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2 Samuel: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

2 Samuel chapter 1 begins after David returns to Ziklag after recovering the captives from the Amalekites. He has won a stunning victory, strengthened his reputation among his men, and won greater favour in Judah through his generous gifts. On the third day, however, news of Saul and Israel's catastrophic defeat arrives.

As I've previously noted, three-day periods occur on a few key occasions at the end of 1 Samuel, representing critical transitions. The man bringing the news declares that he played a part in Saul's death. This conflicts with the description of Saul's death back in 1 Samuel chapter 31.

While there are elaborate ways of harmonising the accounts, the most natural reading is probably to say that the man lied, hoping to get some reward from David for his part in killing Saul and bringing the crown and the armlet. While the Lord has clearly avenged David, David has scrupulously resisted taking vengeance into his own hands. Should David reward this man, who clearly expects to be rewarded for playing a part in Saul's death and for bringing him the crown and armlet, symbols of royalty, David's relationship to the death of Saul would become far less innocent, and the foundations and legitimacy of his own kingdom would become less clear.

By judging the man, David keeps his hands clean. The man turns out to be an Amalekite. The Amalekites, as we've seen elsewhere, are often those who pick off the weakest.

And here, we see an Amalekite acting as a scavenger, opportunistically picking clean the bones of the fallen. Saul had lost the kingdom on account of his taking spoil from the Amalekites, rather than destroying them, and there is some poetic justice in an Amalekite claiming to kill him and taking spoil from his body. David has just defeated the Amalekites who raided Ziklag, and now he strikes down another Amalekite, acting where Saul failed to.

However, at points like this, troubling concerns can surface. Saul and his house are cut off, while David's hands are kept clean, with convenient alibis, plausible deniability, and personal distance. Nevertheless, things really do work out so very conveniently for David.

David's response affirms the inviolability of the Lord's anointed, even while it is apparently to his benefit that Saul was struck down. Also, as the one to inherit the throne, the principle of the inviolability of the Lord's anointed, and resolute opposition to rebellion and regicide, increasingly plays to David's personal advantage. David's magnanimity to the house of Saul, and his mourning over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, are likely genuine and unfamed.

However, as Mashi HaBotal and Stephen Holmes perceptively highlight, the political expediency of such outcomes for David, coupled with the distance that David is able to maintain from them, and the posture of sorrow that he takes up relative to them, expose troubling realities about the character of politics more generally. For those whose lives are a public spectacle, like political leaders, it is almost impossible for moral behaviour not to have a tactical dimension. For instance, David not avenging himself on Nabal is moral, but it is also tactical, as avenging himself would make David into a very different sort of leader, a warlord with a vicious protection racket, whose legitimacy as a just king would always be questionable.

David also gets to have his cake and eat it too, in the situation with Nabal, and in this situation with Saul, as the Lord avenges him against his enemy on both occasions. The problem here is that when personal morality gets entangled with questions of reputation, political legitimacy and the like, with moral actions increasingly being expedient for cynical tactical reasons, action becomes a much, much murkier area, open to all sorts of mixed motives. While I really do not believe that we should regard David as acting as a mere cynical political operative, making a public spectacle of his non-involvement in, and his sorrowful response to the death of his adversary for political expediency, the essential in-clarity of David's motives should unsettle us at such moments, not least as they reveal the character that our good deeds take more generally when they are performed before men.

This is one reason why the realm of politics is viewed with an appropriate degree of moral suspicion, and why deep moral character is required to act faithfully within it. Even political operatives who, like David, are righteous men in their behaviour, are acting in a realm that can exert a corrosive effect upon true morality, something that I believe that we will see at points in David's life. It is very dangerous when morality becomes instrumentalised by concerns of power and status, as it so easily can in the realm of politics.

David's reaction to the news of the death of Saul may surprise some readers of 1 Samuel, in that book Saul had mercilessly pursued David and sought his life. Rather than rejoicing at Saul's comeuppance, or expressing relief at the removal of his adversary, David pours out his heart in lament over the loss of Israel's king. Within David's expression of distress over the death of Saul and Jonathan, some profound yet unappreciated truths about the character of political leadership is exposed.

David's song of lament is entitled The Song of the Bow. This suggests a particular emphasis upon the death of Jonathan, who is associated with the bow as a weapon both within the song, and within the narrative of Samuel more broadly. Indeed, as we look at the song more closely, this accent upon lamenting the death of Jonathan may be borne out in its structure and content.

The parallel between verse 19 and verse 25 might suggest that Jonathan is the glory, beauty or gazelle of Israel that David speaks of as slain upon the high places. Jonathan is the fleet-footed warrior, like Asahel in the chapter that follows. The swift gazelle leaping and skipping in the mountains appears as a romantic image for the beloved in the Song of Solomon, chapter 2, verses 8-9.

The voice of my beloved, behold he comes, leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle, or a young stag. The image of the gazelle reappears in chapter 2, verse 17, and also in the concluding lines of the song, in chapter 8, verse 14.

Jonathan is Israel's gazelle. He's the beloved of the people and their glory. His death robs Israel of its bridegroom and favourite son.

David is concerned that the deaths of Saul and Jonathan would be caused for rejoicing among the Philistines. He calls upon the land itself to mourn with him over the fallen Saul and Jonathan. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings.

Saul and Jonathan were like strong lions and swift eagles. They were jewels crowning Israel's mountains. The weapons of Saul and Jonathan, the bow, the sword and the shield, come to stand for Saul and Jonathan themselves.

Jonathan is the bow, and Saul is the sword and the fallen anointed shield, in verses 21 and 22. David's song concludes with the declaration that the weapons of war perished. Peter Lighthouse observes, the Lord's anointed king is the shield for his people.

Jonathan and Saul not only had weapons, but were weapons, but now they lie unused and useless on the heights of Gilboa. Sacrificial themes also play beneath the surface of the song. Jonathan and Saul offer up blood and fat, in verse 22, and they are slain on the high places.

Gilboa is called upon not to provide fields of offerings, in verse 21. Throughout the song, David refers to Saul and Jonathan in a way that presents them as romantic figures. Their physicality and virility are prominent throughout.

They are described as possessing the strength and speed of majestic animals, identified with the action of their weapons, and described as beloved and pleasant. While David wishes that the daughters of Philistia would not rejoice at Saul and Jonathan's demise, he calls upon the daughters of Israel to weep over Saul. Saul is like a father or a bridegroom to the daughters of Israel, who dresses them in the finest apparel.

David's personal grief at the death of his friend Jonathan overflows into a heart-wrenching declaration of the love between them. Jonathan, although the crown prince of Israel, had symbolically handed over his status to David. He had been loyal to David to the point of risking his life, and he had saved David from death.

Jonathan's love for David was remarkable. He had demonstrated a devotion to David far beyond any woman. David's song reveals some of the deep dynamics of political leadership.

The leadership described in his song is romantic and erotic. The relationship between the king and his son and their people is shot through with love and desire. Israel's beloved gazelle, Jonathan, has perished on the high places, and her daughters mourn the loss of the king who dressed them for marriage.

A land filled with the burgeoning life of awakened love now falls into the barrenness of mourning. Romantic and erotic themes are present throughout the narrative of Samuel and the early kingdom. Leaders are noted for their arresting physical appearance and by the desire and love that they provoke.

Saul is head and shoulders above all of the people. He's more handsome than any other in Israel. David is ruddy, bright-eyed, and good-looking.

Solomon's physical appearance is a prominent theme within his song. The king is the lover, the brigim, the husband of his people, a theme that is powerfully illustrated by the Song of Solomon. Around these figures cluster all of the ingredients of great romance.

Tales of daring do, the composition and playing of music, a fecundity of poetic imagery, and the affection and attention of young women. David and Solomon are the archetypal kings, not so much on account of military might or prowess, but because they are the great lovers of Israel. David's story is one of power gained through the winning of people's love.

Saul loved him, Jonathan loved him, the women of Israel loved him, Michael, Saul's daughter, loved him, all of Israel and Judah loved him. And that's just up to the end of chapter 18. David, whose name means beloved, is loved by God and expresses a deep love in return.

As Augustine once observed, it is the lover who sings. And David is the sweet singer of Israel. He's the one in whom Israel's devotion to the Lord bursts forth into the joy of song.

The friendship between David and Jonathan reflects David's gaining of power through love. The story of their love begins with the young David being taken from his father's house and brought into the house of Saul, much as a bride would be, and as Jonathan initiates a covenant with him. David's attractive appearance, his ruddy and bright eyed, is not the arresting masculinity of Saul's great stature and physique, but a softer, more feminine one.

However, after stripping himself of the garments that displayed his royal masculine status and giving them to David, Jonathan, who formerly distinguished himself as a man on the battlefield, stays at home, is paralleled with Michael, is cast as a mamma's boy, and becomes more and more dependent upon David in emotional and material ways. Meanwhile, the text goes out of its way to masculinize David, who goes out and fights in the most virile fashion, obtaining 200 foreskins from the Philistines. Yaron Peleg observes that the literary portrayal of David and Jonathan's relationship in gendered imagery serves the purpose of highlighting the political reversal whereby David is being established as the husband and father for the nation in Jonathan's place.

Within David's song of lament, we witness the romance and the eros of political leadership. This romantic political lament is not without modern parallel. Jackie Kennedy's appropriation of the line from the musical *Don't let it be forgot* that once there was a spot for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot, describes one such tragic modern political romance in a manner redolent of David's lament.

Though it often evades our analysis, contemporary politics is suffused with such eros and romance. The countless dollars expended on political advertising and the careful cultivation of image are designed not principally to inform the public, but to evoke their love and desire. We vote for our leaders not merely for their policies and competence, but for their charm, their charisma, their personal magnetism, their likability, their virility, attractiveness, and other such factors.

We attend to their physicality, to their personal presence, and to their image. Incumbencies can play out like love affairs with a honeymoon period, followed by a cooling of affections. The Book of Samuel's unembarrassed treatment of the dimensions of romance and eros in its account of political rule may provoke our enlightened judgment, leery as we can be of the superficiality of image-based politics.

We may appeal to the Lord's example of looking beyond the outward appearance, searching for virtues such as economic prudence, political intelligence, and the like. Yet the rest of the text of the Book suggests that in choosing a leader, God looked primarily for a fitting lover for his people, and that even though the appearance of such a person wasn't sufficient to fit them for rule, it wasn't unimportant either. Perhaps in our pretensions to a rationality that exceeds the eros of politics, we leave ourselves unprepared to reckon with its necessary presence, and hence more vulnerable to its vicissitudes.

Reflection upon the erotic politics of Samuel may prove helpful, alerting us to its continuing power and importance in our own day. A question to consider. The ambivalent character of morality in the realm of political spectacle, where moral actions can so easily be cynically instrumentalised for the sake of power, self-advancement, social standing, as they almost unavoidably play out in ways that shape and often build up people's reputations, is by no means exclusive to politics.

Nor, for that matter, is it something that people can easily opt out of. If people are within the realm of the spectacle, the character and the motivations of their actions, even if they are righteous, will be cast into a sort of shadow. What are some of the other contexts in our day where such dynamics can play out? How can we be on guard against them? Are there any ways in which we can resist them? In 2 Samuel chapter 2, David finally becomes king, if at first only the king of Judah.

The land is divided between Judah, over which David rules, and Gilead and the rest of Israel, over which Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, rules. Once again, the nation has fractured along familiar fault lines, anticipating the later division of the nation following the death of Solomon. David inquires of the Lord concerning what he should do.

This contrasts with Saul's failure to ask the Lord what he ought to do. The verb go up is important here. David is ascending back into the land.

He is ascending to Hebron, and then he is going to ascend to the throne. David and his men move into the territory of Hebron. Besides being a city of refuge and a sacred city, Hebron was an important site for Abraham and the patriarchs.

It was near the first parcel of land possessed in the Promised Land, as Abraham bought the cave and the field of Machpelah as a burial site. Later, Hebron was the territory given to and conquered by Caleb in Joshua chapter 14. It was a region possessed by giants, the

giants that had initially discouraged Israel from entering the land, but which Caleb faced with great courage.

Caleb was the representative of Judah among the tribes in the spying out of the land. He was a principal Judahite. It seems fitting that David would be associated with Caleb in the sight of his first possession in the land.

David is a Caleb-like character. He follows in the footsteps of the courageous and faithful warrior of Judah. Like Caleb, he was a giant killer and someone exhibiting the same bravery on the basis of God's promise.

He has also married the widow of Nabal the Calebite. Peter Lighthouse observes that David is established as king in three distinct stages. First, he is anointed as king-designate by Samuel in 1 Samuel chapter 16.

He is set apart as a leading warrior at this time through his defeat of Goliath. Second, he is anointed as king or chief of the house of Judah in this chapter. And finally, he becomes High King of Israel in chapter 5. Lighthouse compares this to the way in which Christ is exalted by stages.

He is anointed by the Spirit in his baptism. He is declared to be the Son of God in power in his resurrection and he is raised to the right hand of the Father in his ascension. Reading the story of David, we shall see many ways in which he prefigures Christ.

For instance, as one who gains power chiefly through love, David anticipates Christ, who does not just command the external obedience of his people but reigns in their hearts by his Spirit, fulfilling his law in them by love. David once again shows magnanimity in his treatment of those loyal to Saul. He does not seek to destroy or eye with suspicion the supporters of Saul, such as the men of Jabesh Gilead.

He recognises and praises the steadfast love and faithfulness that they showed to Saul and declares that he will do good to them on account of their loyalty. He presents himself not as an opponent to Saul, desiring to wipe out Saul's supporters and dynasty, but as a fitting and generous successor who admires and rewards the virtues of loyal Israelites, even when those loyalties would not naturally move towards him. Abner, the commander of Saul's army, sets up Ish-bosheth as king.

The suggestion might be that Abner was the true power behind the throne, and as we read on in the story, that seems to have been the case. The establishment of Ish-bosheth as king occurs when Ish-bosheth was 40 years old and he reigns over Israel for two years. However, David is king over Judah and Hebron for seven years and six months.

How do we reconcile these details? It seems most likely to me that after the loss at the battle of Gilboa, much of Israel's territory was under Philistine domination again. Ish-bosheth's kingdom was a rump kingdom, established in Mahanaim, in the region of the

Transjordan. Outside of Judah, the promised land itself was not securely controlled by Israel at this time.

It was not unlikely that it took about five years to establish this rump kingdom to start to re-establish some of the kingdoms. This should also give some sense of the bad condition that Israel was in at this point in its history. Abner and Joab, the respective commanders of the armies of the two kingdoms, both meet at Gibeon.

It's an important city of the Gibeonites in the tribal land of Benjamin, presumably within the region of Ish-bosheth's kingdom. We aren't told how conflict between the two kingdoms emerged. Perhaps Abner was seeking to establish Ish-bosheth's kingdom in the city of Gibeon, which was described as a great city, like one of the royal cities back in Joshua chapter 10.

It is about five miles northwest of Jerusalem. Another possibility is that David was making overtures to the Gibeonites. Perhaps he was seeking to persuade them to leave Saul and join him, as we see later on in the book.

In chapter 21, Saul had killed many of the Gibeonites, who should have been protected. So they would be a weak point in the kingdom of Ish-bosheth. Another possibility for David's going out that some have suggested is that David was a vassal of the Philistines at this point, and that that might have been one of his responsibilities, to ensure that no other power got established in the surrounding region.

Joab and Abner set up ritual combat, a contest in which a number of chosen warriors were to fight in representative combat. There were 12 on each side. Perhaps the intention was that the Lord would determine the side that would represent all Israel.

It isn't entirely clear what happened, whether there was treachery or breaking of the rules involved, or anything of that kind. However, the contest proved indecisive and the two armies ended up fighting directly, with Abner's forces being beaten by David's men. This symbolic or representative conflict did not give an auspicious sign.

All of the parties died. The three sons of Zeruiah, Joab, Abishai and Asahel, are involved in the fighting. Abishai was already introduced to us back in 1 Samuel chapter 26 as Joab's brother, and the one who accompanied David in his daring escapade in Saul's camp.

Here Joab and Asahel are first presented to us in person in the narrative. Joab will be one of the most important characters in the entire book of 2 Samuel. These are the sons of David's sister, Zeruiah, as we discover in 1 Chronicles chapter 2. Asahel stubbornly pursues Abner, even when Abner tries to discourage him.

It seems that Abner knew that Asahel would overtake him if he continued, but also that Asahel wouldn't stand much of a chance in fighting him. Abner's concern seems to be

that he knows Joab is a vicious and vengeful man. If he kills Asahel, the hope of de-escalation of the conflict would be considerably diminished.

What might merely have been a relatively minor skirmish could blow up into something a very great deal bigger. If this became personal for Joab, all of the people could suffer as a result. Asahel does not end his pursuit though, and he is slain by Abner, with the presumably sharpened butt end of his spear.

Abner is still pursued by Asahel's two brothers, Joab and Abishai. Abner's men, people of Benjamin, gather around him and he addresses Joab from the top of a hill. Abner wants to ensure that things don't escalate further, and he calls Joab and Abishai to give up their pursuit.

The ritual combat had completely devoured 12 sets of brothers by the sword, a very bad sign of what full blown war would entail for Israel. Abner seeks to prevent this, and manages to persuade Joab to stand down. Both return to where they had come from.

A question to consider. Abner is presented to us as a man alert to the ways that levels of conflict can be increased through the dynamics of vengeance, and attentive to the ways in which even armed conflict can be de-escalated or controlled. This is an example of what peacemaking can actually look like in practice.

What are some other tactics by which conflicts can be more effectively contained or de-escalated when they occur? What are some ways that we can deploy these tactics in our lives and relationships? In 2 Samuel chapter 3 we read of the continuing war between the house of Saul and the house of David. This war had gotten off to a bitter start when Abner had killed Asahel the brother of Joab, leaving Joab the commander of David's men, with a personal vendetta against the commander of Ishbatheth's men. We also see that David is starting to make political alliances through marriage.

Forging alliances through marriage was a great temptation for the king, and it's one of the reasons it was forbidden in Deuteronomy chapter 17. It was also a more general temptation for Israel within the land to intermarry in order to make their position more secure. By marrying women from important regions and families, David is getting traction in his struggle against Saul.

We might think of this as one of the fronts on which the war is being fought. For instance, marrying Meaca the daughter of Talmi king of Geshur might have given David some advantage within the region of the Transjordan, where Ishbatheth's kingdom was primarily based. However, in the long term, having many wives with many sons from the different wives proved to be a recipe for conflict.

David had a fractured family ripe for rivalry, something that became most pronounced when the question of succession became more prominent. Abner, who had been the

commander of the army of Saul, was the kingmaker. It was Abner who was the real power behind Ishbatheth's throne.

Ishbatheth was a weak man anyway, and the more that the house of Saul was at war with the house of David, the more powerful Abner became as the war leader. Abner, on account of his prominence and his power and his attachment with the house of Saul, probably could have become the king himself had he wanted to. Perhaps recognizing the potential power of Abner, Ishbatheth makes a false accusation against him.

We're never told whether it's true or not, but Ishbatheth accuses Abner of taking his father's concubine. Why would this matter? The new king inherited the harem of his predecessor. It was one of the signs of his power.

In 2 Samuel chapter 12 verse 8, we read of David, I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your arms, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah. A person having relations with one of the king's concubines or wives was a matter of great concern. It was one of the ways in which usurpers and pretenders and others could make power plates.

We see examples of this in the story of Absalom, who slept with his father's concubines in the site of Israel. Another example is Adonijah, who after the death of his father David requested Abishag the Cunamite as his wife. Solomon recognized that he was really trying to make a move for the throne.

Whether or not Abner was guilty of what Ishbatheth accused him of, we might recognize God's sovereignty in causing a rift between the two men. A breach between these two men was very serious, because without the two of them, the kingdom was very weak. It was Ishbatheth that gave legitimacy, and it was Abner that gave the power.

By himself, Ishbatheth was a very weak man, and when Abner resisted him, he wasn't able to stop him. Abner sends messengers to David and offers to give him the whole kingdom in his hand. As proof that Abner has the power to do this, David wants him to send him Michael, his wife, who had been taken from him by Saul.

Getting Michael back will prove Abner's capacity to deliver Israel into David's hands. Michael is also important, as she represents Saul's house. David sends messengers to Ishbatheth, demanding the return of Michael.

Abner presumably shows that he has the power behind the throne by getting Ishbatheth to comply. Ishbatheth is weak and capitulating to David's strong demands, and he seems to be losing the women in his household. His accusation to Abner concerning Rizpah, and now sending his sister to his rival David, suggests that he can't perform one of the most basic tasks required of him as king, in guarding the women of his house from rivals.

Michael has been married to someone else, and this might make us wonder whether David is breaking the commandment of Deuteronomy 24, verses 1-4. While David did not divorce her, the situation is not clearly legitimate. At least, while it is most likely legitimate, it is very murky.

Why are we told about Paltiel? Paltiel clearly dearly loves Michael. Michael was the one woman in Old Testament narrative said to love a man, David. She had acted bravely on David's behalf, delivering him from her father Saul.

However, her father had used her as a political pawn, designed to control David. David's demand for her return is likely shot through with similar concerns. She is a daughter of Saul, who could bear sons, who could be a threat on account of their association with Saul's house.

It is quite likely that Michael is being instrumentalised to some degree or other in this situation, and the pitiful weeping of Paltiel might give a sense of what is taking place. Abner confers with the elders of Israel and the Benjaminites, encouraging them to turn over their loyalties to David. Benjamin was Saul and Ish-bosheth's tribe.

If he could get them to submit to David, the other tribes would almost certainly follow. Abner brings 20 men to David. We should remember at the end of the preceding chapter, in verses 30-32, that 20 men had been killed.

Perhaps Abner is intentionally making up for these men. Abner makes a covenant with David and promises to gather Israel to David to make a covenant with him. Joab hears, however, that Abner has come to David.

He is a violent and a vengeful man. On account of his brother Asahel's death, he has a family vendetta against Abner. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Abner went out of his way to avoid having such a vendetta, and only killed Asahel when he obstinately refused to stop pursuing him.

Abner was entirely in his rights to kill Asahel in war, and this was not legitimate grounds for a vendetta. Furthermore, Abner is arguably the most powerful man in Israel, a commander with decades of experience, the power behind the throne of Israel, and someone who would likely expect to be the commander of the entire army on account of his service to David. Appointing Abner to such a position would be a strategic way to heal the breach in the kingdom.

So not only is there the personal vendetta, he is a very obvious rival to Joab. Joab is a shrewd and ambitious man, and his motives in this situation are muddy at best. Was he acting for self-advancement under the cover of the vendetta? It's entirely possible.

There is also the consideration that Joab knew that Abner was a powerful player who had already betrayed one king, and as a member of the house of David, Joab wants to

eliminate him as a threat to David, once he has served his purpose in returning Michael and bringing the tribes over to David's side. Joab claims to David that Abner has been spying on him, although there is nothing whatsoever that suggests that he was doing so. This is most likely the second false accusation levelled against Abner in this chapter by people fearful of his power.

Joab deceptively kills Abner. Abner struck Asahel in the belly and killed him, now Joab strikes Abner in the belly and kills him. This is not the only time that Joab kills a rival, nor is it the only time that he does so using deception.

He does the same thing to Amasa in chapter 20. This all puts David in a highly compromised position. Joab is his right-hand man of many years, he's David's nephew.

Who is going to believe that David is innocent of Abner's blood? It really looks like David has gotten Joab to perform a convenient assassination for him. David curses Joab and his father's house for his action, not just Joab. Abashai is included, as he seems to have been involved in some way.

The curse is that the house will always have a weak, poor, outcast person or victim of violence within it. Commentators differ on the meaning of the expression translated, who holds a spindle, in the ESV. Many believe that it refers to an effeminate man or a man too weak for anything but domestic work, while others believe it refers to a crutch, suggesting lameness.

Joab has not honoured David's peace. Throughout David's reign, Joab is the serpent in his garden, and he never effectively deals with him. David leads the people in mourning for Abner, lamenting him aloud.

He refuses food and declares his deep sorrow. Whatever David's actual feelings about Abner, and I'm sure that these feelings were largely genuine, the really urgent matter here is David's public image. Joab has deeply compromised David.

However, David fails to deal with him decisively, by removing him from his office or putting him to death. Perhaps Joab simply has too much power to be removed, or perhaps he's just too important or useful a figure to sacrifice to the demands of justice. Did David know that Joab had acted in part out of a sense of David's own interests, and perhaps was reluctant to remove him from office in repayment for what had been intended as a good deed on his behalf? The motives of all parties here are incredibly muddy, and were probably unclear to themselves too.

Whatever the case, David's failure to deal effectively with Joab caused him great problems, and cast doubts over just how seriously he took the killing of Abner. Joab's murder of Abner also left lingering animosity between the houses of Saul and David. David's kingdom is built on less than certain foundations, and some cracks will start to

emerge before long, both on account of the multitude of his wives, and on account of his failure to deal with Joab.

A question to consider. In many respects, Joab represents the serpentine shrewdness of a man who loves to play cynical and cruel power games. While David publicly distances himself from Joab in various ways, he never succeeds in expelling this serpent from his garden.

How does David's treatment of Joab colour the way that we see David's own motives, and the considerations that drive his actions? What lessons might we learn from this? In 2 Samuel chapter 4, following the defection of Abner, Ish-bosheth's situation is fairly dire. Ish-bosheth is described as Saul's son at the beginning of the chapter. He displays the same loss of courage that Saul often exhibited here.

All the signs are that Ish-bosheth would make peace come to terms with David, given the chance. However, before he could do so, someone else acts. Rechab and Beanna are men of a Gibeonite city in the region of Benjamin, Beeroth.

The Benjaminites would likely have had tensions with the Gibeonites as they had to live alongside each other, and we find out later on that Saul had killed a great number of the Gibeonites. Rechab and Beanna are Benjaminites though. They're not getting revenge for something that had been done to their people, but trying to take advantage of the turn in Ish-bosheth's fortunes.

Mephibosheth is introduced to us at this point. Mephibosheth was crippled at the age of 5 after his father and grandfather were killed in the battle at Jezreel. Like Ichabod back in 1 Samuel chapter 4, he's a child whose life is indelibly marred on the day that he loses his father and grandfather in a great battle in which Israel suffers a terrible defeat.

Both Ichabod and Mephibosheth stand as remnants of their father's houses, remnants that show the judgement that their father's houses have fallen under. At this point, after 7 years of David's reign, Mephibosheth would be 12 years old. He's a cripple now.

He's probably not acceptable as a king on account of this fact. Cripples could not become priests, and we must presume that they couldn't become kings either. Apart from Ish-bosheth, Mephibosheth is the last man who could potentially have continued Saul's dynasty.

Mentioning him at this point underlines the importance of Ish-bosheth his uncle and Michael his aunt. Rechab and Beanna kill Ish-bosheth in a way similar to Saul's own death. Ish-bosheth is struck in the belly and then he is decapitated.

Once again, there is someone bringing trophies of the dead king to David. David himself draws the parallel between the killing of Saul and the action of the Amalekite and the actions of Rechab and Beanna here in the case of Ish-bosheth. Once again, it would

seem that David is compromised by the actions of violent and opportunistic men who seek to make him complicit in the deaths of his adversaries.

As in chapter 1 with the Amalekite, David's young men perform the execution. The hands and the feet of Beanna and Rechab are cut off, perhaps to emphasise David's abhorrence of the action that they had performed with him. They are hanged as a public spectacle, a warning to any who would seek to gain favour in the same way.

We probably would not be wrong though to contrast the extent of David's zeal, in this instance, from his handling of Joab in the previous chapter. Compared to what he does to Rechab and Beanna, his treatment of Joab seems quite lacklustre. All of this colours the reader's judgement of David's motives in these matters.

When people are dispensable and the action is politically expedient, David is prepared to exercise the most vigorous justice against them. However, when it is not so expedient and the people are not so dispensable, as in the case of Joab, David's actions seem to be somewhat more restrained. David, although he does abhor the actions of Joab, does not punish him with anything like the vigour that he punishes Rechab and Beanna.

This is a common human tendency. We are all often reluctant to execute true justice upon people who are key figures within our institutions, people who are close to us or that we have some personal attachment or beholdenness to. However, when justice is not truly impartial in such matters, our institutions and our societies can become compromised at their roots.

David's failure to deal effectively with Joab and impartially with Joab, political expediency be damned, is a crack in the very foundation of his regime that only grows over time. It would cost David very dearly in the long term. A question to consider.

In what ways might the story of Rechab and Beanna remind us of the story of Ehud and Eglon, back in Judges? What might the parallels teach us? In 1 Samuel chapter 5, David finally becomes king of Israel. The people address him as their bone and flesh. They are declaring that David is their brother.

There is a similar claim made in Judges chapter 9 verse 2 as Avimelech addresses the leaders of Shechem. The people recognise that David has been an effective military leader of Israel during the reign of Saul. Also that God has made a promise to him which had clearly become wider knowledge among the people.

In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 14-15, Israel was given instructions concerning their king. When you come to the land that the Lord your God has given you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me, you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you.

You may not put a foreigner over you who is not your brother. David is the king who is chosen by God and also someone who they recognise to be their brother. He is to be the shepherd of the people.

The patriarchs were shepherds, the Israelites were shepherds which is why they lived in the land of Goshen away from the Egyptians, and Moses was a shepherd. He delivered Israel with a shepherd's staff. The nation are described as a flock.

Joshua when he is set up as the leader of the people in Numbers chapter 27 verses 16-17 is described as performing the role of a shepherd over sheep. Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd. We can see very similar language there that is used of David in this chapter.

Shepherds are rulers and leaders of the flock. This can be seen in passages such as Ezekiel chapter 34. However, shepherds are supposed to serve the flocks that they are ministering to, not to lord over them.

The shepherd is not so much in scripture the young man tending sheep in bucolic pasture land, but a guardian in dangerous terrain, protecting the flock from bandits, wild beasts and other dangers of the wilderness. The shepherd also provides for them in inhospitable environments. The elders of Israel come to the king.

We need to remember that David is already king at this point, but he is only the king of Judah. But now a leader of Judah is finally becoming king over all of Israel. This is a fulfillment of Genesis chapter 49 verses 8 to 10 and the blessing of Judah by his father Jacob.

And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. David becomes king at the age of 30. 30 was the age at which priests and Levites seemed to have entered into the main service of the tabernacle or temple, something that we see in Numbers chapter 4. In Genesis chapter 41 verse 46, Joseph enters into the service of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, at the age of 30.

Jesus starts his ministry with the baptism of John at around the age of 30 in Luke chapter 3 verse 23. In scripture age is often seen to matter. People may exhibit great talent and skill for their age, but there is something about growth and wisdom that simply takes time and even the wisest and most advanced youth for his age needs to pass through various seasons of life before he is ready to occupy particular offices or to perform specific roles.

Elders in the church for instance should be probably ideally in their 50s or above. Why might this be the case? In passing through various seasons of life for instance, seasons

of sowing and reaping, you grow into a deeper understanding even of truths that you already know on some level. There are seasons of life that are seasons of transitions, periods of life where we are reaping what we have sown in previous years and discovering the true character of our previous choices.

On account of the seasonal character of human life people will often experience crises at specific junctures. Even the smartest youth is callow by comparison with the person who has truly weathered a midlife crisis and successfully navigated the straits that will lead into a new stage and season of their lives. David, before he was ever fit to rule as king, had to learn faithfulness as a son and as a suffering prince.

The period of his life spent on the run and in the wilderness and in exile was a crucial part of his preparation for the rule that he has now entered into. Jerusalem had first been captured back in Judges chapter 1 verse 8. And the men of Judah fought against Jerusalem and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword and set the city on fire. But later in that chapter in verse 21 we read, But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.

Jerusalem has a number of different hills and the Jebusites presumably control the chief stronghold there, the high city. However, it seems likely that the Jews were living in the other parts of the city at this time. The Jebusites believed that their stronghold was so secure that even the blind and the lame among them would be able to hold David's forces at bay and defend it.

David uses the expression blind and lame to refer to the Jebusites as the Jebusites have identified themselves with the blind and the lame. The lame and the blind don't come into the house and that is presumably a reference to the Jebusites. It isn't about the exclusion of those who are actually physically blind and lame.

Mephibosheth, for instance, is lame but he will still come into the house. Rather, it is an ironic reference to the Jebusites themselves. The likely significance of the water shaft is that David's men cut off the water supplied to the city.

In particular, from what we read in 1 Chronicles 11 verses 5-7, Joab seems to have been the one who led this assault. The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, you will not come in here. Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

David said, whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander. And Joab, the son of Zehorah, went up first, so he became chief. And David lived in the stronghold, therefore it was called the city of David.

The New Testament narrative alludes back to this, I believe, in Matthew 21 verses 10-14 as David's greatest son enters the city of Jerusalem and heals the lame and the blind in

the temple. And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, Who is this? And the crowd said, This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple.

And he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers. And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

Miller was a fortress that guarded one of the ascents to the city. The city has a central stronghold and a surrounding area. David makes Jerusalem his capital.

The first time that we encounter the city of Jerusalem in scripture is in Genesis chapter 14, where we meet Melchizedek, who's the king of Salem. David deals wisely with surrounding peoples. He defeats the Jebusites and the Philistines, but he forms an alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre.

Hiram's assistance to David and to Solomon, his son, is a sign of the riches of the Gentiles coming into God's people. James Jordan suggests that we have a victory house building pattern here, a pattern that we see on several occasions in scripture, and a pattern that explains in part why events in this chapter are recorded out of chronological sequence. David wins a victory over the Jebusites and then his palace and his household are established.

Another victory house building pattern follows this, as David wins victories over the Philistines and works towards the establishment of the temple. At this point David is taking even more wives. As we've seen before, taking wives was probably in large part a ploy to forge strategic alliances with leading families and surrounding peoples.

The inclusion of Solomon here, for instance, should also alert us to the fact that these verses are covering a lot more time than merely the initial years of David's reign. The Philistines come up to attack when they hear that David has become king. This occurs, presumably, before David captures Jerusalem, just when David has become king.

He goes down to the stronghold, rather than up to Jerusalem. The Philistines are spread over the valley of Rephaim, which is associated with giants. Perhaps to this point David has still been considered a sort of the Philistines.

But the prospect of a united Israel is a threatening one to them, and they go out to battle against David and Israel. David inquires of the Lord and following the Lord's instructions wins a great victory over them. The capture of the Philistines' idols is an important detail.

The Philistines had earlier captured the Ark of the Covenant, back in chapter 4 of 1 Samuel. They had also declared the good news of Saul's defeat in the houses of their idols seven years previously. Now the Philistine idols are captured, and they are

humiliated.

There is a sort of repetition of the original attack at the end of the chapter, as the Philistines again come up and again spread out over the valley of Rephaim. This time, after inquiring of the Lord again, David defeats them as he follows a divine sign, the sound of marching in the top of the balsam trees, perhaps a sign of God's marching ahead of Israel. David attacks the Philistines from the rear, and he wins a decisive victory over them at this point.

The Philistines, we must remember, had crippled Israel since Israel's loss at the Battle of Gilboa. This victory, in the victory house-building pattern, will be followed by David's attempt to build a house for the Lord. A question to consider.

Why do you think that David made Jerusalem his capital? 2 Samuel chapter 5 and 6 contain a couple of iterations of a victory house-building pattern. The basic pattern involves a victory over enemies, whose riches are then spoiled, leading to the establishment of a new dwelling place in which rest can be enjoyed. The most prominent Old Testament example of this is probably found in the Exodus narrative itself, with the movement from the defeat of the Egyptians to the building of the tabernacle.

The first cycle in these chapters is the victory over the Jebusites, and then the establishment of David's household in Jerusalem. The second cycle is the victory over the Philistines at the end of chapter 5, and then the establishment of God's palace in this chapter, in chapter 6. David and his 30,000 chosen men go down to restore the Ark after an almost 60-year exile. The Ark was captured at the Battle of Aphek in 1 Samuel chapter 4. 30,000 Israelites had perished at Aphek, and now 30,000 Israelites are travelling up with the Ark as a great honour guard.

The army accompanying the Ark is fitting for the one who is described as the Lord of Hosts, or the Lord of Armies, who sits enthroned on the cherubim. The Ark and the mercy seat are the Lord's throne and his footstool. In 1 Samuel chapter 6, the Ark was returned to Israel by the Philistines, but it had to be left in Kiriath-Jerim.

It still hadn't truly been brought back from captivity. If we remember the aftermath of the return of the Ark from Philistia, we should recall that the Ark never was restored to the tabernacle or to proper service. 1 Samuel chapter 6 verses 19 to chapter 7 verse 2 read, And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the Ark of the Lord.

He struck seventy men of them, and the people mourned, because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow. Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? and to whom shall he go up away from us? So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to you.

And the men of Kiriath-Jerim came and took up the Ark of the Lord, and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son Eliezer to have charge of the Ark of the Lord. From the day that the Ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jerim a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. The people of Beth-shemesh were seemingly struck with a plague as a result of looking into the Ark, suffering the same sort of judgment as the Philistines had.

Fearful of God's judgment, wanting to be free of the Ark, much as the Philistines were, they sent it up to Kiriath-Jerim. The people of Kiriath-Jerim leave it at the house of Abinadab, who consecrates his son to keep it. The city of Kiriath-Jerim was one of the cities of the Gibeonites, which means that its population was primarily Gentile, while under the rule of Israel.

The Ark's resting in a Gibeonite city, and not being restored to the tabernacle, is a sort of wilderness period, after a lease, but prior to settlement and restoration. It would be over a century before the pieces of the torn house of the Lord were truly brought back together in the temple. The Mosaic system of worship collapsed at the Battle of Aphek.

During the period following the capture and the return of the Ark from Philistia, there seemed to be a sort of legitimate reversion to earlier forms of worship, with localised altars and sacrifices, rather than the one central sanctuary that Deuteronomy had required. David leading the Ark to Jerusalem with his men is a sort of a triumphal procession, and an entry into the city. When the Ark is brought to Jerusalem, as Peter Lighthouse has observed, there is an exact reversal of the pattern of events that occurred when it was first taken.

In restoring the Ark and bringing it to Jerusalem, there is a sort of resurrection of worship too. The Ark was taken, and the house of Eli was removed, in 1 Samuel 4 1-22. Then the Ark was exiled in Philistia, in 5 1-6 9. Then the Ark was returned on a cart, and there was a sin concerning it, in 1 Samuel 6 10-21.

Then the Ark was with Abinadab, in 1 Samuel 7 1-2. As David brings the Ark into Jerusalem, the sequence of events is an exact reversal of the events that led to the Ark's removal from the Mosaic tabernacle. First, the Ark is returned on a cart, and there is a sin concerning the Ark once more, in 6 1-9 2 Samuel.

Then the Ark is housed with a Philistine, in 2 Samuel 6 10-11. And then finally the Ark is restored, and the house of Saul is cut off at the end of the chapter. David and his men sinned concerning the Ark.

The Ark was not to be transported by a cart, but on the shoulders of the Kohathite Levites. There are detailed instructions for how the Ark was supposed to be prepared for transport, and how it was supposed to be moved from place to place, along with the other holy items. We should know all of this from Numbers 7 4-9.

Then the Lord said to Moses, Accept these from them, that they may be used in the service of the Tent of Meeting, and give them to the Levites, to each man according to his service. So Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites, two wagons and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service, and four wagons and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest, but to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because they were charged with the service of the holy things that had to be carried on the shoulder. By carrying the Ark on a cart, they were in violation of the law then, and put themselves in jeopardy of just such an infringement as Uzzah committed.

They are following the example of the Philistines, not the instructions given in the law. Uzzah's sin is the breaking of the boundary of the holy things. Intentional or not, the infringement is an extremely serious thing.

The person who touched Mount Sinai, for instance, would be put to death. Uzzah wasn't judged for his personal wickedness. The problem was with taking the presence of God as a light thing to be handled carelessly.

Because the priests and the Levites failed to guard the Ark properly, the cherubim struck down Uzzah for his violation. The place is named after the event, Peres Uzzah, the breaking out against Uzzah. This might remind us of the naming of the site of the victory over the Philistines in the preceding chapter, Baal Peresim, Lord of the Breaking Through.

There might also be some significance to the relation of the name to that of David's ancestor, Peres. Words related to Peres occur on several key occasions in the story of David and his ancestors. As a result of the judgment upon Uzzah, the attempt to bring the Ark into Jerusalem is abandoned for a time.

The Ark is left with a Philistine, a Gittite, before it will finally be returned. As a Gittite, Obed-Edom came from Gath, where 600 men had joined David. We read of these persons in 2 Samuel 15 verse 18.

The Lord showed great favour to the house of Obed-Edom for the time that the Ark was housed there. God's presence is a fearful thing, but also a source of great blessing for those who approach it appropriately. As David sees God's blessing of the Gentile Obed-Edom, he rightly desires that the Ark would be brought up to the city of David, so that it might bring blessing upon the wider kingdom.

After three months, David goes and brings the Ark from the house of Obed-Edom in another great triumphal procession, marked by great rejoicing and an immense number of sacrifices. David dances before the Ark with all of his might. This isn't the only occasion that we see some sort of dancing and festal celebration in scripture.

It isn't a regular form of worship at the tabernacle or temple, where dancing isn't mentioned, but it is an entirely appropriate, extraordinary celebration of a different kind. Another example is found in the response of the Israelites to the victory of the Lord over the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Dancing in such a celebratory procession is definitely the appropriate thing to do.

Horns are also blown, as they were in the procession around Jericho on the day of trumpets and at the Feast of Jubilee and at other such occasions. David establishes a tent for the Ark of the Covenant. This is not the tabernacle, which is still several miles away at Gibeon, served by Zadok and the priests.

Sacrificial worship continues at the tabernacle, but the Ark is, as we see from 1 Chronicles 16, surrounded by the joy of the songs of Asaph and the other appointed Levite musicians and singers. The two tents are surrounded by different forms of worship. Michael, however, despises David when she sees him dancing.

Michael's objection to David was that his dancing and his dress were shameful or dishonorable. We should not, contrary to many, presume that David was in a state of undress. The same event is described in 1 Chronicles 15, verse 27.

David was clothed with a robe of fine linen, as also were all the Levites who were carrying the Ark, and the singers and Kenaniah the leader of the music of the singers. And David wore a linen ephod. David becoming undressed is not the reason why Michael despises him.

David is dressed like the priests in the procession. Samuel was described as being dressed in a linen ephod in 1 Samuel, chapter 2, verse 18. Rather than thinking of undergarments, we should probably think more of simple dress.

Her accusation is that David's behaviour was unbecoming of a king. He was dressed more as a serving priest than as the sovereign. His dancing was unbecoming of the dignity and nobility of the monarch, who should comport himself as the detached and elevated ruler, not as someone throwing himself into the celebrations.

Behaving in such a way, Michael considered that David behaved himself more like a common fellow showing off to low-born serving women. His uncovering before their eyes was not a matter of exposing physical nakedness, the Levites were dressed in the same way, but rather of stripping himself of royal glory and dignity and acting like a common fellow. David rebukes her.

David's behaviour was not shameful, because it is entirely appropriate for the king to behave as a servant before his lord. A king who exalts his own honour before the lord is a king who has lost sight of reality. Michael's priorities were those of a haughty princess.

Just as her father had spared Agag, presumably reasoning that kings were too important

to be put to death that they were above the rules that applied to general folk, Michael believes that the king should not visibly humble himself before the lord, lest this compromise his majesty and nobility in the sight of the common folk and expose him to dishonour. However, as David argues, the serving women that Michael so obviously despises would have more wisdom than she. While she despises him for his association with the commoners, David's humbling of himself before the lord, and the fact that his heart is not raised up above the common folk, rightly wins him honour in their sight.

We might recall the instructions of Deuteronomy chapter 17 verses 19 to 20 here. The king is instructed to produce a book of the law for himself. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes and doing that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children in Israel.

The king's humility before an obedient service of the lord, and his heart not being lifted up above his brothers the people, would be rewarded with the establishment and endurance of his kingdom. While David's kingdom would be established as an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom consummated by the Messiah, whose great work was symbolised by his laying aside his outer garments and washing his disciples' feet like a servant, the house of Saul, which Michael represents, would be cut off. Her barrenness is a judgment upon a woman whose heart was lifted up above her sisters, upon a woman who was not humble before the lord.

It is not incidental that she is described as the daughter of Saul here, as in this she takes after her father's own behaviour in his later life. A question to consider. In Acts chapter 15 verse 16, the apostle Paul talks about rebuilding the tent of David that had fallen, almost certainly referring to the tent shrine that David set up for the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem in this chapter.

Considering this chapter, and 1st Chronicles chapter 15 and 16, why might David's tent have assumed such significance in later prophecy? After a few chapters packed with action, in 2nd Samuel chapter 7, the narrative slows down and focuses upon words and conversation. We've observed the victory house building pattern. David has defeated the Jebusites in Jerusalem and established his household and kingdom there.

He has also defeated the Philistines and brought up the ark from Kiriath-Jerim to Jerusalem. However, the ark is still in a tent, as it has been since Sinai, rather than in a proper house. The bringing in of the ark to Jerusalem was a sign of the deliverance of the Exodus nearing its completion.

The building of a permanent structure for the ark and God's presence with his people dwelling in safety and security in the land would be the crowning of God's deliverance of

his people, something anticipated in the song of Moses at the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 15 verse 17. You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established. David declares his intent to build a house to Nathan the prophet.

One of the things that the building of the house would do would be to address the dysfunctional character of Israel's worship after the battle of Aphek, after which there was no single central sanctuary, as had been mandated in Deuteronomy chapter 12 verses 5 to 14. But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.

And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes. For you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.

But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you, your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the Lord your God will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you.

Now that there is finally rest on all sides from enemies, David understandably thinks that the time has come to establish a fitting central sanctuary, no longer a moveable tent, but an enduring house. This would end the situation of everyone worshipping in different altars in locations, a situation that was ripe for divergence of worship from the divine pattern into localised cults. One of the great tasks of the king was to ensure that orthodox worship was established and maintained.

We should note the use of the expression that Moses uses to describe the situation of non-uniform and non-centralised worship, you shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes. A similar expression is repeated on several occasions at the end of the book of Judges, especially in the

context of abuses of worship, there it is connected to the condition of having no king. In his desire to establish the true form of worship that God prescribed in Deuteronomy 12, David is taking his responsibilities very seriously.

We should remember that David was, according to Deuteronomy 17, expected to write out his own copy of the book of the law and to reflect upon it. Nathan initially gives David encouragement in his desire, however that night the Lord spoke to Nathan telling him that David would not be the one to build his house. In 1 Chronicles 28, verse 3, David declares But God said to me, You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood.

However, this is not the reason given in this passage, rather God had not called for a house to be built at this point, his presence had moved about in the tabernacle and the tent of David, but he had never rebuked his people for not building him a house nor commanded them to do so. He would call for a temple to be built when the time was right. While David had wanted to give to the Lord by building him a house, the Lord responds by recalling the ways in which he had blessed David to that point, in taking him from the pasture and the flock to the throne and delivering him from all of his enemies.

Like God once promised Abraham, he would make David's name great. He would also secure Israel's place so that they can dwell in peace and security, protected from the violence of their neighbours and enjoying a sort of Sabbath rest in the land, the work over. In giving these promises to David, God is more clearly specifying the shape that the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises would take, they would be realised chiefly through the house of David.

In the verses that follow, David and his house are brought into a closer relationship with the Lord. While David wanted to build the Lord a house, the Lord is going to build David's house, establishing his dynasty and kingdom for generations to come. The offspring of David, coming from his own body, would be raised up after his death.

There is an implicit resurrection occurring here, one that helps us to understand Peter's use of the testimony of David on the Pentecost in Acts 2, verses 25-32. For David says concerning him, I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced.

My flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life.

You will make me full of gladness with your presence. Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David, that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did

his flesh see corruption.

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses. Behind David's words that Peter quotes here, is the promise of God that the line of David would be raised up, and that the grave would not finally swallow it. The Lord promises that the most immediate descendant of David, Solomon, would build a house for his name.

He also promises to enter into a closer relationship with David's son. David's son would be adopted by the Lord as his son. Saul had been established as king by the Lord, but he had never been the son of God in such a sense.

Israel as a nation was spoken of as the firstborn son of the Lord in Exodus chapter 4 verse 22, but now the language is being used of a particular person, not just of a corporate sonship. The Lord is here making a covenant that greatly elevates David and his son in their relationship with the Lord. As the son of God, David's son would represent the Lord to the people in a stronger way.

Furthermore, David's son would also carry the destiny of the kingdom upon his shoulders to a greater degree than previously. He would sum up the people in himself. The king and his people would be blessed or judged on account of his behaviour.

However, the steadfast love of God would not depart from him as it had done from Saul and his house. The Lord would persevere with David's son. The greater degree to which the king represents the people and determines their fate by his behaviour helps us to understand the relevance of this to the ministry of Christ as the son of David.

David's response to all of this is to sit before the Lord and express his thanksgiving. It seems as though David was sitting before the Ark of the Covenant in the tent that he had established for it. Peter Lighthouse suggests that the situation here is similar to that of the Lord's meetings with Moses in the Tent of Meeting prior to the building of the Tabernacle.

Just as Moses was the prophet who established the Tabernacle, David was the prophet who would instruct his son in the building of the Temple. Lighthouse also remarks upon David's posture here. He is seated before the Ark, which the priests never were.

The priests were always on duty. However, David is a son in the house, not a servant waiting upon guests and managing the affairs of the house. David earlier danced before the Ark like a servant.

Now he sits before it like a son. However, David's humility is clear in both instances. David here is humbled by the greatness of the grace that he has received.

He extols the majesty of the Lord, repeatedly addressing him as Lord God or Master Yahweh and declaring his incomparable greatness and the way that he has set Israel

apart by placing his name upon them and making a name for himself through their deliverance. David marvels at the fact that God has revealed such incredible purposes for David's house to him and is humbled by the goodness that he has received from the Lord's hand. He asks the Lord to confirm his promise and prays that the Lord would bring about his word.

A question to consider, how can we see, beyond Solomon, Christ as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant? In 2 Samuel chapter 8, after centuries of territorial insecurity, the territory of Israel expands under David and their enemies on various sides are subdued. In verse 10 of the preceding chapter, the Lord had promised to David, and I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. Now the Lord is bringing his word to pass.

As Peter Lighthouse notes, the chapter is ordered geographically. David's conquests move from the Philistines in the west to the Moabites in the east to Hadadiza of Zobah in the north and then to the Edomites in the south. The kingdom is stretching out on all sides.

The Lord had promised an expansive territory to Abraham back in Genesis chapter 15 verses 18 to 21. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abraham saying, to your offspring I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Guggeshites and the Jebusites. Under David, many centuries later, Israel is finally entering into possession of the promise.

David begins by defeating the Philistines. David of course first rose to prominence with his defeat of Goliath of Gath, the Philistine champion. Later, fleeing from Saul, he sought refuge in the land of the Philistines in Gath and at a later point became a mercenary for Abimelech, living in Ziklag with his men.

The Philistines had struck against David when they saw the threat of him uniting Israel and Judah into one kingdom. They had failed in that assault. On two separate occasions they had been defeated by David.

The Philistines had been the dominant force in the region for quite some time. Back in the story of Samson, they clearly dominated Judah, the Judahites being prepared to sell Samson into their hands to protect themselves from reprisals. The Philistines had delivered a crushing blow to Israel in the battle of Aphek, with judgment falling upon the house of Eli, his two sons Haphnah and Phinehas dying on the same day and he dying when he heard the news, and then the Ark of the Covenant being captured.

When it was returned after it had plagued the land, the unity of Israel's worship was not restored until a century later. Saul fought against the Philistines with his son Jonathan on a number of occasions and won important victories, thanks especially to the courageous

faith of Jonathan and David. However, at the battle of Gilboa, the Philistines struck down Saul and his sons, leaving Israel in a state of such insecurity that they could only regroup in the land of the Transjordan.

It is possible that in his early years as the king of Judah, David would have been a vassal kingdom of the Philistines. The Philistines in scripture are associated with Egypt from chapter 10 of Genesis onwards. Some have suggested that the Philistines were established as a vassal kingdom of Egypt to bolster its power and its dominance over the land of Canaan.

However, as Egyptian dominance crumbled, the Philistines themselves filled the vacuum. In this passage, David and Israel are rising to dominate a land that was often ruled by vassal kingdoms of Mesopotamian empires to the north and Egyptian empires to the south. Verse 1 says that David took Methagana from the hand of the Philistines.

A number of commentators suggest that this is a reference to Gath as the mother city. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18 verse 1, in the parallel passage, we read After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Gath and its villagers out of the hand of the Philistines. David had of course sojourned in Gath for a while, and 600 Gittites had followed him.

This is a spectacular turnaround in just a few years. In the days of Saul, the Philistines had a monopoly upon ironworking. They had garrisons based throughout Israel, and then in the final defeat of Saul, they had wiped out large areas of the land.

David also defeats Moab. We're not told how the conflict started and who instigated it, but given David's treatment of the Moabite prisoners of war, even while it was likely considered lenient at the time, was possibly a judgement for a war that they had started. We should recall that back in chapter 22 of 1 Samuel, David had sent his parents to the king of Moab to protect them.

David also has Moabite blood through Ruth, his great-grandmother. Much of the passage is given to the discussion of the war to the north, against Hadadiza and the kingdom of Zobah. Hadadiza and other Arameans are mentioned in the following chapters, so it seems likely that much of the material in this chapter is not in chronological order, but is in thematic order, just as we were told of Solomon's birth a few chapters ago.

The purpose is to underline the way that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel and to David, and the way in which he is giving them rest on all sides. David's victory leads to the winning of great spoil, and the spoil is dedicated to the Lord. He obeys the law not to accumulate a great army of chariots, preserving only 100 horses for that purpose.

He also wins friends to the north. Toi the king of Hamath sends his son Joram to King David, in thanks for David's defeat of Hadadiza, who had often been at war with his

kingdom. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18, Joram's name is given as Hadorum.

The difference between the names Joram, the Lord is exalted, and Hadorum, Hadad is exalted, maybe suggests that there has been a name change and a conversion. Moving to the south, David dominates Edom. He places garrisons throughout the land, and the Edomites become David's servants.

Jacob's twin Esau comes under his sway. We might see Isaac's blessing of Jacob in which he gave him lordship over Esau as being fulfilled in these particular events. Later on in 1 Kings we learn a bit more about the brutality with which Joab and David cut off the men of Edom, and the way in which an enemy is raised up from Edom to fight against Solomon.

Along with pacifying the surrounding region and allowing Israel to finally dwell in peace, David conducts the internal affairs of the land with justice and equity. The chapter ends by describing the court of David. Joab, the son of Zeorah, over the army, Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud as the recorder, Zadok the son of Ahithob and Himalek the son of Abiathar the priest, and Sarai the secretary.

Ben-Nahar the son of Jehoiada is over the Kerithites and the Pelethites who were David's bodyguard, and David's sons are described here as priests. This last identification has caused a lot of debate, since the kingly and the priestly line were quite clearly distinguished. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18 verse 17 they're described differently.

David's sons were the chief officials in the king. How are we to make sense of this? It seems to me that the most promising explanation is found in the recognition that the temple is the palace of the lord, and the priests are the household stewards or officials. Consequently, it is appropriate to call the chief officials of the king in his palace his priests.

The term priest then does not have an exclusively religious meaning, and when we understand the analogy between the royal palace officials and the priests in the chapter 18 we can have a better understanding of the role of the priests more generally. Throughout this chapter we're seeing God fulfill his promises. In verses 6 and 14 this is underlined by the expression, and the lord gave victory to David wherever he went.

Furthermore, just as the covenant made with David echoed the Abrahamic covenant in a number of details, so in this chapter we see the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise concerning the extent of the land. God is fulfilling promises to Abraham through David. A question to consider, comparing this chapter with 1st chronicles chapter 18, how can we see the victory house building pattern continue to play out? Back in 1st Samuel chapter 20 verses 13 to 17, Jonathan had made a covenant with David, in which David had sworn to continue to show faithfulness to Jonathan's house after he ascended to power.

There Jonathan said to David, And Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David saying, In 2nd Samuel chapter 9 David is fulfilling this promise by taking regard for Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. In these chapters we have been seeing David's establishment of his kingdom by defeating his enemies, capturing his capital, securing his kingdom, forming a well-ordered household, establishing the worship of the Lord, and preparing the material for the building of the temple. At the end of chapter 8 there was a list of David's chief officials and a description of his court.

The chapters that preceded this were more thematic and covered material from the entirety of David's reign. We read of the birth of Solomon and of military victories that have yet to occur in the chronological progression of the text. There is further dischronologised material appended to the narrative at the end of the book, but in this section we seem to be returning to something that is ordered more chronologically and less thematically.

The story of Saul dominated 1st Samuel until his death and the death of Jonathan at the end of the book. The shadow of Saul continued to rest over the early years of David's reign. In chapter 1 David mourned for Saul and Jonathan and killed the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul.

In chapter 2 war broke out between Israel and Ishbosheth, Saul's son, who was appointed king of Israel, and David as the king of Judah. In chapter 3 we read of the defection of Abner, the former commander of Saul, his murder at the hands of Joab, and David's mourning over him. We also read of the return of Michael, the daughter of Saul, to David as his wife.

In chapter 4 Ishbosheth was assassinated and David killed his murderers. In chapter 5 David was officially appointed a successor to Saul by Israel. In chapter 6 Michael was rendered barren.

In chapter 7 the Lord promised to David that he would not remove his favour from David as he had from Saul. So the relationship between David's kingdom and Saul's, the legitimacy of David's succession from Saul, the relative fates of the houses of David and Saul, and David's fulfillment of his faithfulness to Jonathan are prominent and important themes in 2nd Samuel. We were introduced to the character of Mephibosheth back in chapter 4 verse 4. Jonathan the son of Saul had a son who was crippled in his feet.

He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel and his nurse took him up and fled and as she fled in her haste he fell and became lame and his name was Mephibosheth. Now his thread in the narrative is taken up again. In 1st Chronicles chapter 8 verse 32 and 9 verse 40 Mephibosheth's name is given as Meribael.

It was likely changed in the text much as his uncle's name was changed from Eshbael to Ishbosheth. In both cases it was probably changed to avoid using the name Baal as part

of an Israelite name. Although it wouldn't have been used with an idolatrous sense, the idolatrous connotations seem to have loomed much larger in later history.

However it should also be noted that both Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth include shame as part of the meaning of their names. Ishbosheth means man of shame and Mephibosheth as Peter Lighthouse remarks means one who scatters shame or from the mouth of shame. Both men are associated with the aftermath of the fall of Saul and his sons at the battle of Gilboa.

Ishbosheth is Saul's remaining son doomed to failure and Mephibosheth is a young man stunted by a fall on the day of the news of his father and grandfather's death. Later in chapter 21 we read of other sons of Saul who were presumably sons of others of Saul's wives or concubines but not in line to rule. As far as heirs of the dynasty go, Mephibosheth is it.

We should see parallels here with the story of Eli and Ichabod back in 1 Samuel chapter 4 after the news of the loss of the battle of Apeck. There Eli fell like Mephibosheth and Ichabod's life was marked by the day of his father and grandfather's death in being called the glory has departed. Mephibosheth bears the mark of the day of his father and grandfather's death both in having a name implying the departure of glory like his uncle Ishbosheth and Ichabod before them both and in the lameness that resulted from his fall.

In these regards he also symbolizes his father's and invites us to compare Saul's house with Eli's. Mephibosheth was five years old when he escaped after hearing the news of Saul's defeat. He would have been 12 or 13 when David became king of all Israel.

David's summoning of Mephibosheth likely occurred at some point before he was 20. Mephibosheth is living in Lodabah in the realm of Transjordanian Manasseh. His location Lodabah means nothing or no word and it might suggest the very low profile that he was keeping.

This is within the region where Saul's son Ishbosheth had established his kingdom but it's not central to it. Mephibosheth as the son of the former king is a person who represents a threat simply by virtue of who he is. Even though he himself is lame and perhaps even disqualified from occupying the throne on that account he could bear legitimate heirs to the Saulide dynasty.

The destruction and extinction of the Saulide dynasty in death and barrenness has been the way that things have been moving for the past few chapters and there is a fragile remnant left in Mephibosheth. At this point David holds almost all of the power. If he wanted it wouldn't be hard finally to extinguish Saul's house never to have to worry about it rising up again.

There are several such attempts to extinguish ruling households in scripture so David

would have precedent. In the rebellion of Absalom a few chapters later in the narrative we get a sense of the potential threat Mephibosheth could have represented even if only as a defector who could grant legitimacy to an opponent of David. It might have been expedient for David not to kill Mephibosheth.

Maintaining some peace with the remnants of Saul's loyalists would be a good way to maintain unity in Israel but ideally he would want to ensure that Mephibosheth was kept very weak and kept under his sight. The fact that Mephibosheth has all of the land of Saul restored to him and is presumably also given a wife so that he has a son called Micah is an indication that David is not merely defanging and chaining Saul's remaining heir so that he can keep a potential enemy under his thumb. The fact that Saul's servant Zeba has 15 sons and 20 servants is an indication that he isn't a lowly servant but a fairly powerful steward with a number of wives, much property of his own and a large household.

That he will now serve Mephibosheth as the heir of Saul might suggest the extent of the wealth and power that David restored to Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is significant not merely as a remnant of the house of Saul, he is far more significant as the son of Jonathan. David was concerned to keep his covenant with Jonathan who was David's brother-in-law and closest friend showing loving kindness to those remaining of his house.

Jonathan had recognised that David was going to inherit the throne and completely supported and showed loyalty to David. Jonathan's father Saul also recognised that David would get the throne but he tried to destroy David on that account. After Saul was judged by the Lord, the Lord has shown considerable mercy to him in bringing his appointed successor into his house as his son-in-law.

Saul had the opportunity to support David as his successor and to be blessed on David's account, yet he fought against him instead. Jonathan by contrast had supported David. In the raising up of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's reception of the grace that God gave to Saul in his judgment upon him bears fruit.

By joining David, Mephibosheth and others of Saul's house could be saved from the death and judgment of the house of Saul. David had been adopted into the household of Saul and had presented the opportunity of saving Saul's household. Here Mephibosheth enjoys a sort of adoption into David's house.

He eats at the king's table, along with and like the king's sons. The remnants of the house of Saul are faced with a choice in the posture that they will take towards the house of David. They can oppose it and suffer the Lord's judgment.

Michael had formerly joined David but then suffered judgment from the Lord for her despising of David, being cut off in barrenness. Mephibosheth is raised up here, although

he will later be tested at the time of Absalom's coup. Zeba will also be tested and he will fail as he takes advantage of his position when he sees the chance.

A question to consider, how might David's loving kindness towards Mephibosheth reflect the Lord's loving kindness towards him and illustrate the Lord's loving kindness towards us? We first encountered Nahash the Ammonite back in 1st Samuel chapter 11 when he besieged Jebesh-Gilead. Now in 2nd Samuel chapter 10 we learn that he has died to be succeeded by his son Hanun. Presumably while David was pursued by Saul, Nahash had granted him aid, perhaps recognizing an opportunity to unsettle or weaken a rival's kingdom.

Perhaps he even hoped to improve relations with Israel should David rise to power. Ammon was a kingdom to the east across the Jordan. Back in chapter 8 we read about David's wars, including his war against Hadadiza and the Syrians.

It also mentions his subduing of the Ammonites. As this chapter begins with statements implying that David was on good terms with the Ammonites prior to this point, it seems reasonable to surmise that the events of this chapter fit within the larger summary of David's victories back in chapter 8. Peter Lightheart suggests that this is a second phase in the war with Hadadiza. I'm not so sure.

The introduction of the chapter with the words after this probably places it shortly after Mephibosheth was brought into the house of David. It also highlights the thematic connection between David's display of loving kindness to Hanun for the sake of his father Nahash with David's display of loving kindness to Mephibosheth for the sake of Jonathan in the preceding chapter. It also sets us up for the contrast between their two responses.

In his extension of loving kindness to Hanun, David is giving him the opportunity of being blessed for the sake of his father, of entering into a positive relationship with Israel. However, Hanun's princes and councillors believe that David actually desires to destroy them. This isn't an entirely unreasonable impression to reach.

From a distance, David looks like someone whose enemies conveniently die, and then David sheds crocodile tears over them. Both Abner and Ish-bosheth were conveniently assassinated, and while David can blame the brutality of Joab as much as he wants, there is Joab, still the commander of David's army. To the typical onlooker, he wouldn't seem very sincere.

David's failure to deal effectively with people like Joab would naturally lead to distrust and suspicion from characters like Hanun. While Nahash, Hanun's father, might have been very happy to support David while Saul was king, hoping to weaken Saul's kingdom, now that David is king, fighting and winning battles on various sides and establishing Israel as a strong and united kingdom and expanding its borders, it wouldn't take all that much provocation for relations with the Ammonites to take a frosty or a

hostile turn. However, David's intention throughout had been to show loving kindness.

Ironically, Hanun's fears will ultimately be realised as David takes over his royal city and enslaves the Ammonites at the end of chapter 12. But that is a situation arising not from David's initial intention, but from Hanun's provocation and his laying down of the gauntlet. Hanun humiliated David's men by shaving off half of their beards and cutting off half of their clothes so that they were exposed.

This might be a mockery of mourning rituals, but it is definitely an attack upon their masculinity. Whatever the full meaning, it is a very serious provocation. David instructs them to wait at Jericho.

Presumably there was still a settlement remaining at Jericho, even after its destruction by Joshua, but it wasn't established as a fortified city again until much later. The Ammonites hired the Syrians, who were to the north of Israel, to fight for them. When David heard of it, he sent Joab out to fight with the army.

Joab came against Raba, the Ammonite capital, with his men, presumably offering peace first, according to the commandment of the law. However, the Syrians and the kings accompanying them, kings of small kingdoms who were presumably their vassals, came against the Israelite army to their rear. Joab split the forces between himself and Abishai, his brother.

Perhaps there is some ironic association drawn between the victory that's won by splitting the Israelite army in half and the removal of half of the messengers' beards and garments earlier in the chapter. Joab and the elite troops faced the Syrians and the other mercenaries or vassals accompanying them, while Abishai faced the Ammonites. Joab defeated the Syrians, at which point the Ammonites also fled back behind the walls of the city of Raba.

The Syrians at this point launched an offensive in response, which David heard of, and then sent his men up to meet them. David's men soundly repulsed the Syrians, who suffered exceedingly heavy losses. This led to a larger shift in power in the region, as former vassals and tributaries of the Syrians abandoned them and became subject to Israel.

The Syrians also became wary of intervening against Israel again after this point. Joab doesn't press Israel's advantage against Raba right now, though. He returns to Israel.

The Israelites will besiege Raba again in the following chapter, perhaps at a more convenient time of the year. A question to consider. In verses 11-12, Joab makes a statement that seems quite out of character as a seeming expression of confidence in the Lord.

What might we make of this? We've read the story of David's rise, and now in chapter

11, we reach the point of his catastrophic fall, a fall that will cast its ugly shadow over the rest of David's life. The story has its starting point in the war against the Ammonites. Joab and his men are besieging Raba.

However, David has not gone out with the army, even though we have just been told that it was the time when kings go out to battle. The war with the Ammonites is important background to the story of chapters 11 and 12. It frames the entire narrative, which begins with David staying at home in Jerusalem while his army goes out to besiege Raba, and ends with the capture of Raba, now with David present, and David then returning to Jerusalem.

In this chapter, the siege of Raba will be exploited by David as a means of covering up the murder of Uriah. The background of the battle heightens the irony, revealing just how cynical and evil David's sin was. David takes full advantage of the faithfulness, loyalty, and honesty of his servant Uriah in order to enact his callous betrayal and his act of predation.

Rather than fighting for Israel with his men, David is staying at home and praying upon the wife of one of his closest servants. While there was nothing wrong in principle with David not going out to war, when his behaviour is seen against the backdrop of the war, and in contrast with the behaviour of the ill-fated Uriah, it is seen in its true ugliness. Peter Lighthouse and others observe that the expression in the opening verse, typically translated, when kings go out to battle, is, in the Masoretic text, when messengers go out to battle, the word for messengers being extremely close to that of kings.

This would highlight just how much of the chapter is about the sending of messengers to and fro, not only in the kingly business of war, but in assisting David in his act of adultery and murder. Indeed, even when messengers are going to and from the battle line, it is the business of the adultery and murder that is foremost in David's mind, not the proper business of the Ammonite War. David is lazing around in the late afternoon, lying on his couch.

This detail is not strictly necessary to the scene, which might have begun with David on the roof of his palace. However, it helps to characterise David's state of excessive ease, which will contrast with Uriah's behaviour later in the passage. David sees a woman bathing from his roof.

The king's palace was almost certainly on higher ground and a higher building than any of the other buildings around, so he was able to overlook other people's properties. According to many readings of the passage, Bathsheba was purifying herself from her presumably menstrual uncleanness, which suggests both that she was not pregnant, and underlines the fact that she was acting as a righteous Israelite, and was not inviting any male attention in her actions. After David sees the woman, the first act of several acts of sending in the chapter occurs.

David sends and inquires about the woman. In the various acts of sending, David establishes an expanding web of complicity. He is told that she is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

One of the important things to note here is that both her father and her husband were members of David's 30 mighty men, listed at the end of 2 Samuel chapter 23. These were not just ordinary Israelites, these were some of David's chief and most loyal men, the top 30. They performed the most remarkable deeds of terrorism and faithfulness for him.

Uriah the Hittite is a Hittite. He's presumably not an Israelite, but a convert. His piety is pronounced in the rest of the chapter.

Praying upon a regular Israelite would be bad enough. But David is praying upon one of Israel's great war heroes, upon a person whose loyalty to David and to the God of Israel was not merely a matter of honouring the loyalties of birth, but were the loyalties that he had assumed through choice. The baseness of David's act of treachery is more readily seen in the light of this fact.

Indeed, Bathsheba's grandfather, the father of Eliam, was Ahithophel, one of David's closest advisors and counsellors. When Ahithophel a few chapters later joined the conspiracy of Absalom, and even more so when he counselled Absalom openly to sleep with his father's concubines that David had left behind in the palace, on the very same roof from which David had espied Ahithophel's own granddaughter Bathsheba, he was probably getting some personal revenge. David's actions here will have huge repercussions down the line.

We should also consider all of this from Bathsheba's perspective. Here is the king, the most powerful man in the land, the man that her husband and her father fight for, the man whom her grandfather counsels, summoning her and wanting to lie with her. Not only is the power difference immense, she might also reasonably think that if she does not comply, David might take vengeance upon the people closest to her.

She might also consider that if she spoke out, she would be directly hurting people she loved and undermining the entire cause to which they had dedicated their lives and service. Of course David is the one responsible, but you can see why she would feel trapped. Having discovered Bathsheba's identity, David sends messengers to take her.

There is a sort of fall taking place here too. David sees forbidden fruit, sees that it is pleasing to the eyes, and then takes it, bringing death and judgment upon himself. David to this point has, as it were, been established in the garden of the kingdom.

God has shown immense goodness to him. However, now that he falls into sin, it will lead to bitter consequences. After lying with Bathsheba, David sends her back to her house,

but then she sends a message to David to declare that she is pregnant.

We should be considering just how many messengers have already become privy to some part of this story. This would likely have been the gossip of the servants at this point, an open secret in the palace. At this point, David realises that his sin will likely become known, so he determines that he must get Uriah to lie with his wife, so that Uriah might perhaps think that the child, when it is born, is his.

Under the guise of sending news about the war, David sends word to Joab to send him Uriah, who then sends him Uriah. After speaking with Uriah, David sends him to his home and sends a gift after him. However, Uriah did not go back to his house, and this was told to David.

We should again consider just how many people are becoming complicit in David's sin here. Asked why he did not return to his house, Uriah gives an answer that highlighted David's detachment from his men in the war. Uriah is steadfastly loyal to the men, and even though his wife is just a short walk away, he is determined not to enjoy ease while the rest of the men are fighting.

We should also consider the possibility that Uriah, by this point, has suspicions of his own. Perhaps he wondered why David had sent for him in particular, or why David was so eager to speak to him, yet seemingly relatively uninterested in the news that he bore. Perhaps he noticed some servants whispering to each other when they saw him in the hall.

To heighten the irony, David swears by David's own life that he will not return to his house and lie with his wife while Joab and David's army are camping in the open field. When David tries to get Uriah to lie with Bathsheba, he is trying to get him to break a vow that Uriah made on David's own life. That Uriah so values the life of the king also makes us think of how little the king values the life of Uriah.

On the third day, after David had tried and failed to get Uriah to go back by getting him drunk, David sends Uriah with a message to Joab. By this point, we've had over 10 different acts of sending, message bearing or news bringing of various kinds. Uriah, however, is sent with his own death warrant.

The tragedy of Uriah and the sinfulness of David is seen by the fact that Uriah will die precisely on account of his loyalty and by means of his faithfulness in bearing a message from his master. David is also making Joab most directly complicit in his sin. Joab was the man of violence who had already proved his willingness to act in a moral way for personal vengeance or political expediency.

David knows all too well that in Joab he has a man who will get what he wants to have done done. David's plan is a really careless one. The plan would involve making a great

many more people complicit in a way that could easily lead to its failure.

David, the great military strategist, is becoming careless and sloppy and foolish on account of his sin. Like many others before and after him, in David's sin a wise man is reduced to folly. According to David's plan, the men around Uriah would have to be in on the plan in order to draw back from him. Presumably seeing its weakness, Joab doesn't follow David's plan.

Rather, he determines to treat some other soldiers as collateral damage so that they die alongside Uriah in a place where the fighting is especially fierce. In murdering Uriah, David also murders a number of other nameless servants of his. Knowing that the military manoeuvre in which Uriah perished was quite unnecessary and obviously strategically flawed, David knows that he will be very angry about it, so he instructs the messenger to tell David that Uriah died in it, knowing that that would appease his anger.

However, the messenger now probably has his own suspicions that the king and the commander of his army have conspired to assassinate an Israelite war hero. The extensive details given by Joab are also interesting, especially the reference to Abimelech. Abimelech was a murderous king who was killed by a woman in Judges chapter 9. Perhaps Joab is making a veiled comment upon David's sin.

David was now also a brother-murdering king who risked having his head crushed by a woman. The messenger, however, seems to relay a somewhat different message from that which he was instructed to. In both the actions of Joab, which didn't directly follow the instructions that he was given, and Joab's messenger, who didn't give the precise message that he was sent to give, we see how David's sin has compromised the effectiveness of his rule.

The dishonour of his own actions end up feeding the dishonesty and even the treachery of his own servants. Through the betrayal and murder of Uriah, a profoundly faithful servant, David became more dependent upon and beholden to those of his servants who were most willing to be complicit in such an action. The servants who would be most likely to betray him in their turn, as Joab later would.

Joab, knowing David's sin, now also had greater power over him and secured his own position, making it harder for David to purge his administration of Joab's poison, something he should have done long ago. David's response to the news of Uriah's death, especially when we contrast it to his response of the news of the deaths of people such as Saul and Jonathan, Abner or Ish-bosheth, displays a callous cynicism that might even make us retrospectively start to doubt his sincerity in those instances. After the death of her husband Uriah, Bathsheba mourns him, and after her mourning is over, the coast is now clear and David takes her as his wife, and she bears him a son.

It might seem as if David had gotten away with it, but the final words of the chapter alert us to the Lord's displeasure and prepare us for his judgment upon David that will follow. A question to consider. Reading this chapter, we can see David's initial sin of coveting his neighbour's wife gradually grow into ever greater sins and folly, and the slow spread of its rot into his power to rule, his judgment, the loyalty and faithfulness of his servants, his reputation among his people, and much more.

The consequences of David's sin would only increase over time. How, after considering the growth of the sin and the spread of its rot, could David have arrested or avoided his sin? What steps could he have taken long before he stepped out on that roof, or after he saw Bathsheba, or at some subsequent point, that would have avoided the sin or prevented its growth? After chapter 11 ended by speaking of the Lord's displeasure at David's sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, in chapter 12 of 2 Samuel, God sends his prophet Nathan to confront David concerning that sin. Nathan is the latest of several messengers who have been going to and fro.

David had used various messengers to help him to commit his sins. Now the Lord sends a messenger to challenge him in his sin. One of the larger concerns in this section, as James Jordan observes, is that of the dynasty.

In the earlier chapters of the book, the fate of Saul's dynasty as David rises to power is a prominent concern. Now the reader should be asking the question of the fate of David's dynasty. The Lord has promised great things concerning it in chapter 7, but David has now compromised his house and his rule.

As we saw in the previous chapter, David by his sin had tied himself to Joab, and Joab's violence would increasingly undermine David's kingdom. Rumors of David's sin have presumably spread among the servants. All the messengers being sent to and fro were made complicit in the sin or certain parts of it, and they would be spreading the word around.

They did not look at David in the same way again. There seemed to be divergences from the instructions given to servants in the preceding chapter as well. As David would now be able to command less authority as a result of his reputation as a righteous and upstanding man, his capacity for rule would be weakened.

His own treachery would lead to people in his administration rising up against him. The more that David became entangled personally with his sin, the more the people around him were made complicit in it, and the more the people who were around him were either corrupted by David's sin or elevated on account of their corruption. Of course, all of this contrasts with the faithful servant Uriah, who is killed by David.

He is killed precisely on account of his loyalty, the fact that he will identify with the men in the field rather than going to sleep with his wife and enjoy the pleasures of home.

Then his faithfulness as a message bearer is exploited as David makes him carry his own death warrant to Joab. Sin by its very nature cannot easily be compartmentalised.

We may think that we can play with sin for a while, all the time keeping it in a safe corner of our lives, but we will soon find that it starts to infect everything else. The question then of how David's rule can be restored and who will inherit the kingdom after his death will become much more prominent issues in the chapters that follow. David's sons will start to assume a much greater place in the narrative.

To be restored from the high-handed, intentional sins that he committed concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David would have to repent. As David acknowledges in Psalm 51, which he composed after being confronted by Nathan, in verses 16 and 17, For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You will not be pleased with the burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. Nathan, when he confronts David, confronts him with a story, some regarded as a sort of parable. It is offered to David as a case that, as the ruler, he must judge.

The story is fundamentally one of cruel oppression, with theft as a part of it. The rich man possesses large flocks and herds, but the poor man possesses just one new lamb, to which he is deeply attached. The lamb is his only possession, and he loves it as if it were a member of his own family.

He treats it, not as mere livestock, but as if it were his own daughter. Within the parable then, the sin of the rich man is most especially felt in his oppression of the poor man. It is not just the act of stealing, but it is from whom he is stealing that is especially highlighted.

The parable particularly focuses upon David's adultery. He takes the daughter-like sheep from the bosom of the poor man. We should remember that this is being directed to David, who is the shepherd of Israel.

He has a great many flocks and herds of people that he guards and looks after. However, Uriah was as it were the shepherd of just one person, his wife Bathsheba. David, as the shepherd-guardian of the whole nation, steals for the sake of his own pleasure from a poor shepherd, Uriah, the man with just one new lamb.

David, when he hears the case, is infuriated and declares judgment upon it. The man must die because of his oppression, and the lamb must be restored fourfold according to the law of Exodus 22.1. As a leader, David was subject to a higher judgment. The Lord had shown great mercy and grace to David.

He had given the kingdom of Saul into David's hands. He had given Saul's house and even his wives into David's hand. The reference to Saul's wives being given into David's

arms does not mean that David slept with them, but it means that he was made the guardian of the harem of the kingdom.

David had struck down Uriah with the sword, indeed with the sword of the enemies of the Lord, the Ammonites, and now as a result of his sin, the sword would not depart from his house. He had declared that the man who took the sheep of the poor man would have to pay back fourfold. He would pay back fourfold from his own family.

Evil would rise up for David from his own household, and as he took the wife of another secretly, his own wives and concubines would be taken openly, and someone would sleep with them in the presence of all Israel. David had utterly scorned the Lord in his sin. He had caused surrounding nations to blaspheme.

If rumors concerning the sin of David were going around the palace, they had likely reached the ears of his enemies also. When people see the people of the Lord behaving in exactly the same way or worse than those around them, they can despise the Lord, thinking him little more than the false gods. Perhaps the service of the Lord is just a mask used by hypocrites to cover up their sin and to make themselves seem better than others.

The Lord has placed his name upon his people, yet when his people sin brazenly, much like their neighbors, his name is blasphemed. This is a classic example of what it means to bear the name of the Lord in vain. In such situations, the punishment of the unrighteous people of God is part of the means by which the Lord will vindicate his great name.

In the parable, David is judged as a shepherd, not just as a private individual. In chapter 7, the Lord had said that when the Davidic king sinned, he would be judged with the rod of men. The king's personal sins could lead to consequences for the nation.

And part of the tragedy is that the sin of David primarily leads to consequences for his house. Four of his sons will suffer premature deaths, a number of them as a result of violence. His own wives and concubines will be taken and raped by one of his sons.

The consequences of the sins of a wicked shepherd will not merely fall upon himself, but upon all the people that he is associated with and looks after. The judgment upon David first falls upon his young son. David pleads before the Lord for the life of his child.

For a number of days he fasts before the child dies. All the time that the child is approaching death, David is mourning on account of the child, praying in God's mercy that he would spare the child. But the child's life is taken.

David, when he hears the news, arises from the earth, washes and anoints himself and changes his clothes. It's a resurrection. The death due to him, as it were, has been borne by his son, and now he can be restored.

Following the death of that son, another child is born to David and Bathsheba. The child is called Solomon, maybe a name suggesting the peace with God that David now enjoys. The birth of Solomon is a sort of resurrection for David.

The Lord loves Solomon and gives him the name Jedidiah, Beloved of the Lord. His name might remind us of David's name, which also means beloved. As Peter Lighthouse observes, both Solomon and Absalom have peace as part of their name.

However, only Solomon lives up to that name. Solomon also receives a name from the Lord and is called Beloved by the Lord. He is born as a sign of David's restoration and resurrection.

All of these things suggest that he is the rightful heir of the throne. Following the birth of Solomon, Joab sends news to David that the Ammonite city of waters has been taken and that Joab has been fighting against Rabbah. So David goes up against Rabbah and captures it.

He receives the crown from the king of Rabbah and places it upon his head. He also receives very great spoil and reduces the Ammonites to servitude. David going up from Jerusalem to fight at Rabbah returns us to the very beginning of the story.

As Peter Lighthouse has observed, there is a there and back again pattern to the story. It begins with Joab besieging Rabbah but David staying behind in Jerusalem. Then David sleeps with Bathsheba and she becomes pregnant.

David arranges for Uriah's death. Bathsheba mourns for Uriah and then in the middle, Nathan confronts David's sin. And then it goes back.

David mourns for his infant son, much as Bathsheba had mourned for Uriah. David's son dies, much as he had arranged for Uriah's death. David sleeps with Bathsheba again and she becomes pregnant again.

And then at the end, David goes to Rabbah and finishes the siege and returns to Jerusalem. However, this return movement is a restoration of David. David receives a crown.

He receives a great victory and he is established once again with an heir to his throne, an heir who will be blessed by the Lord. However, even though David is restored before God, the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba have only started to play out. In the chapters that follow, we will see the bitter fruit that the sins of David bore in the lives and actions of his children.

A question to consider. Looking at Psalm 51, written after David was confronted by Nathan concerning his sin with Uriah and Bathsheba, what more can we learn about the character of David's restoration? Why was David restored whilst Saul was not? As we

move into 2 Samuel chapter 13, we must recognise that in many respects we are still reading the story of David and Bathsheba. David was forgiven his sin and restored at the end of chapter 12.

But this does not mean that the ongoing effects of his sin were simply neutralised. Chapter 13 is all about the consequences of David's sin continuing to play out in the world. These consequences are not merely those of an imposed punishment by the Lord, but they are the consequences of the natural fruit of his sin itself.

Just as in the story of Saul, in 1 Samuel, we had a portrait of the corruption of a man's character over time, so in 2 Samuel we have a portrait of the horrific dynamics of sin, even for a forgiven person. It also shows that though we would like for the consequences of our sins to be carefully targeted and contained, if we have to face them at all, the consequences can actually fall most heavily upon innocent parties. Our unaddressed sins can cause immense harm to others.

When reading this chapter we also should be mindful of the ways in which biblical narrative often conveys meaning through artful literary means, connecting events together in ways that invite comparison and contrast, or which help us to perceive developments. Associations can be communicated through subtle details that all but the most careful readers may pass over without noticing. The final chapter of Shimon Bar-Ephrat's *Narrative Art in the Bible* has a masterful treatment of the literary features of this story, which informs a lot of my observations.

The first verse sets the scene. It places the character of Tamar between two sons of David, Amnon and Absalom. As Bar-Ephrat observes, it hints at what is to come.

It begins with Absalom, even though Absalom plays little direct role in the narrative that immediately follows. However, it helps the alert reader to recognise that this is a crucial part of the larger Absalom narrative that will follow. By placing Tamar between the two sons of David, it structurally prepares us for a rivalry between the two of them.

By characterising Tamar as the sister of Absalom, rather than as the daughter of David or simply as the sister of Amnon, without reference to Absalom, it also prepares us for the way that it will be Absalom who acts for Tamar, rather than David. At the outset, we are told of Amnon's intense love for his sister, a love so intense that he becomes sick through it. The fact that she is a virgin seems to play some part in his desire for her.

However, he can't do anything to her. What does he want to do to her? We might be wondering what precise intentions he has, but they aren't made clear at this point and are left ambiguous. Had things remained as they are set up at the beginning of the chapter, nothing might have happened.

But we are now introduced to the character of Jonadab. Jonadab is described as crafty.

He doesn't necessarily intend all that Amnon does.

His plan is designed to get Tamar close to Amnon. It is not clear that he intends what happens next. The attention that is given to characterising him, however, suggests that he is an important character.

His role in the narrative may be rather more significant than we originally suppose. His suggestion to Amnon is he should lie in his bed and pretend to be ill. When David comes to see him, he should ask David to send his sister Tamar to him, to give him bread to eat, prepare the food in his sight, that he may see it and eat it from her hand.

The design of this request is that under the guise of preparing food for the sick Amnon, Tamar should actually come close to him. Amnon takes Jonadab's advice and puts the plan in motion. He asks David to send Tamar to him, but his request is shortened from Jonadab's.

Jonadab's suggested request is more artfully constructed, more fitted for disguising the true intent, yet achieving the purpose. When David gives the instruction to Tamar, it is shortened yet again. From Jonadab's suggestion, let my sister Tamar come and give me bread to eat and prepare the food in my sight, that I may see it and eat it from her hand, we get, go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare food for him.

Nothing is mentioned in David's instruction to Tamar about any personal interaction with Amnon. All she has to do is prepare the food at his house. She's going to his house, not necessarily to his bedside.

There is no reference to preparing the food in his sight or feeding it to him from her hand. Tamar follows David's instruction and there is a chain of instructions and responses. Jonadab instructs Amnon, lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill.

So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. Amnon then instructs David and David sends for Tamar. David instructs Tamar, go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare food for him.

So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house. Amnon speaks to those around him, send out everyone from me. So everyone goes out from him.

And then Amnon instructs Tamar, bring the food into the chamber that I may eat it from your hand. And Tamar takes the cakes that she has brought and brings them into the chamber to Amnon, her brother. But then the pattern of instruction and obedient response is broken as rather than eating from Tamar's hand as per the instruction, Amnon asks her to lie with him.

As if to heighten the suspense beforehand, we're given a very detailed account of how Tamar prepared the cakes. She took dough, she kneaded it, she made cakes in his sight

and baked the cakes. She took the pan and emptied it out before him.

Much attention is given to the preparation of cakes that are never eaten. Tamar refuses and resists Amnon's request to lie with her. She makes clear to him that it would be a violation.

It's not a thing to be done in Israel. Do not do this outrageous thing. The language of her protestation here might remind us of the story of Genesis chapter 34 and the rape of Dinah.

The response of the sons of Jacob was very similar to the way that Tamar responds here. The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it and the men were indignant and very angry because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter. For such a thing must not be done.

The association between this story of Tamar and Amnon and the story of Dinah back in chapter 34 of Genesis should be borne in mind. Beyond pointing out the wickedness of the act, Tamar draws attention to the consequences that it would have for her. She would be shamed by it and he would have committed a sin of such great proportions that his character was defined by it.

Rather than take her in such a manner, she suggests that he go and speak to the king. He will not withhold her from him. Whether this was a ploy or whether she was serious is not entirely clear.

However, Amnon does not listen to her and he forces himself upon her, overcoming her with his greater strength. However, once he is lain with her, he despises her even more than he once loved her. If her virginity played some role in his original attraction, now her loss of virginity causes him to despise her.

He sends her away from him in the harshest of manners. She protests at this point. She is doubly shamed by his actions.

Again, we might recall the story of Shechem and Dinah. In that story, Shechem humiliates Dinah by seizing her and lying with her. However, then he seeks, on account of his love for her, to formalise their union.

Amnon, by contrast, takes Tamar, violates her, and then takes no responsibility for her. Her response to her rape is described in the most pitiful of fashions. Thrust outside the door by Amnon's servant, she pours ashes on her head and tears her long robe, according to some translations, a coat of many colours.

This detail should not go unnoticed. The comparison with the story of Joseph should jump out at us. Absalom finds her, discovers the truth, and then takes her into his house where she lives as a desolate woman.

David, however, hears but does nothing about it. Absalom wants vengeance for what Amnon has done to Tamar, his sister, and so he bides his time, and after two years, by which time Amnon might have lured his guard, he prepares his vengeance. His vengeance occurs at the time of sheep-shearing.

The time of sheep-shearing is an important one within the story of Jacob and also of Judah and David. It's the time when Jacob leaves Laban. It's the time when Judah sleeps with Tamar.

It's the time of the conflict between Nabal and David. And now it will be the time of Absalom's revenge. Absalom invites David to come to his feast.

This more general invitation will be a good cover for the invitation that's given to Amnon. David declines the invitation for himself and his servants but gives Absalom his blessing. When Absalom asks for Amnon to go too, David is surprised, but seemingly under the guise of an invitation given to all of the king's sons, he is, when pressed, willing to let him go.

We should observe the way that Absalom makes David complicit in the death of his son Amnon. Amnon had made David complicit in the rape of Tamar and now Absalom, seeing David's complicity and his lack of action in the case of Tamar, wants to get his own back upon his father too and so makes him complicit in the death of his son. The servants kill Amnon according to Absalom's instructions and then the news goes back to the palace that all of the king's sons have been killed.

We might here recall the story of Genesis chapter 34 once more, where the king's house and the city of Shechem were wiped out by Simeon and Levi in an act of bloody vengeance undertaken because the father had failed to act. However, Jonadab, who knows what Amnon did to his sister and was alert to Absalom's motives, assures David and the others that the king's sons are not dead, just Amnon alone. Absalom then flees to Talmai, his maternal grandfather in the region of the Transjordan, in Geshur.

David bitterly mourns the loss of his son. It isn't entirely clear which son he is mourning for, Amnon the worthless rapist or Absalom, for whom he seems to have a deep affection. By the end of the chapter he is comforted concerning Amnon, since he's dead, but his heart longs to go out to Absalom.

Reading the story of David in 1st and 2nd Samuel, we should see many parallels between David and the character of Jacob in Genesis. Such parallels can be seen in the story of Nabal, or the parallels between the story of Jacob's blessing by Isaac, and a number of the encounters between David and Saul. Saul plays the part of Laban in relationship to David.

He switches the two daughters and sets himself in a rivalry with his son-in-law. There is

deception involving a terror theme, and there are many other events in which we can see some sort of parallel. And yet, in the latter half of Jacob's life in the story of Genesis, the violence and the rivalries among his sons, and the tragedy of a seeming death, cast a shadow over everything else.

In this chapter, a cluster of familiar details from the story of Jacob surface. There is a character called Tamar who is sexually wronged. There's a rape in the house of Jacob.

There's a vicious premeditated act of vengeance by brothers that seems to wipe out an entire royal house. There's a robe of many colours that bears testimony to the evil committed against its owner by a brother. There's a comeuppance at the time of sheep-sharing.

There's a reference to an abominable act and a disgraceful thing in Israel. There's a father who, though angry, fails to act on behalf of his raped daughter. The reader of all of this should have a chilling sense of recognition.

David, who had played out so many of the positive themes of Jacob's life, is now playing out some of the most negative ones. David was forgiven for his sin in chapter 12, but if you sow evil seeds you will reap a terrible harvest. In the lives of his sons, David's own sin mutates into even uglier forms and destroys his household.

Seeing his sons, David should be able to recognize himself in their actions. There is a comeuppance for him here as The unnamed son of Bathsheba dies in his stead. In seeming contrast to David's sin with Bathsheba, Amnon's rape of Tamar is an act of violent coercion.

However, as Peter Lighthouse observes, crudely verse 14 records that Amnon laid her, rather than the more common idiom, lay with her, which makes it clear that this was not consensual. A parallel with David is being drawn. Though David did not force Bathsheba, Amnon's use of his superior strength provides an unexplicated view of what David actually did.

Just like Amnon, David had used his superior strength to take a woman. In the more shameless actions of his sons, Yahweh was bringing to light the truth of David's sin. In the story of Amnon, we can see another parallel.

Jonadab acts as Joab did with David, with the craftiness of a serpent. He makes David unwittingly complicit in the rape of Tamar, much as David himself had formed a web of complicity around his sin. Jonadab is a nephew of David, just as Joab was.

Amnon's feigning illness and remaining in bed, David himself being sent as a messenger to Tamar, Tamar's mourning, and the movement between houses that is constant in this chapter, all harken back to David's own sin. David himself had played the part of the ill king in chapter 11 at the beginning, neglecting his duty to defend his country when it

was under threat. He had sent messengers to get Bathsheba and had made her a mourner by killing her husband.

David is here being made to feel some of the anger and disgust that God felt at his sin. We are also seeing a further effect of his sin. As father, he set the pattern for his sons and his sin concerning Bathsheba and his killing of Uriah are played back to him in a recognisable form in the actions of his sons.

What we do can set a pattern for other people who can go on to do things that are even worse. A question to consider. The story of David and Bathsheba has often been appealed to as a precedent for restoring fallen leaders after serious sin.

How can a more careful reading of the story of David and Bathsheba help us to use the example much more circumspectly? What does it teach us about the effect that serious sin can have upon people's ministries, lives, families, households, and wider spheres of influence? In 2 Samuel 14, five years after the rape of Tamar and three years after the exile of Absalom, Joab decides to intervene. Absalom had killed Amnon, the crown prince, after he had raped his sister Tamar and rather than Absalom being put to death, he went out into exile, staying with Ptolemy, the king of Geshur, his grandfather. David failed to act against Amnon after he raped his sister and now he fails to act effectively in Absalom's case.

This failure to act in situations that call for decisive action will be a characteristic of David's later years as king. After David's sin with Bathsheba, he is weak and passive and ineffectual and into the power vacuum that he leaves step people like Joab and Absalom. Much as Abner was the man pulling the strings behind the throne of the weak Ish-bosheth, so Joab is the one who pulls the strings behind David's throne.

David's failure to act decisively at this point is a matter of incredible severity. The crown prince Amnon has been killed and the one who might be next in line, Absalom, is the one who murdered him and is now in exile. David's strength and his powers of judgment are clearly failing him and the question of succession is pressing itself quite keenly upon the minds of the people but yet there is the situation of uncertainty where the true successor has not actually been marked out.

While the reader knows that the true successor is supposed to be Solomon, that is not clear to everyone else in the nation and Joab in particular does not seem to want to have Solomon as the heir. Joab has always been a man of real politics, a strong man who's concerned with pragmatism and power over morality and seeing this growing power vacuum and David's passivity, he recognizes the threat this poses to the nation. Joab also has a great deal of leverage with David on account of his knowledge of David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah.

We should bear in mind here that David's weakness is not merely as a result of his failing

strength through old age. He has placed himself in a morally weak position relative to Joab and also relative to Absalom. He was made complicit in the rape of Tamar, his daughter, by Amnon who had followed his father's example in the way that he had treated Bathsheba and gone even further with his rape of Tamar.

Absalom in killing Amnon also made David complicit in his action and once again was following his father's example of murder. David had arranged the murder of Uriah, now Absalom arranged the murder of Amnon. On account of both his own sins and his complicity in the sins of his sons, David was unable to judge effectively and so he ends up being passive.

Furthermore because of Joab's involvement in David's own sin, Joab has great power over David and David can't rule effectively in his case. David's weakness and his inability to hold on to his kingdom is in many ways a loss of his power to exercise judgment on account of his own sin. Like some vast arrangement of dominoes, David's first fateful action sets off a cascade that leads to a collapse of stupendous proportions and that is even though some of the damage is averted on account of his repentance and forgiveness.

At this point David himself and his capacity to run his administration are a shadow of what they once were. Here there is another confrontation with David in the form of a parable, this time orchestrated by the serpent in David's garden, Joab. Instructed by Joab, the wise woman of Tekoa tells a story of two sons who fought in a field, one slaying the other.

As a result of this situation the murderer is going to be killed and the woman who's a widow is going to be left without any son to carry on her name. The choice here is between the avenger of blood and not cutting off the name of the deceased husband. The son who killed his brother is presented as having committed manslaughter in a fight that got out of hand, not committing premeditated murder.

This we should observe reminds us of two previous events in the preceding chapters. First of all the parable of Nathan that Nathan gives to David, a parable that leads him to repentance and which exposes the character of the situation and then in chapter 13 the way that Jonadab, the crafty man who like Joab is a nephew of David, puts words in someone else's mouth with an ulterior motive. Here even though David recognizes that it is Joab behind the wise woman of Tekoa, he goes along with Joab.

He can't resist Joab at this point. He has lost both the moral authority and the actual power to stand in Joab's way. Having presented her concern that the murderer was going to be killed by the avenger of blood and that her husband's name and her life will be thoroughly extinguished, the woman pleads for the life of the remaining son to be spared and David rules in favor of her plea but then she springs the trap of the parable.

He is the man as it were. The widow was Israel and the son for whose life she pleaded was Absalom. There are various echoes of Eden here.

Joab was a snake in the garden of David's house, a shrewd and vicious operator who was one of the most insidious threats to David and the integrity of his kingdom. He made David complicit in his wickedness and David himself by entrusting Joab with the execution of his plot against Uriah had given Joab this leverage over him. Employing deception, the serpent Joab used a woman to get David, the new Adam, to capitulate.

The woman's account of her two sons closely parallels the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter 4 and the woman was implicitly aligning herself with Eve. Significantly, just as she springs the trap of the parable, she speaks of the discerning of good and evil in verse 17, recalling the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden. David hearkened to the voice of the woman and to the voice of the snake behind her.

Absalom was brought back to Jerusalem. Perhaps David also heard a faint whisper of his own sin within the woman's parable. Why did Cain kill Abel? Because he was envious of God's pleasure in the firstlings of Abel's flock.

But as the parable of Nathan had revealed, David has slain Uriah for his new lamb. We should also consider the logic of the parable. The logic of the parable is quite insidious.

First of all, it presents the woman as a widow. But yet Israel has a husband, David. David is still on the throne.

He has not yet died. Unless perhaps we are to recognize that David is so ineffectual at this point that he might as well have died. The vacuum that he has left in his failure to act and appoint a clear successor to himself is causing a crisis of succession.

Israel feels that it is bereaved, but it does not know who to look to to carry on the name. We might also observe that even though David was spared from death by the Lord after his sin with Bathsheba, his life is characterized by inaction, mourning, powerlessness, and his approaching death. David allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but not to enter his presence.

This doesn't make things any better. Absalom is not clearly set up as the successor to David, but neither is he condemned nor exiled. At this point Absalom is described to us.

Absalom is remarkably handsome. He's someone who stands out from everyone in Israel, just as Saul did being head and shoulders above everyone else, and as David did on account of his beautiful appearance. Here is a man who seems set apart for rule.

The feature of Absalom that particularly marks him is his hair. Later this will prove to be important for the narrative, but here it also has significance in other respects. Absalom's hair is weighty.

It's cut once a year and it's weighed. Weighed using a measure that is also used for the wool of sheep. Jeffrey Gagin observes the significance of this in Absalom's case.

Absalom had executed revenge upon his brother Amnon for the rape of Tamar at the time of the sheep shearing festival in the preceding chapter. Elsewhere in the Old Testament we see the importance of the sheep shearing festival for the house of Judah, David, and the house of Jacob. Jacob leaves Laban at the time of sheep shearing.

Judah sleeps with Tamar at the time of sheep shearing. David is opposed by Nabal at the time of sheep shearing. And now Absalom, David's son, is personally associated with the time of sheep shearing.

He is like a sheep that is shorn at that time of the year. Absalom has three sons and a daughter called Tamar. Absalom's beautiful daughter called Tamar clearly reminds us of Absalom's beautiful sister called Tamar, and of the wrong that was committed to her.

The fact that the text gives us her name and not the name of her brothers would suggest that her name is of narrative significance. A man with three sons and a daughter called Tamar would also remind us perhaps of Judah. Judah had three sons and a daughter-in-law called Tamar.

Absalom reminds us of David, and even more so as he wins over the hearts of the people in the following chapter. He reminds us of Judah, the head of the kingly tribe, and he has various other auspicious features that mark him out as a kingly character. Perhaps we might also see some resemblances to the character of Samson, another man who is characterized by the weight of his hair and who burns fields of grain.

Absalom, though he is back in the city of Jerusalem, is clearly not in his father's good graces and is not allowed into his father's presence. He is not satisfied with this position, so he appeals to Joab to act in his case, but Joab won't respond. He sends a second time and Joab won't respond, and so he burns Joab's fields with fire.

Joab, who brought Absalom back, has his fields burnt up by him. This anticipates what will happen to the whole field of Israel as a result of Absalom's return. Absalom is engaging in some real political brinkmanship here, showing some virility that David completely lacks at this point.

If David won't make a decision in his case, he will force the decision upon David, giving him the ultimatum, either kill or completely expel him from the land, or return him to his good favor. Joab brings the message to the king, and Absalom is restored. A question to consider.

How in this chapter and the chapters that preceded do we see David losing his powers of judgment after his sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah? Ever since David's sin with Bathsheba, his power within the kingdom had been crumbling. His moral authority was

deeply compromised. His wisdom was failing him.

People like Joab were gaining power in his administration, and there was violence and wickedness within his own house that he could not deal with. Now, in chapter 15, after his ineffectual attempts to deal with him, Absalom the crown prince stages a coup against his father. James Jordan suggests that Absalom functions as a foil for Solomon.

Both Solomon, whose name means peace, and Absalom, whose name means my father is peace, have peace as part of their name. Solomon is distinguished for his wisdom, Absalom for his cunning. Much as the two descendants of Saul, Ish-basheth and Mephibosheth, had names that played upon that same word for shame, so the two sons of David are set in juxtaposition with each other, with their names both having to do with peace.

Absalom might also remind us of David himself in various ways. His physical appearance is similar to that of David. He's beautiful, he is arrestingly handsome, and he steals the heart of the people.

David was also noteworthy for his beautiful physical appearance, and over the period of chapters 16 to 18 of 1 Samuel, won over the hearts of the people, as Absalom does here. Absalom seduces the bride away from David the husband. Absalom begins his coup by developing a sort of retinue around him, a group of runners and servants that made him look like a king.

More particularly, Absalom takes on the characteristics of a king of the nations. We don't usually read of David travelling around with a chariot and horses. Absalom quite likely picked this up from his grandfather in Geshur, when he stayed with him in Aram as a result of his exile.

Judgment was delivered in the gate of the city, and it seems that Absalom focuses upon people from the northern tribes, the tribes of Israel, those tribes that were formerly associated with Saul. There is a natural split within the nation, and when the nation is in a poor condition, it's along this fracture line that it will tend to divide. Saul had very much privileged the tribe and people of Benjamin during his time in rule, and Absalom suggests that David is showing a similar sort of favouritism to Judah.

People from Judah get heard by the king, but those from Israel aren't really cared for by the king. They don't get justice in Jerusalem. And so any people coming down to Jerusalem from Israel to have their cases heard is discouraged before they are ever seen by David or one of his ministers.

Absalom, however, plays the part of the flatterer. He shows great concern for their case, and wishes that they could be heard. If only he were king, he would act on their behalf.

In all of this, he's fostering grievances among the people in the northern part of the

kingdom against David, suggesting that he does not care for them or administer justice truly. He's also, by his flattery, winning hearts and minds to his cause. As he acts this way over a period of years, it puts him in a position to stage a coup.

We should again be alert to the way that David's sin with Bathsheba set off a chain of events that weakened his hold, weakened his administration, empowered unfaithful elements within it, and weakened loyalties in others, and compromised David's capacity for judgement and for moral authority. In the preceding chapters, we saw David's indecision, and how his inability to act in the case of Tamar and Amnon, and in the case of Absalom, gave power to others to force actions upon him, or to act in his place. Here, the absence of a strong just authority leads to a power vacuum that will be filled by people like Joab and Absalom, and Absalom is all too happy to exploit the weaknesses of David's kingdom at this point.

At the end of either four or forty years, Absalom addresses the king. If it is forty, forty seems to be the original reading, then it might be a reference to the years of David's reign. David reigns for forty years, so Absalom's coup might occur in the final year of his reign.

If it's four years, which would be the easier reading, Absalom has had a considerable amount of time to strengthen and create grievances, and is now in a strong position to actually pull off his coup. There are similarities to be noted here, with the vengeance that he enacted against Amnon back in chapter 13. He stages a special feast, invites many royal officials, and then performs the deed.

This is all after many years of cunningly biding his time, two years in the case of Amnon, and likely four years here. He goes down to Hebron, to the south, under the pretense of holding a peace offering, a feast in fulfillment of a vow given for deliverance. He invites two hundred top men from David's administration.

They will either join him, or they will serve as helpful hostages. At this point, Absalom has David in a pincer movement. Israel to the north have had their hearts estranged from David, and will join Absalom, and to the south there is Hebron.

And for all David knows, the two hundred men have thrown their lot in with Absalom. He has to flee to the east, out into the wilderness. Absalom and his men are based in Hebron, in the south of Judah, where David's rule over Judah first began.

Ahithophel most significantly joins Absalom. He is Bathsheba's grandfather, and perhaps even though Bathsheba has now married David, Ahithophel is angry with David on account of his taking of his granddaughter and his killing his grandson-in-law. David and his men leave Jerusalem, and he leaves ten concubines to guard the palace.

While they would not physically guard the place, they would be a remnant of David's

house left there. David is accompanied by the Cherethites and the Pelethites, the bodyguard of the king, also with six hundred men from Gath, either Gittites who had joined him during his period there, or the original military force that had been with him from the beginning. Ittai is a convert from Philistia, a Gittite, who has associated himself with David.

The vow of loyalty that Ittai gives to David at this point is reminiscent of the vow that David's great-grandmother, Ruth, gave to Naomi back in the book of Ruth. David and his men cross the brook Kidron, which is between Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, and Zadok comes bringing the Ark of the Covenant, also Abiathar. These are two men functioning as high priests at the time, and the Ark is going to go with the true king.

Yet the Ark belongs back in the city, and David here goes into exile while sending the Ark back to the city. The description of setting down the Ark until all the people have passed by might remind us of the entry into the land back in the book of Joshua as they crossed the Jordan. This is a sort of inverse of that.

They are now leaving the land. David goes up the ascent of Olives, the Mount of Olives, in a state of mourning with his men. They're weeping and with bare feet.

He hears that Ahithophel is among the conspirators, and he prays that Ahithophel's counsel would be made into foolishness. There is an immediate answer to David's prayer as Hushai the Archite arrives to join him. Hushai, the king's friend and counsellor, will be a means by which Ahithophel's counsel can be thwarted.

He will go back to the city, present himself as loyal to Absalom, and seek to undermine the counsel of Ahithophel. There will be a number of men who are faithful to David left in the city, the priests Zadok and Nebiathah and their two sons, and Hushai, the king's friend and counsellor, will all be there to act for David and spy on Absalom. A question to consider, in what ways does David's retreat from Jerusalem anticipate the story of Christ and his cross? In chapter 16 of 2 Samuel, as in the preceding chapter, there is an itinerary of David's departure from the city and his ascent of the Mount of Olives.

This itinerary involves a series of meetings and encounters, members of his household, groups of his men first, then Zadok and the Ark, Hushai, the Archite next, and now in chapter 16 he meets Zeba, the lying steward of Mephibosheth, and then Shimei. Both Zeba and Shimei are people associated with Saul. Zeba was Saul's steward, perhaps his chief steward.

We first encountered him back in chapter 9. David and his men are travelling out from Jerusalem in the realm of power, and the persons with whom David had surrounded himself in the past are being removed from him. As he goes further out he meets with men formerly associated with Saul, and there is a sort of reversion to the earlier stage of David's life, where he was pursued by Saul in the wilderness. David is going out into

exile, and it is as if layers of his kingdom are being stripped from him at various points on the journey out towards the Jordan.

Zeba gives a great array of gifts to David, similar to the gifts that Abigail had sent to David when he went to attack Nabal. Zeba gives a false report about his master Mephibosheth, seeing an opportunity to gain favour for himself, and to ingratiate himself to David. This we can imagine would particularly have hurt David.

When David had gone out into exile previously, he had enjoyed the support of Mephibosheth's father, his greatest friend and closest supporter. That the very son of Jonathan had turned against him would be a particularly cruel blow to David, especially after all of the grace that David had shown to Mephibosheth. Zeba however, as we'll find out later, was lying.

He does not seem to accompany David. In all likelihood he returns to the city where he can play both sides. David arrives at Behorim, which was the point where Paltiel, to whom Michael had been given after she was taken from David, stopped following her when he was weeping after her, back in chapter 3 verse 16.

James Jordan suggests that this is supposed to give us an impression of a boundary of a region of support for Saul. It is important to recognise that the opposition that David faces in the Benjaminite town of Behorim here is not the only reference to the town in the larger narrative. Behorim here is the low point, but in the next appearance of Behorim, in the following chapter, David's loyalists, the sons of the priest, Jonathan and Himiaz, find support there.

As we see Behorim as the low point here, in the next chapter it is the sign of the turning of the tide. Shimei is a man of the family of Saul and he places curses upon David and casts stones at him, accusing him of being a man of bloodshed against the house of Saul. Shimei's accusations are unsurprising and they would seem to have some merit to someone looking from the outside.

The Amalekite who had claimed to have killed Saul had gone to David for a reward. Joab, David's right hand man, had killed Abner in cold blood. Rechab and Beanna, the men who had assassinated Ishbosheth, had also come to David for a reward.

David had furthermore put seven sons of Saul to death for Saul's sin against the Gibeonites. To someone who did not know the full reality of what had happened, this all looks exceedingly bad for David, especially with regard to the slaying of Abner, as David has not put away Joab, he is still his right hand man. Now Abishai, Joab's brother, wants to take the life of Shimei, but David restrains him.

We might here think of the way that Christ, who had also left Jerusalem and ascended the Mount of Olives, restrained Peter when he wanted to strike with the sword those who

came out against Christ to capture him. At the end of this scene David arrives at the Jordan and he refreshes himself there. The scene now shifts back to Jerusalem where Absalom and the Israelites, Absalom's supporters to the north, arrive in the city with Ahithophel.

Hushai, David's counsellor, comes to Absalom and declares his loyalty. Hushai is deceiving Absalom in service of David, and this is one of a great many cases of deception in the books of Samuel, most of which are presented in a very positive light. Deception in such a situation as Hushai was in was quite licit.

Absalom was a seditious man and an aggressor who had no right to the truth which he intended to use to destroy David, the divinely appointed king of Israel. Hushai successfully explains his changed allegiance by suggesting that his allegiance had always been to the kingdom primarily, not just to the man who happened to occupy its throne. His loyalty was to David the king, not to David the man.

No change of allegiance had actually occurred then. Hushai's wisdom is clearly seen in this passage and in what follows. He shrewdly refrains from answering the question that Absalom poses straightforwardly, but gives a two-part response that resists the implication of his unstable loyalties that is within Absalom's question.

He presents himself as a man loyal to the throne, and what is more he flatters Absalom by suggesting that the success of his coup is a sure thing, expressing the absoluteness of his loyalty to Absalom by claiming that Absalom is the one whom the Lord, the men of the court, and all of Israel have chosen as their king. David is no longer David the king, but simply David the man, and he is no longer owed any loyalty. Hushai had been loyal to David when he reigned, but now Absalom had clearly taken David's place and Hushai would be no less loyal to him.

Ahithophel was renowned for the shrewdness of his counsel, and Absalom turns to him for advice regarding what to do. Ahithophel advises Absalom publicly to humiliate his father by openly taking his father's concubines and lying with them. This would be a sign of his father's emasculation and weakness, among other things.

Sleeping with members of the former king's harem was a way of strengthening his claim to the throne. It also made the rebellion more absolute, closing off the possibility of reconciliation between the father and son. People must take sides.

In Genesis chapter 35 verse 22, Reuben had slept with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine, after the birth of Benjamin and the death of Rachel. This was a power play on Reuben's part. It asserted his dominance as the firstborn over his father and over Rachel's side of the family, who had always enjoyed Jacob's special favour.

Back in chapter 3, Ishbosheth had, likely falsely, accused Abner of going into Rizpah, one

of Saul's concubines. In 1 Kings chapter 2, Adonijah, after his failed coup, requested Abishag the Shunammite, likely again as part of another attempt to gain the kingdom. All of this recalls David's original sin with Bathsheba too.

Ahithophel, who gave the council, was Bathsheba's grandfather. The site where Absalom committed the act was the very place from which David had first looked out at Bathsheba. There is a sort of poetic justice taking place here.

David's own sins sowed bitter seeds that are now bearing a very bitter harvest, bringing the consequences back upon David's own head. This all fulfils the judgement of the Lord delivered through Nathan the prophet, back in chapter 12 verses 11 to 12. A question to consider.

How does David's response to Shimei's cursing reveal a righteous response to divine judgement? What might be some of the ways in which we might follow David's example? Now Absalom was manifestly the divinely intended and nationally acknowledged king of Israel. In this answer, Hushai both resisted the implication that his loyalties were unstable, and he flattered Absalom by implying that Absalom's claim and grasp upon the throne was so certain that Hushai's loyalty to him would naturally be absolute. Having survived this initial test, Hushai is now in a position to prostrate the council of Ahithophel in chapter 17.

Ahithophel's council is for him to gather 12,000 men, an overwhelming force relative to David's small band, symbolically representing all Israel too, to pursue after David that night and to come upon him while he is weary and discouraged. David's men would flee, and David would be captured. There is a general consensus that Ahithophel's council is correct.

His council is held in the very highest esteem more generally. However, Hushai had so successfully made the case of his loyalties that, even with an almost complete agreement, Absalom still turns to him to ask for his advice. Hushai now has his work cut out for him.

He has to make a case compelling enough to win everyone away from the shrewd advice of Ahithophel, who is held in the very highest of esteem, and he has to commit them to a much less successful course, all while not arousing any suspicions. The way that he does so is nothing short of masterful. It's a brilliant display of persuasive rhetoric.

Shimon bar Ephrat helpfully analyses the way that Hushai achieves this. He declares that Ahithophel's advice is not good this time. This affirms the general goodness of Ahithophel's council, while disagreeing on this particular occasion.

And he pauses before he resumes. This creates some tension and anticipation. In verses 8-10 he explores the weak points, or supposedly weak points, of Ahithophel's plan, and

in verses 11-13 he proposes an alternative.

Hushai's response downplays the significance of his own advice. Essentially he says to Absalom, you know, you know all of this already about your father, you don't need me to tell you. David is Absalom's father and surely Absalom would know him very well.

Hushai is careful not to draw too much attention to the part that he is playing. Hushai is also concerned to conform his advice to Absalom's point of view, hence the repetition of your father. Ahithophel's advice, by contrast, was sloppy in this regard.

It concerned David, the king, and one man. He did not successfully present things from Absalom's viewpoint. Hushai emphasises that the people with David are his men.

He underlines their intense loyalty, suggesting that they won't be so readily divided from David, as Ahithophel's council implies. They aren't just people, as Ahithophel speaks of them. Hushai doesn't say a lot of this explicitly.

He communicates it with the way that he frames things. Their subtle insinuation can often be more powerful than the explicit claim. He frames the fact that David and his men are mighty men and enraged, as if these things are essential features of their character, and he underlines both of these characteristics.

He uses colourful illustrations, a bear robbed of her cubs. Throughout, Hushai's language is vivid and compelling. He evokes the heroic period of David's life by his descriptions, with talks about bears and lions and all these mighty deeds.

Absalom and his men might have thought that they were pursuing an aged king, but David is still, at heart, the hero of Israel. He also, in response to an argument from Ahithophel founded on David's condition, focuses on David's character. He emphasises David's preparedness as a man of war, and suggests that there are a great many hiding spots he could use, giving a particular illustration.

He suggests that David and his men might well be lying in wait for a pursuing army, ready to strike a damaging blow, and that rumours of David's strike against Absalom's men could easily spread, blowing up into tales of a great defeat, all serving to turn the tide against him. The hearts of former supporters of Absalom would fail them. Whereas he had previously spoken of David's men, when speaking of the men around Absalom, he merely speaks of them as the people who follow Absalom, implying that they could easily be divided from him if things turned sour.

He speaks about David's valiant men in the plural, but he gives an example of even the valiant man among Absalom's forces, insinuating that Absalom's men are of a very different calibre. The valiant man is exceptional, not typical among them. He concludes by broadening his claim about knowledge.

Not only does Absalom know these things about David, his father, all Israel does. Now things are set up for his alternative proposal. David's men are of such great quality that they can only be overcome by great quantity.

Absalom needs to muster men from throughout Israel, and this will buy David valuable time. Again Hushai is careful to make his language colourful and compelling. He uses similes drawn from nature, as the sand of the sea for multitude, and as the dew falls on the ground.

His language is also redolent of the language of divine promise and truth, and so is much more calculated to receive a positive response. The comprehensive references to Israel, all Israel, and from Dan to Beersheba, suggest not only the extensiveness of the force, but also Absalom's status as the commander of the entire nation. Whereas Ahithophel foregrounds himself as the one who would work out his plan, Hushai constantly speaks of we, and more importantly of you, in reference to Absalom.

All of Israel should be gathered to Absalom, and Absalom should go out before them. This plays to Absalom's aspirations. In the second part of the speech David is passive, and his men's loyalty is downplayed.

Even if David uses the time he is granted to fortify himself in a city, and he is found there, the city can be torn down by the sheer numbers of people against him, and there will be nothing found of that city any more, not even David. There is no mention of fighting, the victory will be almost a matter of course on account of the overwhelming force. Absalom and the men of Israel, who might be different from the elders of Israel who were mentioned earlier, are won over by Hushai's brilliant speech.

However, despite Hushai's shrewd rhetoric, it is ultimately the Lord that makes him successful. Hushai then relays the news to Jonathan and Ahimeaz, the sons of the priests, who would send the message on to David. They are discovered however, and Absalom's servants go looking for them, while they fled to Behorim, where David had been cursed earlier by Shimei.

There they are hidden by a woman, who sends the men out in a different direction, and this is all reminiscent of the story of Rahab and Jericho. They then bring the news to David, and they all cross over the Jordan that night. This might remind us of the story of the Exodus and being pursued to the Red Sea, crossing over the Red Sea by night, or perhaps also Jacob's crossing of the Jabbok.

When he sees that his counsel is rejected, Ahithophel goes, puts his affairs in order, and kills himself. This might seem to be an overreaction to the situation, but it is probably more likely that he saw ahead and recognized what was going to happen when his advice was rejected and Hushai's followed. Having crossed over the Jordan, David and his men came to Mahanaim, while Absalom crossed the Jordan in pursuit of him with all

of the men of Israel.

This associates David with Jacob. Jacob had spent time with Mahanaim when Esau's forces were coming out against him. At Mahanaim, David receives aid from kings and others of the region, who provide him and his men with various of the necessities that they need.

A question to consider. Wisdom and shrewdness are common themes in this and the preceding chapters. What may be some of the lessons that we are supposed to draw about wisdom through these chapters? In chapter 17, the Lord had used Hushai the Archite to frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel, who then went out and killed himself.

Now in chapter 18, while Absalom and his men play out the counsel of Hushai, an overwhelming attack with men mustered from all over Israel, covering the face of the earth, David and his men adopt tactics similar to those suggested by Ahithophel, a more strategic strike that separates the leader from his men. Ahithophel's counsel had sought to isolate David and by killing him to destroy his cause. However, this is exactly what happens to Absalom.

David divided his forces into three, much as Gideon's forces were divided back in Judges 7.16 and Saul's in 1 Samuel 11.11. Hushai's counsel to Absalom, that he muster a force from the entirety of Israel, had been designed to buy David significant time. It would take quite some time to gather people from Dan to Beersheba and to bring them all together over the Jordan to attack David. While Ahithophel had sought to pursue David immediately and without delay with men that were already gathered, destroying him while he was exhausted, disheartened and in a position of greater vulnerability, Hushai's plan gave David the time to cross the Jordan, to receive relief and support from Transjordanian allies, to muster a much larger fighting force and to find greater defensive security in some fortified city.

Ahithophel's plan had been to divide David from the men and to pick him off, bringing an end to the war. And so, recognizing this danger, David's men did not want him to accompany them into the battle, lest he be killed and everything come to nothing. However, by Hushai's false counsel, Absalom leads his men into battle and puts himself into a position of considerably greater vulnerability, which he would not have been in had he followed Ahithophel's advice.

This makes it possible to overcome Absalom's coup with one effective blow. David had given explicit instructions concerning the life of one man in the battle, that of his son Absalom. Joab, Abishai and Ittai the Gittite, the commanders of the three parts of David's army, were all instructed concerning Absalom in the hearing of the wider people.

Earlier, of course, David had given instructions concerning the life of Uriah to Joab, desiring Joab to ensure that Uriah's life was taken. Now he requests mercy from Joab, to

ensure that the life of his son is not taken. The battle itself was fought in the forest of Ephraim, between the men of Israel, presumably largely the people from the northern tribes, and the men of David, chiefly men of Judah, and allies from the Transjordan, both Gentiles and Israelites.

Twenty thousand men were killed, and as in several other biblical accounts, such as the defeat of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, or the battle of Deborah and Barak against Sisera, nature itself fights on behalf of God's people. The forest devoured more people of Absalom's men than the sword. Back in chapter 14, the hair of Absalom was described to us as his most notable feature.

In verses 25 to 26 of that chapter, Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, there was no blemish in him. And when he cut the hair of his head, for at the end of every year he used to cut it, when it was heavy on him he cut it, he weighed the hair of his head, two hundred shekels by the king's weight.

Absalom is described here like a ram that is shorn annually, and his hair weighed. His hair is cut at the time of sheep-shearing, at the end of the year. Now this feature becomes his downfall.

The sons of the king rode mules, but when Absalom's hair gets caught in the oak, the mule went out from beneath him. He is unseated from his mule, as he will be unseated from the throne. Much as Ahithophel ended up hanging himself in the preceding chapter, so Absalom, the man who started the coup, is left hanging like his chief advisor.

Given the judgment upon David, with the repayment of four sheep for the one that he stole from the poor man Uriah, perhaps we are supposed to see Absalom as the unblemished ram. Note the description of him as being without blemish, from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. The unblemished ram, the son of David, is caught in the tree, and he will die in David's place.

A man brings news to Joab that Absalom is hanging from the tree, and Joab asks him why he didn't kill him, so that he might be rewarded with ten pieces of silver and a belt. Yet the man had heard the instruction of David to his commanders, and he was not going to go against the word of the king. He knows that if he had taken Absalom's life, Joab, being a treacherous man, would have allowed him to take all of the blame and the punishment, while Joab himself would escape scot-free.

Joab himself runs Absalom through with three javelins, and then Joab's armor-bearers surround Absalom and kill him. Joab calls all the men back from the battle. They have won the victory at this point, the usurper has been killed, and the coup is over.

They take Absalom down from the tree, put him in a pit, and cover it up with a great

heap of stones. Hanging dead upon the tree, Absalom was marked out as a man who was cursed, and being buried under a great heap of stones, he reminds us of Achan, and others whose deaths were marked out as a cautionary reminder for future generations. In these two details, we might be reminded of Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 18 to 23.

First of all, verses 22 to 23 read, And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. This commandment, however, comes immediately after another, in verses 18 to 21 of the chapter, which refers to the rebellious son.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and though they discipline him will not listen to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him, and bring him out to the elders of his city at the gate of the place where he lives, and they shall say to the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice, he is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones, so you shall purge the evil from your midst, and all Israel shall hear and fear. Absalom suffers the death of the cursed man, hanging on a tree, and he ends up in a pit covered up with stones, like the man who is the rebellious son.

The manner in which his body is treated then is a symbolic declaration of the character of his crimes. Job was probably right to recognise that if Absalom was left alive, there would be a continued threat to David's kingdom. David is getting old and he is already weak, and he is going to die very soon.

If Absalom is left alive there will be a continued uncertainty about the succession, and there would be the possibility of another coup. By having many people present at the death, there could be a claim that there was such a commotion that no one knew who took his life, and that way there would be plausible deniability for all involved. An interesting detail is mentioned here, that Absalom in his lifetime set up a pillar for himself in the king's valley, because he had no son to keep his name in remembrance.

This seems to be at odds with the detail that we find in chapter 14 verse 27, where he is mentioned as having three sons, and a daughter called Tamar. Perhaps we are to imply that his sons died prematurely, much as Judah's sons died at the beginning of Genesis chapter 38 perhaps, and also as David's sons have been dying. The detail is significant at this juncture though, because Absalom's name and lineage is completely wiped out at this point.

With Absalom's death his whole line dies. Ahimeaz, the son of Zadok, wants to bring the news back to the king. It is not entirely clear whether Ahimeaz knows that Absalom is dead, if he does know that he is dead he brings a deceptive report when he speaks to

the king, and suggests uncertainty in the matter.

Rather it is possible that Joab's response to him in verse 20 should not include because the king's son is dead in quotation marks. That was the reason why Joab did not want to send him, but Ahimeaz may not himself have known of the fact. Ahimeaz seeing the commotion and knowing that victory had been achieved, might just presume that Absalom had been captured.

He was well aware that the king had instructed that nothing should happen to Absalom, and he might just presume that the king's wishes would be honoured. Joab sends a Cushite, presumably a man of Ethiopia, to bear the news instead. He will bring David both news of the victory and news of the death of Absalom.

On two previous occasions in the book of 2 Samuel, David had taken the lives of messengers who sought praise for the demise of some of his enemies, the Amalekites' news of the death of Saul at the battle of Gilboa, and Rechab and Bayanah's news of their assassination of Ish-bosheth. Perhaps Joab does not want to put the innocent Ahimeaz in the middle of this situation, and so sends a foreigner instead. However, Ahimeaz insists on bearing the news, and he ends up running ahead of the Cushite and bringing the news to David.

The news is clearly news of a victory. The whole army is not running towards the city, but just one man. The story relates the coming of the messengers with considerable suspense, the watchmen watching from the walls, and David eagerly awaiting for the news of the battle.

When Ahimeaz brings the news, it is news of peace. The Lord has delivered up the enemies of David. However, in this situation, the thing that David really cares about is the fate of his son.

Is it well with the young man Absalom? And Ahimeaz doesn't know. And then the Cushite arrives with his news. He tells again of the victory, but then adds the detail that Absalom has died.

David's response is to go up to his chamber above the gate and weep. He goes between heaven and earth, as his son died between heaven and earth. He is distraught over the news.

He has won this great victory, the coup is over. But yet, with the death of his son, it means almost nothing to him. He would rather he had died, rather than Absalom, his son.

Of course, Absalom, his son, had ultimately died, in part because of David's own sin. David's sin with Bathsheba, and the punishment the Lord declared upon it, started the balls rolling that would ultimately lead to the coup of Absalom. And in Absalom's own

death, we saw hints of Absalom as a sort of sacrificial lamb, taking the place of David.

The physically unblemished ram and the son of David dies, so that David himself will not die. There is a sort of poetic justice here as well. Earlier on, in chapter 11, David had given explicit instructions to Joab to kill one man in the battle.

And here, he had given instructions to spare one man in the battle. On that previous occasion, he had given little thought to the other people who had to die, in order that the murder of Uriah, and his sin of adultery, might be covered up. Now, once again, through the actions of Joab, this sin comes back upon his head.

Now, many lives are spared, but the one life he cares about is lost. David's fatherly affection for Absalom reminds us of the story of Jacob. In the latter part of David's life, he plays out the tragedy of Jacob as the bereaved father.

And here, David mourns for Absalom much as Jacob had mourned for Joseph. The death of the dearly beloved son bringing him down to the grave in sorrow. David is the king of Israel, in a moment when he has just won the great victory over his enemies.

And all he cares about is his rebel son. It's quite inappropriate. David's failure to exercise proper discipline over his sons, and his indulgence of them, has produced this situation.

And now, his overly indulgent fatherly love is preventing him from playing the part of the king on a day of great national victory. And the restoration of the kingdom. In David's tragic words of grief that end this chapter, Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would I have died instead of you? Oh Absalom, my son, my son.

We are hearing the words of someone who is tasting the bitterest fruit of his previous sin. Even as a forgiven man, the tragic fruit of David's sin is coming upon his head here. A question to consider.

What do you think was going through the mind of Joab in this chapter? David's response to the news from the battle is unseemly. Israel has just won a spectacular victory. David's loyal men have fought and put their lives on the line for him.

Yet they had to slink back in as if they were a defeated force, as the king was in mourning for his rebellious son who was killed. The very man who had staged the coup, and sought to dethrone him. Joab has to take emergency action.

At this point it seems that Joab is really the power in Israel. David has been passive and largely unable to act effectively as king since his sin with Bathsheba. As David has declined, Joab has filled much of the power vacuum.

David is seemingly unmindful of the danger that his weakness and indecision has placed the kingdom in. But Joab is very concerned on this front. His plan to bring back Absalom

to the land was designed in part to make clear the line of succession, which had been left dangerously uncertain after Absalom killed the crown prince Amnon, and became the next in line to the throne.

However, Absalom proved more volatile than Joab had bargained for, and his brinkmanship and rebellion had brought Israel down into a bloody civil war. Joab had learned his lesson the first time, and so he killed Absalom, rather than sparing him as the king required, and leaving a door of possibility open to a further coup in the future. Joab at this point almost certainly thinks that David no longer has the capacity to rule.

He wants to tighten his grip upon David, and the destiny of the kingdom more generally. David will try to take Joab down a peg here, but he will prove unsuccessful. Joab rebukes David, speaking to him less as his king than as a child to be told off.

He accuses him of shameful behaviour. Joab warns him that the situation is one of the greatest urgency and seriousness. If David does not act immediately, the victory will curdle into a terrible disaster for him, far more devastating than anything that he has faced to this point in his life.

We might well hear a veiled threat here. If David doesn't shape up, Joab will be only too prepared to take over the reins. David responds as he ought to do.

He returns to his seat of judgement by the gate, and all of the people come to him. David now faces the challenge of reuniting the nation after bloody civil war, winning back the hearts of the people, treating both loyalists and former rebels with wisdom, and re-establishing his throne on a just and sure footing. Peter Lighthouse notes the way that David's encounters on his return to Jerusalem mirror those of his departure.

When he departed he met with Hushai, Zeber and Shimei, and now on his return he meets Shimei, Zeber and Barzillai. Both Hushai and Barzillai are elderly loyalists of David, who would have been a burden had they accompanied him. David shows mercy towards Shimei, who had cursed him when he passed through Behorim on his way out of the land.

Abishai, who had sought to kill Shimei on the previous encounter, seeks to do so again. Once again, however, David prevents him from doing so. David's response to Abishai here might make the attentive reader think of our Lord's response to Peter, when Peter seeks to discourage him from going to the cross, and then later on in the story when Peter strikes Malkuth, the high priest's servant, with the sword.

David's mercy towards former enemies and rebels would make the reunion of the nation easier than it would have been, had he been concerned to enact reprisals. Clemency to the former supporters of Absalom enabled the nation to come together once again behind David. Zeber had come to meet David around the same time as Shimei, when he

and his men were crossing the Jordan.

He had earlier been blessed on account of his master's seeming treachery. However, shortly after Mephibosheth appears, and he has a very different story to tell. He has, he claims, been in mourning since David left Jerusalem, and his appearance supports his story.

Zeber tricked him and slandered him to David, in order to get an advantage over him. He puts himself in David's hand. David determines to split the land between the two of them, and Mephibosheth's response is to say that the land does not matter to him.

What matters is that David has returned. Zeber can have it all. Mephibosheth's concern is not with property and possessions, but with his relationship with the king.

David's judgement here seems manifestly unjust on the face of it. However, looking at it more closely, we would not be mistaken to hear some resemblance between this and the story of Solomon and the two prostitutes with the child. Mephibosheth's answer is absolutely the right one.

It reveals that he is the true loyalist of David, and strongly suggests that Zeber is a liar. We are not told what happens next, but it seems likely that Mephibosheth would have received all of his former property back. After Mephibosheth, David's interaction with Barzillai the Gileadite is recorded.

Barzillai had given David succour and support at the end of chapter 17 at Mahanaim, at a time of great need for David. David invites him to live with him in Jerusalem, where Barzillai would be provided for by David, in repayment for his immense loyalty. Barzillai, however, rejects David's offer due to his age, and the difficulty that would be involved.

He sends Chimham, presumably his son, in his stead, to be blessed and advanced in David's house on account of his father's great loyalty. There are problems bubbling away in Israel throughout the chapter, though. David's challenge will be to bring the people of Israel back into union with the men of Judah.

Absalom's coup had gained support in the northern tribes, precisely because they had the impression that David gave very favourable treatment to his fellow Judahites. However, in returning David to the land, the privileged place given to Judah pours salt into that old wound, making the situation much worse. David's honour guard for his re-entry into the land is mostly Judahites, with half the people of Israel with them.

The impression might be received that David is really primarily the king of Judah, and that the other tribes simply aren't as important to him. David does give a gesture of conciliation in appointing Amasa, the commander of Absalom's men, as the new commander of his army in the place of Joab. David knows all too well by now the danger that Joab represents, presumably suspects that the hand of Joab was behind the death of

Absalom, and he realises that he might soon face a coup from Joab if he is not careful.

However, Amasa's appointment would prove short-lived. Joab had already killed Abner, who threatened to take his place at the beginning of the book, and now he will be quite prepared to take the life of Amasa too. The chapter ends with an argument between the Judahites and the rest of Israel.

Israel insists that their title to David isn't being acknowledged properly by the Judahites. They have ten shares in David, while Judah has only one. Why should Judah be so privileged? These continuing tensions show that the nation was far from united, and that it was ripe for further division and war.

A question to consider. Disunity, distrust and recurring eruptions of antagonisms along familiar fault lines was an enduring feature of Israel's life in the land from the time of their first entry into it. What were the causes or the reasons for some of the major divisions? And when were they most clearly seen in Israel's history? By what mechanisms could unity have been achieved, and what provisions did the Lord make for it? In what ways could the fractures in Israel be regarded as a natural consequence of the nation's sins? In 2 Samuel 20, the difficult task of reuniting the nation after the end of Absalom's coup continues, now in the form of another rebellion led by Sheba the Benjaminite.

David's grasp upon power at this point is very weak, and in the previous chapter it was already plain that there were enduring tensions between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes. In chapter 19 verse 43, the Israelites had insisted upon their stake in David as their king, and the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, We have ten shares in the king, and in David also we have more than you. Why then did you despise us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king? But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

The tribe of Judah, however, acts as if they have a special claim to David, and at the beginning of chapter 20, Sheba starts a rebellion by disavowing any stake on Israel's part in David. If Judah won't acknowledge the fact that Israel has ten shares in David to their one, then fine, Israel will reject David altogether. David is the king of Judah, not the king of Israel.

Many of the men of Israel withdraw from David and follow Sheba instead. The division between the north and the south anticipates the later division in the land that will occur in the time of Rehoboam. Whether or not Sheba is a descendant of Saul, he is a man of Benjamin, and the lingering tensions between the tribes of Benjamin and Judah in the leadership of the nation are flaring up yet again.

Nearing the end of David's reign, the tension that framed much of its beginning has reappeared. Things are falling apart. David returns to Jerusalem, yet there is no grand re-

coronation.

In fact, David seems fairly impotent at this point. He does not return to the concubines, who, among other things, represent the nation as the bride. They now live as if in widowhood.

We might here recall the parable given by the wise woman of Tekoa, where, symbolically standing for Israel, she spoke of herself as if a widow, even while David remained on the throne. David remains the husband of Israel, but only technically. As the chapter progresses, we will see that he might as well be dead, as he is only the puppet king by the end of it.

There are ten concubines. Peter Lightheart suggests the possibility that perhaps we are to regard the concubines as symbolic of the tribes of Israel. The Judahite king never truly goes in to the concubines again, as, for the northern tribes, David has ceased to be regarded as their husband.

They were bereaved of David some time ago, and while they are guarded and provided for by him, there is no conjugal union any more. David has appointed Amasa as commander over the army in the place of Joab, in the preceding chapter. Amasa had commanded Absalom's forces, but was a worthier man to lead than Joab was.

As in the case of Abner, David had shown grace to the commander of the army of his adversary. As in the case of Abner, Joab will assassinate a rival. David wants a swift military strike upon Sheba the son of Bichri, much as Ahithophel had advised a few chapters earlier against him.

Unless such a swift strike is made, Sheba could easily get into a fortified city, and his rebellion would be much more difficult to quash. Amasa, however, failed to summon Judah in the appointed time. As Amasa delays, David fears that unless action is taken immediately, Sheba's rebellion may prove more damaging than Absalom's.

He summons Abishai, who was second to Joab and now to Amasa, the most important of his military commanders. Abishai's men are joined by the men of his brother Joab, with the Cherethites and the Pelethites presumably led by Ben-Aniah the son of Jehoiada. As the story progresses, however, Joab clearly takes priority over Abishai his brother, even though Abishai was the man with the higher command after Amasa had taken the place of Joab.

Joab kills Amasa, his rival for the leadership of the army, in much the same way as he killed Abner. In both cases, there is deception involved. 2 Samuel 3, verse 27 reads, And when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the midst of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the stomach so that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.

The killing of Amasa occurs in the same location, Gibeon, where the conflict between Ish-bosheth and Abner and the men of Israel, and David and Joab and the men of Judah had begun in chapter 2. Much as earlier on, Joab had gone against David's will in order to cling on to his power as the commander of the army, so here he does so again. This time, however, there is more clearly an internal coup taking place. Sheba will be defeated by the end of the chapter, but Joab's internal coup will have proved successful.

Later in 1 Kings chapter 1, Joab will be involved in another coup, opposing David more directly. Much as in the murder of Abner, Joab is also killing a figure who strengthened the ties between David and the northern tribes. Abner was the commander of the men of Ish-bosheth with the northern tribes, and Amasa was the commander of Absalom's men from the northern tribes.

In both cases, Joab's personal interests and ambitions are being placed ahead of the security and unity of the kingdom. Amasa is killed and then a summons is given in verse 11, and one of Joab's young men took his stand by Amasa and said, The wording here leaves us in little doubt as to who is actually in charge at this point. The young man is Joab's young man, not David's.

Joab's name is placed before David's, and Joab is the man that they must follow, the man that David had just deposed from his office as commander of the whole army. In 2 Samuel 3, verse 39, after Joab's killing of Abner, David had lamented that the sons of Zeruah, Joab and Abishai, were too hard for him. He was unable to reign them in, and in the end, they ended up controlling him and the kingdom.

David's concern regarding Sheba was realised. Sheba was able to get into a fortified city in the north of Israel, Abel Bethmeachah. This made capturing or killing him considerably more difficult.

However, having gone through the entirety of the land, he had not been successful in gathering much of a force behind him. Joab and his men besieged him in the city. As they were preparing siege works in order to break down the walls of the city, though, a wise woman intervened in the situation.

Speaking of the city of Abel as a mother in Israel, she wonders why it is being destroyed. The city is not in rebellion, but is faithful. Yet it is in danger of being destroyed for the sake of Sheba.

She offers to cast out the head of Sheba, which they go on to do. Her wisdom saves the city. However, we should probably consider the echoes of the story of Abimelech in Judges chapter 9 here.

In that story, a pretender to rule has his head crushed by something cast by a woman from a besieged city, which is saved by her actions. We had another reference to that

story back in 2 Samuel chapter 11, when Joab instructed the messenger concerning the news to bring to David after the murder of Uriah. Perhaps we are to see Joab as a successful Abimelech-style character, as Peter Lighthouse suggests.

As Lighthouse also notes, after Joab returns to the city of Jerusalem, there is a summary statement of David's administration. After this chapter, the rest of the material of 2 Samuel relates to earlier periods of David's reign. It is appended material and out of chronological order.

However, there is a glaring contrast between this summary statement and that of chapter 8 verses 15-18. There is no reference to David reigning. Rather, Joab is the first person mentioned in the list.

After the internal coup of this chapter, Joab is now the de facto leader of Israel, and David is but his puppet. Once again, we should probably see this as part of the bitter harvest of his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. In the stories of Saul and David, in 1 and 2 Samuel, the virtues and the vices of power are carefully explored.

Saul desperately clung on to power like a drowning man. His relationship to power was illustrated in his relationship to his spear. However, his weakness, insecurity and lack of faith led to his failure to exercise power well, and his movement into tyranny.

His power was brittle and hollow. David, for his part, started well. He displayed characteristics of both Jacob and his more virile brother Esau.

While the virile traits of Esau came with their great dangers of vengefulness and lust, both of which would have destroyed David's legitimacy and ultimately his power, when these traits were exercised by someone who had mastered himself, they made David a very effective, strong and good king. However, after his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David's personal power and virility as the king plummeted, while the power of the brutal and evil, yet highly virile, Joab rose. After his repentance following Nathan's confrontation, David's problem is much less one of personal sin than of his compromised authority and his personal weakness.

Israel needs a man on the throne to keep vicious men like Joab in check, yet David has empowered Joab and weakened himself. No matter how moral he may be, David is now a weak man and hence a poor husband for the bride of the nation. Israel needs that rare sort of a man who is powerful, virile and confident as a ruler, yet a man who has mastered himself and can exercise his strength with goodness and virtue.

Both Saul and David have failed to be this man in various ways, while Joab is a manly and politically effective person, yet evil and corrupt. A further part of the tragedy of the story of David can be seen when we read the story of David against the backdrop of the story of Jacob. In the earlier half of David's life prior to his coming to the throne, we see

so many of the themes of Jacob's life being played out in David's life, in very positive ways.

David is a man of faith, who suffers many of the trials of Jacob, yet proves triumphant in them. Yet, after his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah, David's life starts to take on the character of the elder Jacob, the Jacob who is marked by mourning for his sons and his sons being in rebellion against him. In the story of Absalom in particular, we see echoes of the stories of a number of Jacob's sons and the tragedies concerning them.

Levi and Simeon, in vengeance for the rape of their sister in Genesis chapter 34, kill a king's son and all who are associated with him. Absalom avenges himself on Amnon after his rape of Tamar in much the same way. Absalom is also like Reuben, who sleeps with his father's concubine Bilhah.

Absalom sleeps with the concubines of David. Absalom is like Judah, the one who has three sons, and a daughter called Tamar who loses his sons prematurely and is cut off from the rest of the family. And then, of course, Absalom is like Joseph.

He is the son whose death or apparent death absolutely devastates his father, so that his father seems to go down to the grave in mourning. The harvest of sin is very, very bitter. A question to consider.

Looking back at the story of Joab, can you trace the steps that led him to this position of dominance in Israel? 2 Samuel chapter 21 begins the concluding section of the book. It is out of chronological sequence in all likelihood. The story raises troubling questions as well, as the sons of Saul are killed on account of his sin against the Gibeonites.

David is having here to deal with the legacy of Saul's sin, the guilt of which lies upon the nation. The Gibeonites were of the remnant of the Ammonites, a remaining people of the land. They were to be wiped out in the conquest, but they had been spared on account of the treaty that they made with Joshua, a treaty made under deceptive conditions in Joshua chapter 9. In verses 3 to 6 of that chapter we read, But when the inhabitants of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and to Ai, they on their part acted with cunning, and went and made ready provisions, and took worn-out sacks for their donkeys, and wineskins, worn out and torn and mended, with worn-out patched sandals on their feet, and worn-out clothes.

And all their provisions were dry and crumbly. And they went to Joshua in the camp at Gilgal, and said to him and to the men of Israel, We have come from a distant country, so now make a covenant with us. They successfully persuaded Joshua and the Israelites that they were from a far country.

They made a covenant and swore an oath before discovering three days later that they were inhabitants of the land. However, having made a covenant, they were not allowed

to destroy their cities. As a result of their covenant, they were spared, but they were made woodcutters and drawers of water for the congregation, servants of the tabernacle.

They then came under the protection of God, as they were devoted to His service, as His possession. Consequently, anyone who attacked them committed a particularly serious offence. They were attacking the people that had been claimed by the Lord.

There is no biblical account of Saul's attack upon the Gibeonites. However, the war between David and Ish-bosheth began at Gibeon. Gibeon in Joshua 10, verse 2 was described as being a great city, like one of the royal cities.

We learn in 1 Chronicles 21, verse 29 that the tabernacle, minus the Ark of the Covenant, was based at Gibeon. The Gibeonites were the servants of the Lord's house, so it was not surprising that the tabernacle would end up being based in their city. Gibeon was also in the territory of Benjamin, so one can readily imagine that there were tensions between the Benjaminites, who felt that the Gibeonite cities were theirs by right, and the Gibeonites who had been spared to live in them.

In chapter 4, verses 2-3, we discover that the Beerothites, men of the city of Beeroth, also in Benjamin's wider territory, had fled. Beeroth was another city of the Gibeonites, so it seems likely that during Saul's reign, there had been some attempt to drive the Gibeonites out, even though they were under the Lord's special protection. It is not unlikely that Saul wanted Gibeon to be his royal city, the site of his throne and of the tabernacle.

That the conflict between David as the king of Judah and Ish-posheth as the king of Israel began at Gibeon was possibly a sign that this was a more determined purpose on the part of the Saulide dynasty. The judgement is not just against Saul as well, it is also against his house. It seems as though wiping out the Gibeonites had not merely been the action of Saul, but was also the action of the people around him.

The Gibeonites had been under the Herum ban in the original conquest, though they had been spared. The Amalekites had also been placed under the ban, and Saul had failed to bring God's judgement upon them. Maybe Saul is trying to recover himself from the judgement that fell upon him.

Saul has also wiped out the priests who served the tabernacle. The Gibeonites were their servants. Perhaps he sought to exterminate the Gibeonites at the same time.

We don't know why exactly Saul attacked the Gibeonites, but doing so was a very serious offence, and the Lord brought a famine upon the land for three years in the days of David on account of it. After David sought the face of the Lord, the Lord told him that it was on account of the sin of Saul concerning the Gibeonites. The whole of the nation is

suffering on account of the sin of their representative, even their former representative.

We might also recall the example of Achan's sin here. The whole congregation suffered defeated Ai, and the threat of losing their stake in the land, as a result of Achan's sin concerning the devoted things. Here the whole nation is suffering because Saul killed the devoted persons.

Unless David deals with the national guilt somehow, they will all suffer most severely. Achan was judged for his sin by being killed, with himself and his whole household. It is difficult to understand why Saul's sons would be put to death for his sin, without considering the way that the ban works.

This isn't a regular criminal punishment taking place here. In such cases a son must not be put to death for the sin of his father, even though he may suffer the consequences of his father's sin. However, when Achan took the devoted things, the whole congregation came under the ban until they cut off Achan himself.

As Achan took the devoted things, his entire family became the object of the ban themselves, and they were all destroyed. Saul's sin was of a similar type. This wasn't just a regular act of murder.

When God put his mark upon Cain, the person who killed Cain would suffer sevenfold judgment. The Gibeonites are devoted to God. They have his mark on them, as it were.

So they are avenged sevenfold upon the house of Saul. Again, we should consider that Saul's action wasn't just an action of Saul himself, but was seemingly an action within which his wider house was involved. When David talks to the Gibeonites, they say that silver and gold won't solve the problem.

Financial restitution cannot atone for murder. They aren't in a position to put anyone to death in Israel. David promises to act on their behalf, though.

At the Gibeonites' request, David gives them seven of Saul's sons, who were killed and then hung up as a sign of the curse upon them. David spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, but delivered the five sons of Merab and the two sons of Rispeh, another one of whom was called Mephibosheth. As we see in Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 22-23, hanging was a serious symbolic act.

And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance. However, it seems that the Gibeonites want to bring the fuller measure of the curse upon the sons of Saul.

This is described in Deuteronomy chapter 28, verse 26. And your dead body shall be

food for all the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away. They were hanged on public display on the mountain before the Lord at the beginning of the barley harvest, and were to be left there until rain fell upon them, which would be a sign that the drought that was presumably causing the famine that had come upon the land was over.

The expected rain might well have been an unseasonal sign, as Saul's sons were killed at the beginning of the barley harvest, around the time of Passover, and the regular rains wouldn't be expected until much later in the year. Being hung on the mountain before the Lord was probably on the mountain opposite the tabernacle in Gibeon. All of this might make us think of Christ, who was hung on the mountain before the Lord, as the one bearing the curse upon the people, so that the rain of the Holy Spirit might finally come upon once parched land.

However, while leaving them on display before the rains might have been the initial plan, the commendable actions of the pitiable Rizpah towards her son's corpses seems to have led to a change of plans. Rizpah was Saul's concubine, previously mentioned when Ish-basheth accused Abner of going into her in chapter 4. Rizpah prevented the full curse from coming upon Saul's sons, and arrested the grisly spectacle. David recovered the bones of Saul and Jonathan, which had been taken by the men of Jabesh-gilead from the Philistines, who had displayed their bodies in a similar manner, and buried them, along with the bones of the hanged sons of Saul, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish in Benjamin.

Then God finally responded to the pleas for rain, and restored the land after the famine. Behind all of this, David is dealing with the bitter legacy of Saul's sins, and atonement is occurring for the whole nation. Even though Saul has died and been judged, the nation itself bears the guilt and the consequences of his crimes, and until they are properly dealt with, the nation cannot move on.

The story of David began with giant killing, and here, toward the end of David's story, giants appear again. We read of four of David's men who struck down giants. David, their leader, was a giant killer, and they follow in his footsteps.

A problem is raised by the character of Elhanan, who strikes down Goliath the Gittite. Elhanan is presumably the same as the member of David's 30 mighty men, mentioned in chapter 23, verse 24. However, the real problem is the claim that he killed Goliath.

Many suggestions have been made here. Perhaps Goliath was a common name, or a name used for certain giants more generally. More likely, however, the actual name of the giant was dropped out in the transmission of the text, and the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles, chapter 20, verse 5, gives us the proper sense here.

And there was again war with the Philistines, and Elhanan the son of Jeor struck down Lamai, the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's

beam. A question to consider. How might careful consideration of the judgment upon the sin of Saul concerning the Gibeonites help us to think about the notion of corporate guilt? How might it help us better to understand the judgment upon Adam's sin, and to understand Christ's atonement? 2 Samuel, chapter 22, is essentially the same as Psalm 18.

It particularly focuses upon the deliverance from Saul, but also addresses deliverance from enemies from other quarters. Coming at this point in the book, it serves a larger summary purpose also. Deuteronomy ends with the Song of Moses.

1 Samuel has the prayer of Hannah near the beginning of it. While Hannah's prayer looks forward to anticipated deliverance, David's song looks back to realised deliverance. As Peter Lighthouse notes, they have several themes or images in common.

Both of them mention the horn. The theme of God as rock is also a very prominent image. There is no rock like our God.

In verse 32, For who is God but the Lord, and who is a rock except our God? And then in verse 47, The repeated emphasis upon God as rock, which frames the entire psalm, as the image appears both at its beginning and at its close, should also remind us of the Song of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, where the image of the Lord as rock is very prominent. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright as he. Deuteronomy 32, verse 4. In verse 15 of that chapter, In verse 30-31, In both cases, these songs serve as memorials of the Lord's activity on behalf of his people.

They come at the end of their respective books, expressing the fundamental message of the books in the form of a song, to be memorised and declared by the people. In these final chapters of 2 Samuel, some of the deep themes of the books of Samuel are being explored, recapitulated and resolved. If we read these chapters carefully, we will have a firmer grasp upon what is going on in the books more generally.

They also help the reader to make the transition from reading the history to declaring the praise of the Lord on its basis. Both Hannah's prayer and David's psalm end on the note of the Lord's consideration of his anointed. 1 Samuel 2, verse 10 In 2 Samuel 22, verse 51.

Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever. Both speak of the way that the Lord intervenes to deliver his people in distress, and to save them from their enemies and troubles. The Lord turns the tables on the mighty of the earth, and exalts those who depend upon him.

Read together as bookends for the story of 1 and 2 Samuel, we can see Hannah's prayer and David's psalm as related together like promise and fulfilment. One looks forward to the Lord's salvation, and the other looks back upon it. Lighthouse suggests that the psalm

can be divided into sections, with a chiasmic or bookended pattern.

It begins with the praise of the Lord in verses 2-3, and then returns to the praise of the Lord at the very end in verses 47-51. The Lord saves David from violence in verse 3, and from men of violence in verse 49. After the praise of the Lord, David speaks of the Lord's deliverance of him from his enemies, and his enabling of David to overcome his enemies.

This comes in verses 4-20, and is returned to in verses 29-46. While the first of these sections focuses on the Lord's intervention to deliver David from dire straits, on the return stretch of the psalm, the accent shifts to David's triumphing over his enemies himself, by the strength that the Lord has given him. The imagery here might also remind us of the Song of the Sea in Exodus chapter 15, Moses' song of memorial after the deliverance at the Red Sea.

Both contain theophanic imagery. Exodus chapter 15, verses 6-12. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

In the greatness of Your majesty You overthrow Your adversaries, You send out Your fury, It consumes them like stubble. At the blast of Your nostrils the waters piled up, The floods stood up in a heap, The deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, My desire shall have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them. You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them, They sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in glorious deeds, Doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them.

David describes his deliverance in language and imagery deeply redolent of the Lord's deliverance of His people at the Red Sea. 2 Samuel chapter 22, verses 8-18. Then the earth reeled and rocked, The foundations of the heavens trembled and quaked, Because He was angry.

Smoke went up from His nostrils, And devouring fire from His mouth. Glowing coals flamed forth from Him. He bowed the heavens and came down.

Thick darkness was under His feet. He rode on a cherub and flew, He was seen on the wings of the wind. He made darkness around Him His canopy, Thick clouds a gathering of water.

Out of the brightness before Him coals of fire flamed forth. The Lord thundered from heaven, And the Most High uttered His voice, And He sent out arrows and scattered them, Lightning and routed them. Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were laid bare, At the rebuke of the Lord, At the blast of the breath of His nostrils.

He sent from on high, He took me, He drew me out of many waters, He rescued me from my strong enemy, From those who hated me, For they were too mighty for me. The imagery that David employs here recalls the deliverance at the Red Sea, but also relates to cosmic imagery that we find elsewhere in Scripture. The deep of the waters is related to Sheol and the grave and its threat, as can be seen in passages such as Jonah chapter 2. It is also related to the Gentile nations.

If Israel is like the land, the Gentile nations and powers are like waters constantly threatening to overwhelm and to drown it. Yet the Lord is going to draw them out of the threatening deep by His might and establish them on the firmness of the rock. However, while the earlier part of the psalm focuses upon the Lord's intervention to deliver David, later the emphasis shifts.

It is no longer the Lord's action on David's behalf that is seen, but David's action in the Lord's strength. David is, by the Lord's strength, able to wage war effectively against his adversaries. Not only does the Lord act on behalf of the powerless against their adversaries, He will empower His King to act with strength against His enemies and the enemies of the people of the Lord.

There is an important progression to maturity here, from a situation of dependence in weakness to a situation of dependence in strength. Being dependent upon the Lord in strength is much more challenging, of course. While in moments of desperation and powerlessness we can turn to the Lord, if only because there is nowhere else to turn, in moments where we feel we have strength, we seldom recognise the empowerment of the Lord and turn to Him in thanksgiving.

David, however, recognises his dependence and expresses his thanksgiving to the Lord in both of these conditions. Sandwiched in the centre of the psalm, in verses 21-28, Lighthart finds the exploration of David's cleanness and the Lord's corresponding faithfulness. This section might raise some questions for us.

How can David claim righteousness and cleanness of hands? How can he claim that the Lord rewarded him according to his righteousness, as he does in verse 25? This is something that we frequently encounter in the Psalms. The psalmist often approaches the Lord appealing to his own righteousness and blamelessness as grounds for divine action on his behalf. To understand this, it is important to consider such statements within a covenant context.

On occasion such appeals are made concerning particular situations. We can appeal to God on the basis of our blamelessness in a particular matter, seeking his vindication against those who would accuse or attack us. However, sometimes we meet with more general statements, such as those that we find here, where David appeals to the Lord on the basis of his blamelessness more generally.

Such statements should be considered in the context of the covenant. God has promised to act on behalf of people who are faithful in the covenant. The faithfulness that is looked for isn't sinless perfection, but keeping of the covenant.

The covenant provides for atonement, for sacrifice, for forgiveness, and for the covering of sin. It allows for sinners to be blameless as covenant members. When they sin, they turn to the Lord, they seek his forgiveness and his restoration, and stand before him as those whose sins are covered.

Even David's terrible sins concerning Bathsheba and Uriah were covered by the Lord's gracious forgiveness and faithfulness. While there were dreadful consequences for what David did, consequences that David still suffered, even though he was forgiven, he could approach the Lord on the basis of the Lord's covenant and promise. As someone continues in such a manner, they can approach the Lord and claim that their hands are clean, that they are righteous and blameless, and call to God to act on their behalf according to his promises.

The Lord's promises and the provision that he makes for dealing with sin in his covenant gives David, and can give us, great confidence as we approach him. We can appeal to him, assured that he will hear and act on the basis of these things. David's song ends with foreigners coming to him to pay honour and tribute.

David wins victories over enemies on various sides. He and the nation of Israel are exalted over surrounding peoples and nations. The result of all of this is that the name of the Lord is praised and exalted among the nations.

As David is delivered and lifted up, he praises the Lord among the nations. All around about see David's success, his exaltation, and David sings to the Lord for his deliverance and his steadfast love. The Lord is the God who keeps covenant with his people, and with David and his offspring forever, as he promised in the covenant given to David in chapter 7. A question to consider, how can we see David's song as an initial fulfilment of the Lord's purpose in delivering a people for his name? These words are the last will of David, like the blessing of Jacob or the words of Moses at the end of the book of Deuteronomy.

They are his last official declaration, the words that he intends to pass down before he departs, perhaps his final publicly delivered words. They are not his literal last words, however, as he gives final instructions to Solomon on his deathbed in 1 Kings 2, verses 1-9. Along with the psalm of the preceding chapter, the first seven verses of this chapter constitute the central part of the concluding section of the books of Samuel, but now starting to move back out.

Like the psalm, it can be seen as a fulfilment of themes that were first introduced at the beginning of 1 Samuel in the prayer of Hannah. It should be read, with the psalm, as a

summing up of grand themes of David's reign, as a reflection upon its meaning and its significance. It connects to the psalm in its discussion of the character of the anointed one.

The final verse of the psalm concerns David as the anointed, and the first verse of the oracle speaks of David as the anointed yet again. The anointed was also an important element of the other great poetic parts of the book of Samuel, the prayer of Hannah, and the lament over Saul and Jonathan. However, while the psalm of chapter 22 chiefly concerns the early life of David and his deliverance from the hand of Saul and his enemies, the oracle is spoken in the context of his imminent death, and casts its gaze into the future.

Saul and his house were the prominent antagonists in the first half of this concluding section of Samuel, in chapters 21 and 22. Now, however, attention is more focused upon the reign of David and the legacy of his house. Behind this oracle we should see 2 Samuel chapter 7 and the covenant that the Lord made with David and his house.

David delivers his words as an oracle. Such a designation suggests that this is a more explicitly prophetic word, not just of David's own composition. Hannah's prayer also has a prophetic character, especially in its conclusion.

The main reference to oracles prior to this is found in the book of Numbers, in the oracles of Balaam. The form in which David introduces his oracle should remind us of the form of Balaam's oracles. Numbers chapter 24 verses 3-4 reads The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered.

And in verses 15-16 of that chapter The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty falling down with his eyes uncovered. David's reads as follows The oracle of David the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel. In contrast to Balaam, who is the man who falls down, David is the man who is raised on high.

He is the anointed of God and either the sweet psalmist or the favourite or delight of the songs of Israel, the man that the people love to sing about. Whichever it is, David is a man of song, a man who sings and a man about whom songs are sung. He is a romantic figure, a figure who brings and expresses delight.

After his self-characterisation, he introduces the core of the oracle with a statement of how the word of the Lord has come to him for this prophecy. His words are words spoken more directly by the Holy Spirit, rather than words like the words of his Psalms that are composed by David himself under the inspiration of the Spirit. The content of the oracle

itself concerns faithful rule.

To a limited extent, it characterises David himself, to the extent that he was a wise king and a man after God's own heart. However, having read 2 Samuel to this point, it is clear that David didn't live up to this description. Rather, the description seems to make both a more general statement about a wise ruler and, as an oracle, should probably be taken as a prophetic anticipation of the Davidic king who would one day exemplify such virtues of rule.

Just rule is rule in the fear of God. This is a recurring theme in the wisdom literature, which is the literature of kings. Job 28.28 Psalm 111.10 Proverbs 1.7 Ecclesiastes 12.13 Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Rule that takes its starting point in such fear of God will be teachable and receptive to the ways of wisdom. It will be attentive to the Lord's instruction concerning good and evil. Such a king will be marked by humility, not having his heart lifted up above his brothers, but ministering to them as the servant of the Lord.

The effect of such a king upon his people is described using imagery from nature. He is like the dawning morning light. He is like the sun on a morning without clouds.

He is also like the rain that gives life and growth to the thirsty earth. The just judgments of the king bring such light to his land, removing the darkness of intrigue and corruption and making things plain. In such a society people have confidence to act, knowing that the ground that they are walking on is not unclear and potentially treacherous.

In the dimness or darkness of societies without such a king, one never truly knows where you stand or where justice lies. Such a king is also like the rain, who blesses his people with what they need to grow. Without just judgments a land becomes parched and does not prosper.

Things wither. However, the judgments of a wise and good king are like rain and dew upon the land. The relationship between the king and his people is like the relationship between the heavens, the sun and the clouds, and the earth beneath.

Similar language is employed in Proverbs 16, verse 15. In the light of a king's face there is life, and his favour is like the clouds that bring the spring rain. The image of the king as the light of the dawn might make us think of the description of Christ's advent as the sunrise in the prophecy of Zechariah the father of John the Baptist and elsewhere in the New Testament.

Christ is the one who brings the light of dawn, and in this light his people have illumination that dispels shadows and darkness and enables them to act with confidence and joy. In the person of Christ we see David's oracle concerning the just king truly realized. In verse 5 David speaks of the relationship in which his house stands to the

Lord.

The Lord has blessed him with a sure covenant, one which he himself has established and will fulfill, one that will endure even through the punishment that fell upon David's house following his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. God is not going to cast his promise or David aside, but will bring about all that he has intended for him. Whether they are the conclusion of the oracle or words reflecting further upon its meaning, verses 6-7 contrast the worthless men, the men or the sons of Belial, with the wise and just king.

In contrast to the good king, they are to be destroyed. Like David's blessed house, their end is determined by the Lord. Such men of Belial are difficult to handle, they're like thorns.

To deal with them you need to arm yourself with weapons. There have been several such sons of Belial in the story of the books of Samuel. They are juxtaposed with the righteous king.

Their ultimate fate is to be consumed with fire, according to some translations, fire on the throne. This suggests that the worthless men to which David is referring are wicked rulers. The next section concerns the mighty men of David and some of their heroic exploits.

David was not a solitary hero, but was surrounded by brave and skilled warriors. There are two key groups mentioned, the three and the thirty, two sets of elite warriors. The three are composed of Eleazar and Shammah, and perhaps, depending on how we read it, Joseph Bathshebeth.

Like David himself, these men are mighty men. The exploits of Eleazar and Shammah, which are described, were both achieved against the Philistines. In both cases, their bravery was the means by which the Lord brought about a great victory.

The next group is the thirty. There are at least thirty-three men listed in the group, possibly more depending on how many sons Jason had. We might assume that the thirty was a set number of men, or a rank, like the twelve in the New Testament, and when members of the group died or retired, someone else would be appointed to take their place.

A story of the thirty's heroics is told, presumably an event that occurred either when David was still on the run from Saul, or possibly very early on in his reign. This is because the Philistines are in control of Bethlehem, which, considering it was so far inside Israel's territory, suggests a level of regional dominance that the Philistines lost very early on in David's reign. The Philistines were controlling David's own hometown, which must have been very distressing for him.

He expressed his desire to drink water from the well by the Bethlehem gate. The point of the request wasn't so much David's thirst as his desire to enjoy the refreshment of gaining control of that which the Philistines had stolen from him and his people. Three of the thirty went and broke through the Philistine lines to get him some water, and brought it back to him so that he could drink it.

Rather than drinking the water that was brought to him by such devotion, David pours out the water before the Lord, devoting the sacrificial dedication of his men to the Lord's service, rather than to his own. The fact that this account is recorded here suggests that it is designed to characterize both the dedication of David's men more generally, along with David's appropriate attitude to their dedication. Abishai, the brother of Joab, and the son of Zehariah, and Ben-Aniah, the son of Jehoiada, are both listed separately.

Abishai's victory over the 300 men is mentioned here, similar to Joseph Bathshebeth's victory over the 800. These victories were almost certainly not in single combat, but were victories achieved by them and the men that they led. Three of Ben-Aniah, the son of Jehoiada's great deeds, are recounted here.

Ben-Aniah became the leader of David's bodyguard, the Cherithites and the Pelethites, and in 1 Kings 2 was placed over the entire army at the beginning of the reign of Solomon, in the place of the wicked Joab. The chapter ends by listing the 30. The presence of the name of Asahel, who was killed while David was still the king of only Judah, suggests that the 30 existed for a significant period of time, and that the members of the group that are listed might span many different periods of its existence, and that some might not have overlapped at all.

The group was most likely formed while David was still an outlaw. El-Hanan was also mentioned a couple of chapters earlier, as one of the men who killed a giant. Apart from Asahel, whose death at the hands of Abner occasioned many problems for David's early reign, perhaps the most important names are those of Eliam and Uriah the Hittite.

Eliam was the father of Bathsheba, as we saw in 2 Samuel 11, verse 3. Here we also discover that Eliam's father, and hence Bathsheba's grandfather, was Ahithophel, who supported Absalom's coup, perhaps on account of David's treatment of his granddaughter and grandson-in-law. Uriah was Bathsheba's husband. When we consider the heroism and the profound dedication of the 30 to David, the actions of David towards Bathsheba and Uriah are seen to be so much more wicked.

We might also recognise the degree to which David's lust led him to compromise personal bonds of loyalty that had been the backbone of his support. Sin leads men into the profoundest of folly. Concluding the list with Uriah's name is a sobering note to end upon.

A question to consider. The story of David's sinful census in 2 Samuel 24 is a strange

story in several respects. It also raises the question of why the books of Samuel would conclude on such a peculiar note.

Understanding scripture can often be like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. You need to pay attention both to the image upon and to the shape and the position of the pieces. Likewise, when reading scripture, we'll often find that properly placing a piece, as it were, and relating it to other pieces, requires attention both to structural and to larger literary dimensions of the text, as well as to its theological and narrative content.

If you're anything like me, when you're doing a jigsaw puzzle, one of the first things that you look for are the corner and the edge pieces. One of the keys to the reading of 2 Samuel 24 is the fact that it is akin to a corner piece of the text of the books of Samuel. It is the concluding chapter, which suggests that it might be especially important.

It is also part of discernible internal structures, such as that of the concluding section of the book of 2 Samuel, which itself has a book-ended or chiasmic structure. As Peter Lighthouse notes, within this concluding section, we should readily perceive parallels between chapter 21 and the famine in the land in this chapter. Both chapters concern the sin of a king and the consequent judgment upon the people and the land.

In both cases, successful sacrifice and atonement is made for the land, both using the same expression to refer to the end of the judgment in their concluding verse, 2 Samuel 21, verse 14, and after that God responded to the plea for the land. In chapter 24, verse 25, so the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel. One of the three options of punishment that the Lord gives to David in this chapter was also the punishment that came upon the land due to the sin of Saul, three years of famine.

Seeing the structural parallels and the parallels between the content of these chapters, we will also be alert to the contrasts, to the ways in which, when juxtaposed, certain divergent details stand out from them as especially worthy of note. A prominent theme throughout this concluding section has been the character of true kingship. In chapter 21, David had to deal with the consequences of the sin of Saul concerning the Gibeonites and the judgment that fell upon the land as a result of it.

In chapter 22, David's psalm reflected on the Lord's deliverance and vindication of the righteous king. In chapter 23, David delivered a final oracle concerning true kingship. Now, in chapter 24, David deals with the consequences of his own sin in the census.

Another crucial theme that binds the whole books of Samuel together, appearing at the beginning and at the end, is the theme of the House of the Lord. Near the beginning of the story of 1 Samuel, the Ark of the Covenant is taken by the Philistines. Now, at the end of the book, the land for the Temple is finally purchased and we have an anticipation of its importance as a place where successful atonement will be made for the land and

the people and God's judgment will be arrested.

The story begins with the Lord being angry with Israel and inciting David to number them. In 1 Chronicles 21, we have one of the most startling apparent biblical contradictions as in its account of the same events we read, Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. There are, however, a number of ways to deal with the apparent contradiction.

First, Satan might well have been the means by which God judged Israel. God can incite people to actions by means of other parties, as we also see in 1 Kings 22, verses 20-22. And you shall succeed.

Go out and do so. The Lord could have used Satan in such a manner. Second, another possibility is that the word translated Satan here is not in fact a proper name, but refers more generally to an adversary.

David is incited to number the people, presumably as a threatening adversary is raised up against them. However, as we hear nothing more about the adversary, perhaps we should consider the possibility that it was a weak pretext for a significant overreach on David's part. This still leaves the question of why the Lord would incite David to sin in such a manner anyway.

If we didn't have verse 10, we might perhaps argue that David himself wasn't sinning, but simply that the census was a means by which Israel were brought into judgment. Verse 1 doesn't say that the Lord was angry with David, but that he was angry with Israel, and that David was incited against them. However, while the Lord's inciting of David might have been a result cheaply of Israel's sin, David clearly sins in taking it.

We should consider that there are situations when God brings testing upon people as a judgment to expose what is in their hearts, putting them in situations where their feet will slip and they will fail. The Lord's testing of David here is itself a judgment. We pray, lead us not into temptation, because we seek deliverance from any situation that might overwhelm our weak faith.

However, those who are presumptuous and unfaithful can find that they are placed in such situations. The Lord himself does not tempt us, but he does expose the unfaithful to danger. The judgment in this chapter comes upon David and the people after David takes the census.

This might surprise us. Why would this be considered such a severe sin? Indeed, why would it be considered a sin at all? The first thing to consider is that the census was a military census, not a more general numbering. David is mustering those suitable for military service.

Considering 1 Chronicles 21 1, this was most likely taken in response to a seeming threat

of an enemy. A second thing to consider is the background in Exodus 30 11-16. The Lord said to Moses, When you take the census of the people of Israel, then each shall give a ransom for his life to the Lord when you number them, that there may be no plague among them when you number them.

Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary. The shekel is twenty geras. Half a shekel as an offering to the Lord.

Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the Lord's offering. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the Lord's offering to make atonement for their lives. You shall take the atonement money from the people of Israel, and shall give it for the service of the tent of meeting, that it may bring the people of Israel to remembrance before the Lord, so as to make atonement for your lives.

This passage suggests that taking a census of the Lord's people was an inherently dangerous thing to do. David's census suffers a judgement that might be associated with sacrilege. Perhaps he failed to observe the proper procedure.

The law of Exodus might give us some insight into why taking a census was such a serious matter. The law warns against the danger of a plague when the Lord's people are wrongly numbered, and the law tells them that atonement must be made for their lives. Why might this be the case? In such a census the Lord's people were being reckoned up, both by numbering of their leaders, but also by the Lord.

A census was a presentation of the people for assessment, as it were, and unless this were undertaken appropriately and with care, judgement might fall upon them. They were being inspected, and unless atonement were made for them, they would be brought to the attention of the Lord for punishment. Of course, if the Lord was already angry with Israel, as we see he was here, a census of the nation would be an extremely dangerous thing.

A third thing to consider here is further possible background in the narrative of the Exodus. Peter Lighthouse observes the importance of the language of plague here, and the way that it recalls that Exodus background. We should also consider the role played by the destroying angel.

Pharaoh had taken the Lord's people, and unless he lets them go, plagues would come upon him. David might be doing the same thing here, treating the people of the Lord as if it was his right to muster them. A fourth consideration is the fact that the serious judgement that fell upon the land in chapter 21 occurred due to Saul's attack upon the Gibeonites, who were the servants of the Lord, charged with chopping wood and carrying water for the tabernacle.

The Gibeonites came under the Lord's special protection. Again, this might help to give us some clue into what is occurring in this chapter, when the Lord severely judges David for taking a census. It might strengthen the explanation that David is judged for claiming the right to treat the people as his own possession.

A fifth consideration is raised by David Firth, who notes that the terminology employed for the census suggests the possibility that David is not merely numbering the people for a battle, but is registering them for future administrative purposes, making a claim upon the people of the Lord that he does not have the right to make. A final key thing to bear in mind is that Joab seeks to discourage David from the census, recognising that it is wrong. David also recognises his sin and repents of it, before he is ever confronted by the Lord.

The sin, whatever it is, is not mysterious to them. It seems most likely to me that David took an external enemy as a pretext for making an excessive claim over the Lord's people, registering them for his own purposes. In the actual numbering we see the extent of David's dominion at the time.

The territory of Israel seems to stretch into Phoenician territory. It's extensive in the Transjordan as well. There are 1.3 million fighting men, divided between Judah, which has 500,000, and Israel, which has 800,000.

The numbers given are different in 1 Chronicles 21, which also claims that Benjamin and Levi were excluded from the numbering by Joab. Various ways of harmonising these texts have been suggested, although none is very straightforward. The divide mentioned between Israel and Judah here is significant.

While here its purpose may be primarily administrative, it reminds us again of the fault line along which the nation will later split. If there were this many fighting men, there might have been four or five times as many people as that in the land itself. It gives us an impression of how great the nation had become, and numerous people near the height of their power.

David, although he had ignored warnings, warnings that came somewhat unexpectedly from Joab, later was struck by his conscience and confessed his sin to the Lord. The Lord sends the prophet Gad to him the next morning with three choices of punishment. Three years of famine, three months of pursuit by his enemies, or three days of pestilence.

David chose the last of these three. We should note the contrast between the sevenfold punishment that came upon Saul's house for his sin concerning the Gibeonites, and the threefold punishment that came upon David. The threefold punishment might be a result of David's confession.

If he confesses, the punishment is lessened. David chose the punishment that came

most directly from the hand of the Lord. Seventy thousand people were struck down, but the plague was halted as the destroying angel stayed his hand over Jerusalem, ceasing his destruction by the threshing floor of Arunah the Jebusite.

David interceded for the people. As the shepherd, the judgment for David's sin was falling upon his flock, much as the judgment for his sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah. The prophet Gad then instructed David to establish an altar on the threshing floor.

The chapter ends with David purchasing the threshing floor, in a transaction that should remind us of Abraham's purchase of the field and the cave of Machpelah, from Ephron the Hittite, back in Genesis chapter 23. Arunah the Jebusite is presumably one of the Canaanites, who formerly possessed Jerusalem before David drove them out. Just as Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah was a hugely significant first parcel of the inheritance, this is the crowning part of the inheritance.

It is on Mount Moriah, associated with the place where the angel of the Lord had stayed the hand of Abraham, back in Genesis chapter 22, as we read in verse 14 of that chapter. The full importance of this purchase becomes plain in 2 Chronicles chapter 3 verse 1. where the Lord had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. By this point we should hopefully have a clearer idea why this particular story is placed where it is, taken out of chronological sequence and placed as the very conclusion of the book of 2 Samuel.

The story of the books of Samuel began with the tabernacle facing destruction and dismantling on account of Israel's sin. Now, at the very end of the book, the land for the great building of the temple, where things will finally get put back together again, is purchased. In this purchase the story of Israel has finally reached a key landmark.

The historical importance of the site, as the place where the Lord stopped the plague upon Israel, underlines the significance of the location. This is the place to which Israel can always return to find atonement and the staying of God's hand of judgment. This is the site of mercy and forgiveness.

This is the site of God's favour and grace. A question to consider. What significance might there be in the fact that this key site is a threshing floor?