

Part Three —The Kings: Saul & David

David was the second king over the 12 tribes of Israel, and certainly a man who trusted God and practiced righteousness. But his life is so entwined with that of Saul, it is necessary to consider the background and life of Israel's first king-King Saul. Saul is both a good and bad example. Though eventually disqualified by God, he did accomplish much during his reign.

When Saul was first chosen king, he was humble. In later years this was no longer true. When Samuel came to inform Saul of God's decision to make him king, Saul told Samuel: ". . . Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" (1 Sam. 9:21). Actually, Saul came from a well-to-do family, and he had every opportunity to do well in his appointment. "Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power [margin-substance]. And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people" (1 Sam. 9:1-2). When God rejected Saul as king, Samuel told him: ". . . When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?" (1 Sam. 15:17).

Early in his reign the Holy Spirit inspired Saul. Samuel had told him at the time he was appointed king, ". . . the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man" (1 Sam. 10:6). This inspiration is seen when the first national crises took place. Saul readily assumed command.

Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabeshgilead: and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel. And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days' respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel: and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people: and all the people lifted up their voices, and wept. And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent. And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand (1 Sam. 11:1-8).

Saul then led the Israelites to a resounding victory.

And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together. And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death. And Saul said, There shall not a man be put to death this day: for to day the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel (1 Sam. 11:11-13).

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The Israelites now had a king who could lead them into battle. Saul had an illustrious beginning as this king, and continued on this course for some time.

“So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them. And he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled them” (1 Sam. 14:47-48).

Saul was a good commander and a successful general. A large number of worthy accomplishments accrued under his leadership. Saul did much for Israel, but what were his shortcomings and failures? An imminent battle with the Philistines was about to take place. Samuel instructed Saul to remain in Gilgal until he arrived to offer sacrifices to God. This duty belonged to the Levites and was not given to kings. Since Samuel was a Levite, he would perform the sacrifice upon his arrival.

And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee (1 Sam. 13:8-14).

Samuel saw a serious character flaw in Saul. He knew such a man could not be trusted to always obey God. Saul chose to rely on his own prowess. He assumed the office of a priest by taking matters into his own hands. His fear of the people was greater than his fear of God. Samuel now made it plain that his dynasty would not continue, a pronouncement that would have a large impact on David later. We will see that Saul could not accept God's pronouncement that his dynasty would not continue.

Soon, Saul's lack of judgment began to appear. Saul was again at war with the Philistines. His son, Jonathan, was a very courageous and able warrior. He attacked a garrison of the Philistines with only his armor bearer. In the battle that took place, he killed about 20 men, which had a demoralizing effect on the Philistines. God used this victory by Jonathan to inflict a terrible defeat upon the Philistines.

And there was trembling in the host, in the field, and among all the people: the garrison, and the spoilers, they also trembled, and the earth quaked: so it was a very great trembling. And the watchmen of Saul in Gibeah of Benjamin looked; and, behold, the multitude melted away, and they went on beating down one another And it came to pass, while Saul talked unto the priest, that the noise that was in the host of the Philistines went on and increased: and Saul said unto the priest, Withdraw thine hand. And Saul and all the people that were with him assembled themselves, and they came to the battle: and, behold, every man's sword was against his fellow, and there was a very great discomfiture . . . So the LORD saved Israel that day . . . (1 Sam. 14:15-16, 19-20, 23).

But Saul had made a foolish mistake. He had pronounced a curse on anyone who tasted any food until evening. “And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the

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people tasted any food” (1 Sam. 14:24). The old adage that an army moves on its stomach was just as true then as it is today. Soldiers need all the energy they can get. Saul foolishly deprived his soldiers of the strength and vitality needed to achieve a total victory. Had it not been for God’s intervention, the outcome may have been much different. The soldiers in the camp had heard Saul’s solemn command, but Jonathan had not, as he had not been present. Unknowingly, he had eaten a portion of a honeycomb that he had found in the woods. When Jonathan heard what his father had done, he knew immediately how foolish this command had been. He knew that if the army had had more energy, it could have affected a much greater victory (1 Sam. 14: 29-30).

The soldiers were so hungry after the battle that they began eating the spoil with the blood. “And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground: and the people did eat them with the blood” (1 Sam. 14:32). This was a violation of God’s instruction in Leviticus 3:17. Some of the people told Saul: “. . . Behold, the people sin against the LORD, in that they eat with the blood. And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day” (1 Sam. 14:33). What was Saul’s reaction?

. . . And he said, Ye have transgressed: roll a great stone unto me this day. And Saul said, Disperse yourselves among the people, and say unto them, Bring me hither every man his ox, and every man his sheep, and slay them here, and eat; and sin not against the LORD in eating with the blood. And all the people brought every man his ox with him that night, and slew them there. And Saul built an altar unto the LORD: the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD (1 Sam. 14: 33-35).

Saul just could not seem to avoid presumptuousness. Again, he had assumed the prerogative of a priest. God had made him a king, not a priest. What was the result of this breach?

“And Saul said, Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and spoil them until the morning light, and let us not leave a man of them. And they said, Do whatsoever seemeth good unto thee. Then said the priest, Let us draw near hither unto God. And Saul asked counsel of God, Shall I go down after the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into the hand of Israel? But he answered him not that day” (1 Sam. 14:36-37). God was displeased with Saul. Rather than recognize that it was his presumptuousness that was the problem, Saul accused his son Jonathan of being the one at fault. Due to Saul’s foolishness, the people had eaten flesh with the blood, and then Saul arrogantly assumed he had the prerogative to build an altar. Fortunately, the soldiers had more sense than Saul. Saul was now going to execute Jonathan. “And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not” (1 Sam. 14:45). Saul had lost all common sense and had become rash and illogical in his reasoning.

Saul’s mental stability continued to deteriorate. He became more and more self-willed. In the meantime, God sent this message: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Sam. 15:2-3). Did Saul obey God in this command? No! “And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Sam. 15:8-9).

“Then came the word of the LORD unto Samuel, saying, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the LORD all night” (1 Sam. 15:10-11).

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And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel? And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD? (1 Sam. 15:13-19).

Saul could not see where he was at fault. “And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal” (1 Sam. 15:20-21). Saul refused to accept responsibility. Earlier, he made Jonathon the scapegoat, now he made the people. “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (vv. 22-23). Not only would Saul’s dynasty not continue, now even Saul would be removed from being king. God had already determined who would replace him. The man to replace him would be David.

Samuel was sent to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, and told to anoint one of his sons as king. Samuel was impressed as he looked at the older sons, but God told him none of these were chosen. “. . . The LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7). The youngest son-David-was called.

And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah. But the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him” (1 Sam. 16: 12-14).

For all practical purposes, Saul had ceased to be God’s representative. Melancholy plagued him, and he was now under the influence of a demon.

Saul suffered from bouts of depression. His servants knew the soothing value of music, and they knew of a musician who could help relieve Saul of this affliction.

And Saul’s servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee. Let our lord now command thy servants, which are before thee, to seek out a man, who is a cunning player on an harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well. And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me. Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, that is cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD is with him. Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep. And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent them by David his son unto Saul. And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armourbearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray

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thee, stand before me; for he hath found favour in my sight. And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 16:15-23).

In due time Saul's condition improved, and David returned home. It appears Saul forgot him. The incident that really cemented Saul's relationship with David is found in 1 Samuel, chapter 17. On this occasion Saul and his army were about to engage the Philistines in combat.

Now the Philistines gathered together their armies to battle, and were gathered together at Shochoh, which belongeth to Judah, and pitched between Shochoh and Azekah, in Ephesdammim. And Saul and the men of Israel were gathered together, and pitched by the valley of Elah, and set the battle in array against the Philistines. And the Philistines stood on a mountain on the one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side: and there was a valley between them. And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span And he stood and cried unto the armies of Israel, and said unto them, Why are ye come out to set your battle in array? am not I a Philistine, and ye servants to Saul? choose you a man for you, and let him come down to me. If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us. And the Philistine said, I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man, that we may fight together. When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed, and greatly afraid (1 Sam. 17:1-4, 8-11).

About this time David visited the camp of Israel, bringing his brothers some supplies from home. "And as he talked with them, behold, there came up the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, out of the armies of the Philistines, and spake according to the same words: and David heard them" (1 Sam. 17:23). "And David spake to the men that stood by him, saying, What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26). "And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:32). As some time had passed since David had played in Saul's court, Saul did not recognize him and reluctantly consented.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel and of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines, until thou come to the valley, and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell down by the way to Shaaraim, even unto Gath, and unto Ekron (1 Sam. 17: 40-46, 49-52).

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Acting as a warrior for God, the Spirit moved David to kill the Philistine. This deed affected a great victory for Israel, and Saul was so impressed that he took David into his court (1 Sam. 18:2). In the court David manifested wisdom and discretion. “And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him” (v. 14). “. . . David behaved himself more wisely than all the servants of Saul; so that his name was much set by” (v. 30). “And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war, and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul’s servants” (v. 5). In a number of battles with the Philistines David distinguished himself.

And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistines [margin], that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward (1 Sam. 18:6-9).

Over a period of time, Saul’s jealousy grew worse. He became suspicious, distrustful, and envious. He now regarded David as a competitor. He gave himself over to demonic influence. “And it came to pass . . . that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul’s hand. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. And Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with him, and was departed from Saul” (1 Sam. 18:10-12). Saul had now become extremely dangerous. He plotted to have David killed by fighting the Philistines. He offered his daughter for the foreskins of 100 Philistines. “And Saul said, Thus shall ye say to David, The king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king’s enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines” (v. 25). David took Saul up on the offer, but doubled the request. He and his men brought back 200 foreskins. “And Saul was yet the more afraid of David; and Saul became David’s enemy continually” (v. 29). Saul was now consumed by a spirit of jealousy, fueled by his refusal to accept God’s rejection of him. Saul now openly advocated murder. “And Saul spake to Jonathan his son, and to all his servants, that they should kill David” (1 Sam. 19:1). Saul had lost his entire perspective on what was right and wrong.

From time to time Saul would feel remorse and have a change of heart, but it never lasted long. His jealousy would always return. When Jonathan sympathized with David, Saul was enraged and even tried to kill him (1 Sam. 20:24-33). David fled the court and went to Abimelech, the high priest, for help. Saul heard about it and had 85 priests killed. He sacked the city of the priests and killed all the women, children, infants, suckling babies, and livestock. David was now a hunted man; Saul had become a madman and a cold-blooded killer.

When David was an outcast, he and his men occasionally fought the Philistines. On one occasion, a Philistine incursion into the territory of Judah led to a fight. But before attacking, David asked the Lord what he should do.

Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors. Therefore David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah. And David’s men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines? Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand. So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah,

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that he came down with an ephod in his hand (1 Sam. 23:1-6).

This victory had an appeal to many of the Israelites and established a favorable reputation with them. It set the stage for his eventual acceptance as king. David made forays from time to time in order to supply his men with supplies. During one of these forays the Amalekites attacked Ziklag, the city where he was residing. When David and his men returned, they found the city burned and their wives and children abducted. His men were frantic.

And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way. So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all (1 Sam. 30: 1-3, 6, 8).

David followed their trail, and overtook them.

. . . Behold, they were spread abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled. And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all (1 Sam. 30:16-19).

David was very fair in his dealings with his men. With so much spoil, certain of his men demanded a larger share of the booty than those who had become too exhausted to continue the pursuit of the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:22).

Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day (1 Sam. 30:23-25).

On several occasions when David was an outcast, Saul searched for him throughout the land. He desperately wanted David dead and pursued him relentlessly. On one of these occasions, David had the opportunity to kill Saul.

And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi. Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats. And he came to the sheepecotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave. And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him,

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seeing he is the anointed of the LORD (1 Sam. 24:1-6).

David recognized that Saul's appointment as king had come from God. Though David had been anointed as the future king, he knew better than to take matters into his own hands. He knew it would be absolutely wrong to act in God's stead. David manifested great respect toward God and His anointed even though Saul had been displeasing God for some time. David was indeed a man after God's own heart. He had an understanding of the mind of God. "So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way" (1 Sam. 24:7). After Saul had gone some distance, David shouted to Saul and displayed the portion of the robe he had cut off from his garment. Saul was so remorseful that he wept, and he said to David:

Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the LORD had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? wherefore the LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day. And now, behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand. Swear now therefore unto me by the LORD, that thou wilt not cut off my seed after me, and that thou wilt not destroy my name out of my father's house. And David swore unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold (1 Sam. 24:16-22).

Saul knew that David would be king. But David knew he could not trust Saul. He was likely to change his mind at any time.

The Spirit of God led David. As a result, he could listen to reason even in the heat of anger. Near where David and his men were holed up, a wealthy man had large herds grazing. "Now the name of the man was Nabal; and the name of his wife Abigail: and she was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance: but the man was churlish and evil in his doings; and he was of the house of Caleb" (1 Sam. 25:3). David's men had protected Nabal's herds from thieves and marauders. When shearing time came, David sent some of his men to ask for some provisions.

And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be? So David's young men turned their way, and went again, and came and told him all those sayings (1 Sam. 25:10-12).

David's reaction was immediate.

And David said unto his men, Gird ye on every man his sword. And they girded on every man his sword; and David also girded on his sword: and there went up after David about four hundred men . . . Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and he hath requited me evil for good. So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him [that is, males] by the morning light . . . (1 Sam. 25:13, 21-22).

But Nabal's wife was about to act.

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to salute our master; and he railed on them. But the men were very good unto us, and we were not hurt, neither missed we any thing, as long as we were conversant with them, when we were in the

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fields: They were a wall unto us both by night and day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him. Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal” (1 Sam. 25:14-19).

Abigail met David on his way to wreak revenge upon Nabal. “And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid” (1 Sam. 25:23-24).

David listened.

Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid (1 Sam. 25:25-28, 30-31).

David was greatly moved by her humility and words of wisdom.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand. For in very deed, as the LORD God of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back from hurting thee, except thou hadst hasted and come to meet me, surely there had not been left unto Nabal [any males] by the morning light So David received of her hand that which she had brought him, and said unto her, Go up in peace to thine house; see, I have hearkened to thy voice, and have accepted thy person (1 Sam. 25:32-35).

How would most angry men have reacted under these circumstances? More than likely Abigail would have been brushed aside, her goods confiscated, and Nabal and his house slain. But not David. In the heat of anger he was able to listen to reason and sound advice. He indeed was a man after God’s own heart. He knew God had sent Abigail to prevent him from taking bloody revenge upon the house of Nabal—a blot and stain that would have remained with him for life. David recognized the hand of God in this matter. And what happened to Nabal?

And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone. And it came to pass about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died (1 Sam. 25:36-38).

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The contempt and disrespect shown toward David had cost Nabal his life!

And when David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the LORD, that hath pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and hath kept his servant from evil: for the LORD hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head. And David sent and communed with Abigail, to take her to him to wife And Abigail hasted, and arose, and rode upon an ass, with five damsels of hers that went after her; and she went after the messengers of David, and became his wife” (1 Sam. 25:39, 42).

David’s last encounter with Saul again illustrates why he was a man after God’s own heart. He had another opportunity to kill Saul, but refused to do so. When his men offered to kill him, David said: ” . . . Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless? David said furthermore, As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish” (1 Sam. 26:9-10). From some distance away Saul was made aware of this close call. He replied to David:

Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. And David answered and said, Behold the king’s spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. The LORD render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness: for the LORD delivered thee into my hand to day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’S anointed. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the LORD, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place (1 Sam. 26:21-25).

God’s patience with Saul came to an end after he consulted a witch. A battle with the Philistines was about to occur:

“And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor” (1 Sam. 28:6-7).

Samuel had died sometime previously (1 Sam. 25:1), and the witch conjured up a demon masquerading as Samuel. The demon told Saul:

. . . the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines (1 Sam. 28:17-19).

In the battle that followed, Saul and his sons were killed.

Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul’s sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon

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his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together (1 Sam. 31:1-6).

“So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it” (1 Chr. 10:13)

David wrote the following poem in honor of Saul and Jonathan, and instructed the people to recite it regularly.

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! (2 Sam. 1:19-27).

Shortly after the death of Saul, David asked God what he should do. “And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron” (2 Sam. 2:1). Timing is all-important—the right location and the right time. With Saul dead, the Jews no longer had any reason to look to the house of Saul. “And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah . . .” (v. 4). The stage was now set for David to become king over all Israel.

After Saul’s death there was prolonged war between the house of David and the house of Saul. During this time David reigned over the Jews in Hebron. “Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker” (2 Sam. 3:1). Saul’s son, Ishbosheth, had replaced Saul as king. Due to a dispute over a woman, a rift arose between Ishbosheth and his general, Abner. As a result, Abner determined to bring all the house of Israel under the rule of David. He sought and gained an audience with David. But Joab, David’s general, who was also David’s nephew, viewed Abner as a competitor. Also, Joab wanted revenge for the death of his brother Asahel, whom Abner had killed in battle. Once a war is over, men do not generally seek revenge, so Joab’s act of vengeance against Abner was absolutely brutal. “And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not. And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother” (2 Sam. 3:26-27).

David was appalled by this bloody deed and denounced it, but he could do nothing about it as Joab as he was a national hero and had too much power. Politically speaking, this murder could have been a disaster, as David’s acceptance as king over all Israel was at stake. So, David did the right thing.

And afterward when David heard it, he said, I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever from the blood of Abner the son of Ner: Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father’s house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or

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that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread. So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner, because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle (2 Sam. 3:28-30).

David then made a public statement.

And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier. And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept. And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth? Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him. And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people. For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner. And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel? And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness (2 Sam. 3:31-39).

Joab and his brother were indeed bloody men, treacherous and unmerciful. Even though they were David's nephews, they were not of the same mind. They were very effective as warriors, but lacked the temperament to forgive and to put the past behind them. They were not like David—a man after God's own heart. David himself was a great warrior, used to bloodshed and death, but he did not condone needless violence, nor did he condone the assassination of opponents.

After Abner's defection the house of Saul fell apart. Ishbosheth remained on the throne as the head of the rest of the tribes of Israel, but in a weakened state. Certain of his men saw this weakness as an opportunity to gain David's approval.

And Saul's son had two men that were captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin: (for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who lay on a bed at noon. And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped. For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night. And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David to Hebron, and said to the king, Behold the head of Ishbosheth the son of Saul thine enemy, which sought thy life; and the LORD hath avenged my lord the king this day of Saul, and of his seed (2 Sam. 4: 2, 5-8).

These assassins thought David would be pleased. They had no comprehension how the Spirit of God worked in the mind of David. He knew that as God had removed Saul in His set time, so would he do the same to Ishbosheth. He knew it was wrong for people to take matters into their own hands. It gave him no pleasure to see Saul's son betrayed and murdered in this way.

And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity, When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings: How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth? And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of

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Ishbosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron (2 Sam. 4:9-12).

David's response had a very favorable effect upon the tribes of Israel.

David was so appreciative for the kind things God had done for him that he desired to build a Temple in His honor. "And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee" (2 Sam. 7:1-3). It seemed to Nathan that this was the right thing to do, but God said otherwise.

Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar (2 Sam. 7:5-7).

While God was pleased with David's desire to build a Temple, he was not permitted to build it. Why?

And David said to Solomon, My son, as for me, it was in my mind to build an house unto the name of the LORD my God: But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight. Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days (1 Chr. 22:7-9).

God did not wish a memorial in His honor to be constructed by a man who had participated in many wars and much bloodshed.

Again, notice how David viewed the house of Saul, even after all the evil shown to him by Saul.

And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he. And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar. Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant! And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually (2 Sam. 9:1-7).

David's love for Jonathan completely surpassed any ill will he may have had toward Saul. He could only think of doing something good for Jonathan's descendants.

In his personal life David made only two great mistakes. These were: adultery and murder-adultery with Bathsheba and the subsequent murder of her husband. The whole affair was a tangled web of lust and deceit. Yet, when the sin was called to David's attention, the repentance and deep regret he manifested is rarely seen in this world.

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And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem. And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house. And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child (2 Sam. 11:1-5).

As in most cases of intrigue, one sin leads to another. David sought a way to circumvent the problem. So he sent for her husband, Uriah, who was one of his officers in the army that was besieging Rabba. David thought that if Uriah were home, he would certainly cohabit with his wife and then be led to believe the child was his. Uriah returned as ordered but refused to sleep with his wife. David thought he now had no other choice. Uriah had to be killed.

And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also (2 Sam. 11:14-17).

By his refusal to sleep with his wife, Uriah had signed his own death warrant. "And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sam. 11:26-27). David had seemingly committed the perfect crime, so he thought. But he was in for a shock. The prophet Nathan was dispatched to David with a message from God. Nathan described how a rich man had taken a pet lamb from a poor man and killed it for a guest. David was outraged by this impious act.

Then Nathan said:

Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun (2 Sam. 12:9-12).

What was David's reaction?

"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13). David did not excuse or justify himself. He did not blame Bathsheba. He openly admitted his fault and assumed full responsibility. How many people would react in this manner today? Psalm 51 is David's prayer of repentance. It is one of the most moving Psalms in the Bible. No wonder God said He had put David's sin away. David was human, but he was a man after God's own heart. What does God desire in all human beings? "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

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David was a humble man. He said to God:

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest . . . Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom (Ps. 51:2-6).

God was merciful to David, but there was a price to be paid. For the rest of his life David faced problem after problem. The child that was born to Bathsheba died shortly after birth. Nathan told him: "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:14). Had not David confessed his sin and repented, his fate may have been the same as that of Saul.

The other weakness in David's life was the soft spot he had for his children. Three of his sons caused major problems for him. David's oldest son, Amnon, raped Tamar, one of his half-sisters. David took no action against him, but Absalom, Tamar's full-brother, took revenge and had Amnon killed. Later, Absalom rebelled against David and tried to set himself up as king. In open defiance and disrespect for his father, he took David's wives to bed. In a later battle with David's loyal troops, Absalom was killed. David's sin with Bathsheba brought many curses on his entire family. Absalom's rebellion was an act of high treason, worthy of death, but David could not bring himself to have him slain. Had Absalom survived the war, David more than likely would have banished him. But this did not happen. Joab, David's general, was a man of war. He knew that war means fighting, and fighting means killing. The battle turned against Absalom, and he fled on a mule. While fleeing, he passed under an oak tree and got caught by his long hair. As he was hanging in the tree, Joab pierced his heart with three darts. Joab refused to obey David's command to spare Absalom (2 Sam. 18:5, 14).

David was so upset with Joab that he replaced him as General of the Army. Of all things, his replacement was none other than Amasa, who had headed Absalom's rebellious army. Amasa was a nephew of David and cousin of Joab. But Joab was not to be slighted; he was too powerful of a leader. He determined to get rid of Amasa. One of the bloodiest deeds in Joab's long career was the assassination of Amasa. Joab feigned friendship in order to catch Amasa off guard:

. . . And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out. And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died . . . (2 Sam. 20:8-10).

Joab was calloused and hard. He had seen much war and bloodshed. He had little feeling for any opponent, whether one of David's, or his own. The whole problem with Absalom's rebellion goes back to polygamy-too many wives and too little attention to the many children. Had Amnon been dealt with as he should have been, Absalom's rebellion toward his father may have never manifested itself. But, again, we must be reminded that all these curses fell upon David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband.

Much later in David's reign a serious famine set in. It lasted three years. David sought God for the reason. ". . . And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites" (2 Sam. 21:1). The Gibeonites had been granted protection by Joshua and the elders-a perpetual promise confirmed by a solemn oath. Saul broke the oath. He attacked and killed a number of Gibeonites. God was not pleased. Retribution had to be made. Until then, there could be no relief from the famine. Retribution

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was made and the famine was stayed. How could David have known the reason for the famine had he not inquired of God? David was very much aware that events often happen because of the hand of God. David was God-conscious, and apart from his one lapse into adultery and murder, made God an important part of his life.

At the end of his life, David instructed Solomon on the importance of obedience to God's commandments (1 Kings 2:1-3). David had learned the hard way. In his old age he was faithful and dedicated to God. He always sought for the best interests of his people. "Nevertheless for David's sake did the LORD his God give him a lamp in Jerusalem, to set up his son after him, and to establish Jerusalem: Because David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:4-5).

David, the man after God's own heart is specifically mentioned in the faith chapter-Hebrews 11. He was a great warrior, a master musician, a sinner, and a saint. Many of his psalms indicate he had prophetic insight. Unlike Saul, he remained humble after he was exalted to the throne of Israel.

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, (2 Sam. 23:1-5) Will He not make it grow ? (v. 5, Jewish Pub. Soc.).