyes, and he thoroughly brings Absalom's life to an end. And with that the war is over. The trumpeter is blown. Absalom is buried much like Achan was in Judges 7; he is buried under a heap of stones.

News will certainly reach David's ears about the death of his son, but the question is who will bear the news? One of the spies from the well in chapter 17, Ahimaaz, son of Zadok the priest, is willing and eager. Joab knows the news will not be received well and tries to protect Zadok's son. He sends a Cushite (not an Israelite) instead. For whatever reason, Ahimaaz is so eager that he insists on going but then gets cold feet when the time arrives. He can't bring himself to tell David that his son is dead. The Cushite brings the news, news that he probably thinks will bring David relief but instead is met by tears and deep sorrow.

The sword has not departed from David's house. Does David ever think back to that afternoon on the rooftop when he first saw Bathsheba and think, "It wasn't worth it"? How many people have died because of David's sin? How much sorrow has pierced his soul because of his own sin? Sin is never worth it and yet we chase it so eagerly. May David's grief over Absalom encourage us to crucify our sins and cling to the crucified Savior, the son of David who will never fail us.

When Jonathan and Saul died, David had much to say. When his son conceived with Bathsheba died, David had something to say. When his son Amnon was murdered, David was filled with anger but had nothing to say. With the death of the rebel son Absalom, David has only one thing to say. He wails repeatedly for his son. He is wailing so that everyone in the city knows of the king's grief. God has delivered the nation in battle, but David's heart is filled with grief rather than gratitude. This son who attempted to steal the kingdom is now about to destroy from the grave whatever kingdom is left because David is clearly communicating he cares for Absalom more than all the valiant soldiers who risked their life for the king. Joab gets this message through to David in the way that only Joab can. David resumes his kingly responsibilities. Long live the king.

When David was relieved from the pursuit of the first Saul, he graciously pardoned enemies and rewarded supporters. Now that he has been relieved from the pursuit of this second Saul, he begins to do the same thing. Only this time, David's clarity seems to be fading. His hold on the throne seems to be slipping. Shimei had cursed David on the run, but now he pleads for mercy. David doesn't quite tell him that he's forgiven, but instead he won't die today. David defers judgment until Solomon is on the throne, which doesn't seem like bold leadership. It is the same passive manner that has plagued David in his latter years. With the matter of Mephibosheth, again David doesn't seem certain in how he should lead. Saul's grandson insists that Ziba tricked him, but David has promised everything to Ziba. Rather than doing the hard work of being a king and resolving the matter, David puts the matter behind him by simply dividing everything between the two. David rewards the kindness of Barzillai who supported him in a time of need. Yet for all of the victory that should be preeminent in the chapter, it ends on a note of division. The sword has not departed from the kingdom of David. Things may be peaceful for now but division will continue to plague the kingdom.

Psalm 24 is a victorious psalm celebrating a far greater king than David. He has received blessings from the Lord, but David has not always had clean hands and a pure heart. Sadly, we must join that line with David saying we cannot enter the presence of the Lord because of our sins. Ah, but the King of glory has welcomed us in by his blood. Praise the King of glory!

## *Monday, June 8*

Read: 2 Samuel 20; Psalm 25

We expect to see a general progression in the Christian life. Never perfection but a general trend towards more maturity rather than a reversal towards ungodliness. Isn't it disappointing when older saints do not seem to still be walking in the righteousness they once enjoyed? The boldness of David's youth has become sinfully passive in later years. David is not the man he once was. The formerly decisive, commanding warrior has been replaced by an ineffective leader who seems to have no command of his top warriors.

Chapter 19 ended with the hint of civil war in the land. Chapter 20 sees that division beginning to be set in motion by a worthless man named Sheba. The books of Samuel have been punctuated by worthless men along the way including Eli's sons and Nabal. Sheba fits right in as he leads many away from following their king. David calls Amasa into service, but Amasa is unable to get the job done in time. Remember that Amasa was Absalom's general whom David promoted over Joab after Absalom's death in order to win favor with the northern tribes who are starting to rebel. David now turns to Joab's brother Abishai for help. Abishai and Joab often fought together in battle. Should David be surprised that the power-grabbing Joab so quickly re-enters the story? In a move that reminds us of Ehud assassinating the fat king Eglon back in Judges 3, Joab hides a sword in order to kill his rival Amasa. Many wicked men have been willing to kill for power, and Joab is no different. He does eventually yield to the wisdom of this wise woman in Abel. With his competition dead, Joab is back in command of Israel's army and seems to be in command of Israel's king. The nation may not be fully divided but it's hardly united. Will David ever be able to control his general?

2 Samuel 21–24 serves as an epilogue to the book. The chronological action of David's reign ends here. It will be picked up in 1 Kings, but think about how far we've come in God's big story here in the books of Samuel. The two-volume book began with no king in Israel and everyone doing what was right in their own eyes. The book ends with a king on the throne, a king who has had some glorious victories but also scandalous sin that has ripped apart his family and is ripping apart the nation. Israel needs a king greater than David. How many sins portrayed in the books of Samuel do you see in your own heart? Are you still progressing in the Christian life? Turn to the greater David for victory over sin.

How do you evaluate the long reign of David? The narrator of Samuel has given us the final four chapters to help flesh out the complicated picture. At the heart of the section you have poetry reflecting the man after God's own heart. On the outer edges of the epilogue you have darker scenes, with today's reading being perhaps the darkest. Even after diligent study, we still have questions about what we read in 2 Samuel 21:1–14.

We don't know when this event falls in the chronology of David's reign, but a three year famine has certainly caught the attention of the king and his people. Unlike Saul before him, David knows what to do—he prays. Without the clear revelation of God, David (nor the reader) would have any understanding of how to interpret the situation. God's Word guides us to correctly understand reality.

The Bible does not tell us when Saul murdered a group of Gibeonites, but Yahweh tells David that this sin from years ago is bringing consequences upon the people today. You may remember the Gibeonites from Joshua 9. They made a covenant with Joshua and the nation by pretending to be from far away when they were actually nearby enemies. Joshua honored the covenant. Saul dishonored the covenant. It's up to David to honor the covenant again. The Gibeonites are allowed to name the appropriate restitution from this sin of years gone by. Verses 4 and 5 seem to suggest that money or land would have been sufficient, but the Gibeonites harshly demand blood. They say they want to hang the men before Yahweh, but they misunderstand the character of God. The death of these sons of Saul will not appease God in the sense that he will now be happy and end the famine. The Gibeonites talk about hanging the seven men before Yahweh, but they don't know God's Word well enough to know they shouldn't be left hanging overnight. They should have been buried, and yet their bodies are left exposed for days. God does end the famine and send rain, but we shouldn't assume that God was submitting to a pagan idea of justice. God responds to the prayers for the land after David's honorable actions, not after the Gibeonites' dishonorable demand. The multiple scenes of war in the rest of the chapter show that God is still with David in a way that he wasn't with Saul.

While we still have questions about the text, this much is clear: Saul had broken the covenant. David is faithful towards the covenant. Saul's sin impacted the nation for years to come, but God faithfully responded to the faithfulness of his people.

## *Wednesday, June 10*

Read: 1 Chronicles 21; Psalm 27

As we've already noticed, the epilogue of 2 Samuel 21–24 is bracketed by negative scenes in David's life. 1 Chronicles 21 is a parallel passage with 2 Samuel 24. Comparing them causes us to wrestle with big questions about God. 1 Chronicles 21 tells us that Satan stood up against Israel, but 2 Samuel 24:1 tells us that God incited David against Israel. What is going on? Is God causing David to sin? Is God using Satan for his own purposes?

2 Samuel 24:1 sheds more light on the matter when it says, "Again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel." How did God often bring punishment upon Israel when they sinned? By using adversary nations as his instrument of punishment against them. The Chronicles passage suggests that there was an adversary involved, but perhaps it was The Adversary. You may remember that the Hebrew word "satan" means adversary. So, whether God sovereignly is using an adversarial enemy nation generally against Israel or is using the individual Satan specifically, God is using this entire matter as a test and eventually a judgment upon David.

For modern readers living in a nation that regularly takes a census of the people, David's action may not seem noteworthy. When considering that he is preparing for war against an adversary, his actions might make perfect human sense. But as we see in the text, that's not the whole story. David's census is not merely wise war planning. David seems to be pridefully drawing strength from military might and not from Yahweh. Both accounts stress that even Joab recognizes this census is a bad idea! It was abominable to Joab and displeasing to God. Eventually David recognizes his own sin and repents to God. The Lord allows David to choose his own judgment, and the king entrusts himself to the faithful God instead of unfaithful people.

In a dramatic scene, after 70,000 people have died, the angel of Yahweh is about to destroy the city of Jerusalem when suddenly God demands the destroying angel to halt destruction. As David sees this angel suspended between heaven and earth, he intercedes for the people and pleads to take the sins of the people upon himself. It later becomes clear in 2 Chronicles 3:1 that this is the exact location of Mount Moriah where Abraham had prepared to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It will soon become the location of Solomon's temple. While David can't take the sins of the people on himself, the day will soon come when the greater David will hang between heaven and earth near this very site as he alone makes the perfect sacrifice taking our sins upon himself.

RAMAH MONTHLY

God's promises are trustworthy and true, even when we're not sure how things will all come together. The Lord had promised David through Nathan the prophet that one of David's sons would be raised up to the throne that would last forever. This promise did not pass away even after David's grievous sin with Bathsheba. This promise did not pass away even after all of the bloodshed that has ripped apart David's family throughout the last portion of 2 Samuel. God's promise still stands, but the reader has to wonder how it will all come together.

The scene begins with aged David being so feeble and cold that he needs a young virgin to provide body heat to keep him warm. Whichever son of David takes the throne, it doesn't seem likely that the king is going to be to give much guidance to the process. Enter Adonijah. He seems to be the oldest living son of David which makes him the natural candidate for the job. Like big brother Absalom before him, Adonijah begins to make preparations to present him as the new king. He also seems to have all of the warning signs that also marked his rebellious, now deceased, brother. Adonijah is even picking up key supporters in Joab and Abiathar the priest.

On the other side of the story stands another remarkable group. Bathsheba is no longer known as the wife of Uriah (which would be a reminder of her sin) but is noted as the mother of Solomon. She has taken a place of honor in the household. There stands Nathan the prophet, whom the Lord used to bring David to his knees in repentance. And there is Solomon himself, waiting in the wings to be king. Both Bathsheba and Nathan inform David of Adonijah's actions and how they threaten David's promise that Solomon would be king. David is a shell of the man he once was, but he still clings to the promises of God. He gives them just the right plan to overcome Adonijah's attempted coup, and it works. Solomon is made king! Everyone hears the news, even the people at Adonijah's coronation party. They recognize Solomon's authority and abandon the half-brother of the new king. Trying to protect his own life, Adonijah seeks sanctuary at the altar, but Solomon is gracious, giving him an opportunity to cease his rebellion and live as a worthy subject.

Adonijah is not a worthy example in his rebellion. Yet, we can emulate Adonijah in this way: take hold of the true altar, the greater temple, the greater Solomon—Jesus Christ. Through King Jesus we can know the peace that King Solomon could only point towards.

## *Friday, June 12*

Read: 1 Kings 2; Proverbs 14

What advice could a father give his son on his deathbed? What advice would a king give his son, the new king, on his deathbed? David charges Solomon to be strong and manly, that is, to keep the Word of Yahweh. David knows the promises of God are trustworthy and he exhorts his son to walk in sincere faithfulness before the Lord. That is the preeminent counsel David gives, and it is good counsel for any daughter or son. But David also gives Solomon some practical advice on how to establish the throne and avoid any challenges, particularly from those who challenged David during his reign. The rogue warrior Joab must be dealt with. The cursing Shimei must be dealt with as well. Loyal Barzillai must be treated loyally. With these instructions delivered, David goes the way of all the earth. After 40 years on the throne, he dies.

Challenges to the throne quickly come to Solomon. Adonijah sneakily tries to reclaim the throne once again. Going to Solomon's mother Bathsheba, Adonijah seems to be asking for help in securing a bride. He is actually trying to use the young woman Abishag as a pawn in his battle for the throne. As we saw with Absalom in 2 Samuel 16:20–22, to take possession of a member of the king's harem is a wicked attempt to claim the throne for yourself. Bathsheba may not have recognized Adonijah's betrayal, but Solomon certainly does. He sees right through the ploy and ensures that Adonijah will die for his rebellion just like Absalom before him. As for the priest who supported Adonijah, Solomon spares his life but fulfills God's will that the house of Eli would no longer be allowed to serve in the priesthood. Then there's Joab. Joab attempts to seek sanctuary at the altar like Adonijah had, but Joab isn't leaving the altar. God provided refuge at the altar for the accidental offender (see Exodus 21:14) but that certainly doesn't describe Joab. Joab may underestimate Solomon, but the king sees that justice prevails. Joab is slain upon the altar and buried. For the final foe Shimei, wise Solomon gives him an opportunity to live essentially under house arrest. When Shimei can't live up to those terms, he too is executed.

The kingdom is firmly established in the hands of Solomon. His father had often faced challenges to the throne, but Solomon avoids that. The Lord has raised up Solomon and is bringing about a throne that will last forever. The Lord has also executed justice, even to those who thought they had escaped the justice of Yahweh. Neither will we escape his judgment if we reject the one greater than Solomon.

King David has died, and King Solomon has established his kingdom. Long live the king! But what kind of king will Solomon be? Yahweh promised David that from his seed would come a kingdom that will never end. Is Solomon the promised seed or is he part of God's plan to move his grand narrative forward?

As we continue in God's big story, our readings will sometimes alternate between the books of Kings and Chronicles. You may have wondered why God gave us both books since there seems to be much repetition between them. They are placed alongside one another in our English Bibles which increases our idea that one must be unnecessary, but they come from two different eras in Israel's history. Chronicles was composed later in Israel's history after the time known as "the exile." Don't worry, we'll get there in the story. The Chronicler (possibly Ezra) is helping that generation of Jews to see their history in light of everything that has happened to them. If God's covenant with David is so important, how did the nation wind up being taken out of the land as punishment? The Chronicler is writing from a positive, encouraging perspective to help that new generation press on in faithfulness. He doesn't gloss over Israel's sin or the sins of individual kings, but he is writing from a mostly positive perspective. Understanding this bit of background will help foster an appreciation for the oft-neglected book of Chronicles.

Just as his father David prioritized biblical worship, so does Solomon. From his deathbed David had told his son to walk in the ways of Yahweh, and now Solomon is leading the people to renew their worship of God according to God's commands. David had brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, but the tent of meeting was still in Gibeon. The new king worships Yahweh there at Gibeon. That very night God appears to Solomon and invites him to make a request of the Lord. David had emphasized to Solomon that he would need wisdom in his service as king, and Solomon heard the message loud and clear. He asks the Lord for wisdom, but God responds by saying that Solomon will be blessed with wisdom and much more. As the rest of the chapter begins to picture, God will bless Solomon with much material wealth along with great wisdom. We shouldn't expect that the Lord will bless us in the same way he blessed Solomon, but yet we can also seek wisdom:

*But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

James 1:5 (LSB)

## *Tuesday, June 16*

Read: 2 Chronicles 3–5

When was the last time you read the blueprint for a building? Perhaps the home inventory on an insurance policy? Construction passages are the type of thing we try to avoid in our Bible reading, and yet God has given us so many texts about the construction of structures for his worship. It's almost like worship really matters to God.

David desired to build a house of worship for Yahweh, but God told him that his son would be the one to complete that task. Solomon is still new to the throne, but he prioritizes the worship of God. He begins a seven and a half year building project to construct the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on the very threshing floor that David had bought from Ornan the Jebusite. Much of the temple imagery is also Garden of Eden imagery. The Creator is still moving us forward in the same story, God's big story.

The Chronicler actually doesn't tell us every building detail that he could have told us. He moves quickly to the Holy Place and then into the Holy of Holies. The Chronicler is focused on the very heart of worship, where sacrifices will be made to point forward to the one mediator between God and man—the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). The veil that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (the Holy of Holies) is a shadow of the day when Christ will be the perfect sacrifice upon the cross and the curtain will be torn in two from top to bottom. In fact, everything about the temple is ultimately pointing forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of God who became flesh and tabernacled among us (John 1:14).

After moving rather quickly through the layout of the temple, the Chronicler slows down for the dedication ceremony of the temple. This is a worship service to remember, but before the service can begin everyone and everything must be in its place. Solomon assembles the leaders of the nation to oversee the movement of the ark of the covenant into the temple. The proper priests handle the ark according to God's instructions. A countless number of sheep and oxen are being sacrificed in worship to the Lord. The ark containing only the Ten Commandments is put into its proper place in the Holy of Holies. The singers begin to lift their voices in praise to God and his glory fills the temple in response to their worship. The dedication service is not over, but let us pause and reflect on the glory and goodness of God. The temple is only a foretaste. Jesus is far greater, and heaven will be far sweeter.

We continue worshipping in the service of dedication for the temple by Solomon and the people. The people draw near to God through the atonement he has commanded, God accepts the sacrifice, and they commune with him. This is the heart of true worship through Christ.

Solomon recognizes this has been one long story, going back at least to Egypt. Yahweh appeared in thick darkness in a cloud at Mount Sinai but now he will dwell among his people in the temple of Jerusalem. Solomon blesses the people by blessing the Lord who has kept every single promise. He has been with his people since Egypt and has not abandoned them. Even though David desired a noble thing in building the temple, God promised that Solomon would do it. God has kept his promises.

The sovereign king of Israel Solomon humbly bows before the sovereign king of all things, and he prays. When Solomon prays, his prayer is rooted in the covenant (or promise) of God. Solomon knows the character of God and prays accordingly. How can we pray this way? By knowing the character of God through the Word of God. We can pray all sorts of prayers in all sorts of circumstances (1 Tim 2:1–7) in much the same way Solomon does. Whether in the face of crime, attack, drought, famine, war, or sin (6:22–39), we can pray to the God whom heaven and earth can't contain (6:18). Chapter 6 ends with a plea for God to remember his covenant love to his people as represented in David, the servant of God. Remember that the Chronicler is telling all of these events to a much later generation than Solomon's generation. This is not the newspaper reporting yesterday's events, but a history book reporting the previous four centuries' events. This account is to encourage the people coming out of exile that God has not forgotten his covenant and he has not forgotten them. This ought to encourage us, too, for God has not changed.

A quick reading of the rest of chapter 7 might make us think that God's answer to Solomon's prayer was immediate. Verse 11 actually tips us off that much time actually passes. God appears to Solomon at night many years later just like he appeared at night at the beginning of his reign. God has heard the prayer that Solomon offered so many years before. Like the people coming out of exile, we might sometimes wonder if God hears our prayers, prayers that we offered so long ago. But the Chronicler is teaching us through Solomon that God indeed hears and answers prayers, on his own time table according to his perfect will.

## Thursday, June 18

Read: 1 Kings 10–11

When Solomon began his reign, he asked Yahweh for wisdom. The Lord said that he would indeed give Solomon wisdom, but also riches, honor, and glory. Both wisdom and wealth have been on display in our readings, but they seem to crescendo in 1 Kings 10. We're told of Solomon's great wealth—gold was overflowing and silver was so plentiful that it became common. The king's ivory throne overlaid with gold is flanked by symbols of authority—a dozen statues of lions. Solomon's economy is booming with worldwide commerce flowing through the land. People seem to be coming from the ends of the earth to honor Solomon and to seek his counsel. One Gentile woman in particular is spotlighted: the queen of Sheba. His reputation has reached her ears, and she comes to test him with hard questions. Riddles that would have stumped an ordinary man are no match for this wise king. The sights and sounds and tastes of the kingdom combined with the wisdom of the king leave this foreign queen speechless. The Queen of Sheba recognizes the blessings of Solomon, and she in turn blesses the God of Solomon. She praises Yahweh. Jesus mentions the queen in Matthew 12:42 and indicates that she truly converted to the one, true, and living God. How blessed is Solomon!

All of this makes Solomon's downfall all the more tragic. Notice the somber words of 11:1: "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women." In 3:3 it was said that Solomon loved God. Now his love has changed. As we have watched his wealth and wisdom, we might have wondered about potential red flags along the way. Was the king actually piling up gold and horses and chariots in a way that would bring indictment from Deuteronomy 17:17? Those questions are fully answered in chapter 11. The gavel of condemnation falls in verse 3: his many wives turned his heart away. That's all you need to know, but then more details follow. His heart was not fully devoted to Yahweh. He did not follow Yahweh fully. Solomon is not like his father. Solomon's great gifting does not excuse his great sins. Just as God tore the kingdom from Saul (remember Samuel visually tearing Saul's robe), now God will tear the kingdom from Solomon. However, for the sake of God's promise to David, one tribe will remain under the leadership of Solomon's son. The kingdom will remain united in Solomon's lifetime, but the kingdom is on borrowed time. It will soon divide. The enemies in the rest of the chapter make that plain. Solomon soon sleeps in the grave and his reign is over, but God's promises are alive and well.

The Lord has declared what is about to take place in the kingdom of Israel; we watch the events unfold in 1 Kings 12–13. Jeroboam had been told by a prophet that the nation would be divided, and he would rule over 10 tribes. The soon-to-be king decided to wait in Egypt until Solomon actually died, but now is pleading for mercy before Solomon's son Rehoboam. Rehoboam's name means "one who enlarges the people" but he will sadly divide the people. We learn just how harsh things had been under Solomon's reign, but Rehoboam refuses the counsel of older, wiser, mature men and joins in the folly of younger men who direct him to be even harsher than Solomon. Rehoboam sounds a lot like Pharaoh in Egypt. He plans to increase the burden of the people, but they rebel and the nation divides. Only the tribe of Judah will unite behind the son of Solomon. Lest we think this is just incredibly poor statesmanship by Rehoboam, the text makes plain that Yahweh is bringing all of this about just as he had promised through the prophet Ahijah.

We will follow both the northern and southern kingdoms and their kings throughout the narrative. At times we will need to study hard to keep everyone straight and understand what is taking place. The ESV Study Bible is helpful in showing us what is going on in the Jeroboam story: "As Moses once led his people out from slavery under the Egyptian pharaoh, so Jeroboam now leads Israel out from 'slavery' under the house of David; but 'Jeroboam as Moses' is soon transformed into 'Jeroboam as Aaron' as he fashions golden calves for Israel to worship." Jeroboam knows that if he allows people to continue worshiping in Jerusalem, they will eventually desire to reunite with the tribe of Judah. He creates an alternate worship experience that is eerily similar to Aaron's golden calf. Jeroboam says he wants the people to continue worshiping the God who brought them out of Egypt, that is, Yahweh. But Jeroboam is introducing false worship because it's against the commands of Yahweh.

The unnamed prophet from Judah in chapter 13 announces God's judgment on these idolatrous golden calves. King Josiah will indeed one day tear down Jeroboam's high places. The prophet maintains his integrity before King Jeroboam but is tempted by a lying old prophet from Bethel. The same command the prophet quoted to Jeroboam should have been quoted to the lying prophet. Because God judged the disobedient unnamed prophet, God will certainly also judge Jeroboam and his false worship. But Jeroboam did not listen and increased the sin of the people, sin that will soon be judged.

## *Monday, June 22*

Read: Proverbs 16–18

Proverbs can be convicting and challenging. Some seem hard to understand while others may be easy to understand but hard to put into practice. As we've seen before, the first nine chapters of the book of Proverbs were generally longer sections, but the remainder of the book is noticeably marked by a variety of shorter proverbs. Sometimes themes can be noticed in larger sections. You might notice many proverbs related to relationships and family in chapters 17 and 18, while chapter 16 repeatedly emphasizes God's sovereignty over all things. Since we've been reading Psalms and Proverbs alongside our reading of the grand narrative of Scripture, it's easy to notice how many proverbs can be illustrated by some of our recent readings.

Proverbs 16:3 (“Commit your works to Yahweh, and your plans will be established.”) reminds us of David's trusting the Lord while fleeing Saul and waiting to become king. He often had the opportunity to seize the throne by harming Saul, but he refused and instead committed his works to Yahweh. Does not Proverbs 16:4 (“Yahweh has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”) remind us of so many characters in recent readings? What about Ahithophel, Absalom, and Jeroboam? “For Yahweh had ordained to thwart the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that Yahweh might bring calamity on Absalom” (2 Sam 17:14b). Jeroboam “did not listen to the people; for it was a turn of events from Yahweh, that He might establish His word” (1 Kgs 12:15). God is sovereign over all, good and bad. Similarly, Saul, Absalom, and Rehoboam quickly come to mind when reading Proverbs 16:5, “Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh; assuredly, he will not be unpunished.” It's not that the meaning of the proverb is found in the lives of these men. We study proverbs in their context according to their genre just like we do any other part of Scripture. However, reading the proverbs parallel with our narrative reading certainly illustrates many proverbs in a memorable way. Proverbs 16:12 will play out in the text time and again throughout Kings and Chronicles: “It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for in righteousness a throne is established.”

Solomon penned many of these proverbs. He was a man marked by God-given wisdom, yet how often did Solomon ultimately fail to heed his own advice? Let us hide God's wisdom deeply in our hearts, and pray for his strength that we wouldn't sin.

What do you do when you let over eighty percent of your kingdom slip away? Try to get it back! Rehoboam is the first king of Judah in this new era of the divided kingdom. He is going to model many things, both good and bad, that we will see repeated in the text in future readings. Our passage begins with Rehoboam trying to reunite the kingdom by force. He first prepares to fight the northern kingdom back into submission with the might of his own army. The Lord sends a prophet to make plain: do not attempt to reunite the kingdom. It is God's will for the kingdom to be divided.

Plan B for Rehoboam is to fortify many cities. He also benefits from the many Levites and priests from across the northern kingdom move to Jerusalem. They have been rejected by Jeroboam (who has set up his own priests) and desire to remain faithful to Yahweh. For three years the king and the kingdom of Judah enjoy the blessings of God because of their obedience to walk faithfully like David and Solomon. The family tree of Rehoboam reflects his shrewdness (but not godliness) in planning for future succession. All of the blessings Rehoboam enjoyed in the beginning of his reign could not make up for the unfaithfulness that began in the fourth year of his reign. By year five, Yahweh judged their unfaithfulness by the hand of Shishak of Egypt. It seems we're reverting to the era of the judges: the people sin, God judges them through an enemy nation, the people repent and cry out to the Lord, he delivers them, and eventually the cycle starts over. When the Lord sees the people humble themselves, he announces he will not destroy them but he will teach them a lesson. The reversion to the judges became a reverse exodus as the nation of Judah becomes slaves to Egypt.

Shishak lets the people live but he completely plunders Jerusalem including the palace and the temple. All of Solomon's wealth—gone. All the extraordinary material blessings of God poured out on Solomon's life are removed in one generation. What a reminder of how much we lose when we are unfaithful to the Lord.

The Chronicler emphasizes the repentance of Rehoboam. When he repented, the Lord showed mercy. The original audience needed to be reminded of that lesson, and so do we. The final assessment of Solomon's son is found in 12:14: Rehoboam was evil because he did not set his heart to seek Yahweh. Where is your heart set today? Are you seeking the Lord?

## *Wednesday, June 24*

Read: 1 Kings 15–16; Proverbs 20

Israel's history seems to be moving at a breathtaking pace. We read two entire books devoted to the first two kings. Solomon received nearly a dozen chapters. The writer of Kings is picking up the pace to cover many kings in short amounts of space. The picture in the Southern Kingdom is bleak with only a few good kings. The picture in the Northern Kingdom is entirely dark with only evil kings. The narrator shifts back and forth between the kingdoms as history progresses, but the question will typically be: how much is this king like David?

Jeroboam's son is wicked just like his father, but there's one bright spot in Jerusalem: Asa. For the sake of his covenant with David, God raises up Abijam's son Asa who is faithful like his great–great grandfather. Asa tears down much (but not all) of the false worship in the land, even when it impacts his own mother. Asa reigned forty–one years in Judah, and his overall good reign was also marked by ongoing war with the Northern Kingdom.

The narrator shifts the focus back to the wicked kings in the Northern Kingdom. The rest of chapters 15 and 16 describe the increasing wickedness in the kings of Israel. We've seen how God will still bless the Southern Kingdom when the kings are faithful and for the sake of his promise to David. The rest of our reading shows just how dark things can become when the kings reject the Lord. Jeroboam's son Nadab and his evil reign are brought to an end by the murder that had been prophesied by the prophet Ahijah in chapter 14. Jeroboam's house is over. The new king of Israel (remember that's just referring to the Northern Kingdom right now) is Baasha, but he and his son Elah are wicked like the previous dynasty of Jeroboam. Their family reign does not last long when Zimri conspires against Elah and murders him. When a king is overthrown their family is always destroyed. Zimri does to the house of Baasha what Baasha had done to the house of Jeroboam. It sure feels like the story is going backwards. There's a king in Israel, but everyone is still doing what is right in their own eyes.

The kingdom Zimri certainly dreamed of does not last long. He is king for a week before civil war breaks out with Omri eventually emerging victorious. History suggests that Omri's reign was quite influential in the world, but the author emphasizes only this: Omri and his son Ahab were more wicked than anyone before them. They bring Baal worship into the land! Jericho is rebuilt on his watch! Israel is reverting back to Canaan!

We remember at the end of the era of the Judges when Samuel was being raised up, we were told that the word of God was rare in those days (1 Sam 3:1). Throughout much of the era of the judges until the Lord sent Samuel, they didn't have any guidance or direction from God. It's a sign of judgment when God doesn't speak to his people, and the nation seems to be under that judgment again. Since David's kingdom was divided under his grandson Rehoboam, we haven't seen prophets sent to the kings of the Northern Kingdom in the way that prophets brought the word of God to Saul, David, and Solomon. That is, until Elijah. Elijah brings the word of the Lord.

In the days when the worship of Baal is being actively promoted by the wicked kings of the north, God sends the prophet Elijah to confront this false worship. Elijah's name means "Yahweh is God," and he will demonstrate that truth in a variety of ways throughout his ministry in the days of wicked King Ahab. The Canaanites (and now the Israelites thanks to Ahab) believed that Baal was the god of rain and fertility. He was only one of many gods that affected their livelihood, but they believed Baal in particular brought rain. Here comes Elijah announcing that Yahweh, the only God, is the one who controls rain, and he says that God will stop the rain. Baal will be unable to do anything about it, but God provides for his servant Elijah. The Lord provides for this new prophet like Moses in the same way he provided after the escape from Egypt. God not only provides miraculous portions of bread and meat in the middle of a drought, but Yahweh uses a faithful widow to provide according to his word.

Yahweh is not only the only one who controls the rains, but he is also the giver of life. Baal was supposedly able to give life, but Elijah confronts that lie. This same widow's son lays dying, and she knows that ultimately God is in control of that. She assumes it's a sign of God's judgment on her sin, but Elijah intercedes for her simply on the fact that Yahweh is the only one who can truly give life. God hears and answers Elijah's prayer. He is victorious. Not Baal.

Elijah's confrontation with the pagan religion that Ahab has brought into the land is not over, but it's already clear what the outcome will be. Yahweh is God, and Elijah keeps pointing to that truth. He also points us to Christ, the one who multiplies food and raises the dead. In a world full of Baals, cling to Christ.

## *Friday, June 26*

Read: 1 Kings 18

The drought in Samaria (the northern kingdom of Israel) has gone on for three years, but it's about to end thanks to the prayers of Elijah (see James 5:17). The question for the people will be who caused the drought to end. Baal or Yahweh? 1 Kings 18 makes the answer abundantly clear.

Before facing Ahab, Elijah first runs into Obadiah. He is not the minor prophet, but he is a key figure on Ahab's staff. Obadiah also happens to be faithful to Yahweh and puts his faith into action. Sadly, like many of us, Obadiah is also fearful and prone to compromise. He is afraid to proclaim the truth about Yahweh to Ahab. This whole chapter should strengthen us to not be fearful like Obadiah.

Ahab and Elijah finally meet. The king mistakenly thinks that the prophet is the one who has caused all this trouble in Israel, but Elijah knows that it is Ahab's sin that has caused the problems in the land. Achan had troubled Israel in the past (Josh 6–7). Ahab is the new Achan, the real troubler of Israel and this will be proven just as publicly as was Achan's sin. Elijah challenges Ahab and his chosen idol Baal. The site of the showdown will be Mount Carmel, a mountain range on the border between Israel and Jezebel's native land of Phoenicia. Supported by 850 prophets, Baal will have the home field advantage.

Elijah challenges his generation much like Joshua in his own day (Josh 24:15): how long will Israel waver between two opinions? These Jewish men who have made themselves priests of Baal are still keeping an eye on Yahweh. Maybe he is the true God after all. Elijah's test will make the answer plain. He gives Ahab's team every possible advantage. If only Baal would answer. The many prophets try to get his attention, but of course he is not there to hear. For hours they call out in prayer, they fervently dance, even cutting themselves in an effort to get their god's attention so that he will come down to them. Let this be a reminder to Christians that biblical worship is not about frantically calling God down to us. We don't have to get his attention or stir ourselves up emotionally in order to encounter him. Instead look to Elijah's example. He simply prays, and God hears and answers that prayer. God consumes the sacrifice and the entire altar itself. Everyone plainly sees that only Yahweh is God.

The drought may be over but the battle with Ahab is not. The battle against sin and the devil rages on. Let us pray like Elijah, for the Lord is God.



# *Weekly Calendar at Ramah*

## **Sundays:**

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.

Worship Service: 11:00 a.m.

Equipping the Saints: 5:00 p.m.

## **Wednesdays:**

Coffee and Fellowship: 5:45 p.m.

Prayer Meeting: 6:00 p.m.



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