



The books of Samuel are two parts of the same work. What has been said in the introduction to the first book holds true for the second.

In this second part, the deeds of King David are narrated. No history as sincere as this was ever written in ancient times – a story written by a man of God who could unearth David’s real greatness. Thus, what is exceptional about King David can be noted in a series of small things that perhaps seemed insignificant or even stupid to his contemporaries (see how different David is from Joab, the “achiever” and “effective” man). But these things did not pass unnoticed by the one who narrated the story. Then, Israel understood that if they had had several outstanding kings, only David provided them with an anticipated image of the true King, Christ.

To better understand the events that follow, let us bear in mind that even before David, the tribe of Judah which settled in southern Palestine felt different from the tribes of Israel situated more to the north. Saul had more allies in the north; while David was a Bethlehemite from the tribe of Judah and found his support there.

David learns of Saul’s death

1 • ¹It was thus that Saul died. As for David, he returned after defeating the Amalekites. He was already two days in Ziklag ² when, on the third day, a man came from Saul’s camp, with his clothes torn and dust strewn on his head. He went to David and fell to the ground in homage. ³David asked him, “Where are you from?” And he answered, “I have escaped from the Israelite camp.” ⁴David then said, “Tell me what happened.” And the man told him, “The soldiers fled from the battle but many of them fell and died. Saul and his son Jonathan – they too are dead.”

⁵Then David asked the young man who reported this, “How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?”

⁶The young man replied, “I happened to be on Mount Gilboa and I saw

Saul leaning on his spear while chariots and horsemen were closing in on him. ⁷He turned around and, seeing me, called me. ⁸I said, ‘Here I am.’ He asked, ‘Who are you?’ and I replied, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ ⁹He then said to me, ‘Come here and kill me for I feel dizzy though I am fully alive.’ ¹⁰So I went over and killed him, for I knew that he would fall and not rise again. Then I removed the crown from his head and the armlet from his arm, both of which I have here to give you, my lord.”

¹¹At this, David took hold of his clothes and tore them and his men did the same. ¹²And they mourned, weeping and fasting until evening, for the death of Saul and his son Jonathan, for all the people of Judah and for the nation of Israel.

¹³David asked the young man who told him this, “Where are you from?” And he answered, “I am the son of an

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Amalekite immigrant.” ¹⁴ David said, “Why were you not afraid to lay your hands on Yahweh’s anointed and kill him?” ¹⁵ He then called one of his men and ordered him, “Come and strike him down.” He struck down the Amalekite and killed him.

¹⁶ David declared, “You will answer for your own blood for you condemned yourself when you said, ‘I have killed Yahweh’s anointed.’”

¹⁷ David sang this song of lamentation for Saul and his son Jonathan, and had it taught to the people of Judah. It is called “The Bow” ¹⁸ and is found in the Book of the Just.

¹⁹ *“Your glory, O Israel, is slain upon your mountains!*

How the mighty ones have fallen!

²⁰ *Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon
lest the Philistine women rejoice,
lest foreign maidens exult.*

²¹ *Mountains of Gilboa,
let neither dew nor rain visit you,
no more fertile fields on you!
For on you the shield of the valiant was
defiled.*

²² *The shield of Saul was not anointed
with oil;*

*but with the blood of the slain.
From the fat of the warriors,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
nor did the sword of Saul return unstained.*

²³ *Saul and Jonathan, beloved and cherished,
neither in life nor in death were they
parted;*

*swifter than eagles they were
and stronger than lions.*

²⁴ *Women of Israel, weep over Saul
who clothed you in precious scarlet.*

²⁵ *How the valiant have fallen!
In the midst of the battle Jonathan lies
slain on your mountains.*

²⁶ *I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan;
how dear have you been to me!
Your love for me was wonderful,
even more than the love of women.*

²⁷ *How the valiant have fallen!
The weapons of war have perished!”*

David is anointed King over Judah

2 ¹ After this, David consulted Yahweh, “Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” Yahweh answered him, “Go!” Then David asked, “Where shall I go?” He answered, “To Hebron.”

² So David went up to Hebron with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

³ David also brought up his men with their families and they settled in the towns of Hebron. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the nation of Judah.

David learned that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, ⁵ so he sent messengers to them with these words, “May Yahweh bless you for you have dealt kindly with Saul, your master, and have buried him. ⁶ May Yahweh show his love and fidelity to you! I, in turn, will be kind to you for having done this. ⁷ Now be brave and strong for although your master Saul is dead, the people of Judah have anointed me their king.”

⁸ Now Abner, son of Ner, Saul’s general, had taken Ishbaal, son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim ⁹ where he made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin and the rest of Israel. ¹⁰ Ishbaal, Saul’s son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for two years. Only the people of Judah followed David. ¹¹ David was their king in Hebron and he ruled over them for seven years and six months.

Civil war

¹² Abner, son of Ner, and the menservants of Ishbaal, Saul’s son, left Mahanaim for Gibeon ¹³ where Joab, son of Zeruiah and the men of David met them at the pool of Gibeon. There they sat, one group on one side of the pool, the other on the opposite side. ¹⁴ Abner

• **1.1** The first reaction of David, upon hearing of Saul’s death, shows his noble qualities. From then on, he champions national unity and strives to reunite around him both allies and enemies of Saul.

Mountains of Gilboa. David is already known for his poetic talents (see 1 S 16:18). This poem

attributed to him is one of the more ancient songs in the Bible.

• **2.1** Saul’s death seems to undermine the recently acquired and still fragile unity of the twelve tribes.

David is proclaimed king by the people of

¹⁵ told Joab, "Let the young men rise and perform for us." Joab replied, "Let them rise!" ^{17:8} ¹⁵ So they rose and were counted off: twelve of the Benjaminites of Ishbaal, Saul's son, and twelve of David's men. ¹⁶ Each one caught his opponent's head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, and all fell down together. Therefore, that place in Gibeon was called field of the fighting.

¹⁷ After a very fierce battle that day, Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's troops. ¹⁸ The three sons of Zeruiah – Joab, Abishai and Asahel – were there. ¹⁹ Asahel, who ran as fast as a wild gazelle, pursued Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left. ²⁰ Abner turned around and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?" He replied, "Yes, it is I." ²¹ Abner said to him, "Turn right or left, go after one of the young men and take his spoil." But Asahel refused to desist from following him, ²² so Abner again said, "Stop following me! I will surely strike you down and then, how could I face your brother Joab?" ²³ But Asahel would not heed, and Abner, without turning back, struck him in the belly with his spear which ran through him and came out his back. He fell and died on the spot and all who came to the place where Asahel fell dead, stopped there.

²⁴ Joab and Abishai, however, pursued Abner and, by sunset, arrived at the hill of Ammah which lies near Giah toward the desert of Gibeon. ²⁵ The Benjaminites then rallied around Abner, forming one band, and took their position on the hilltop. ²⁶ Then Abner called to Joab, "When will the sword rest? Do you not realize that this will bring you more bitterness? When will you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?" ²⁷ Joab replied, "As God lives, if you had not spoken, my men would have continued pursuing their brothers until morning." ²⁸ So Joab blew the trumpet and the men desisted from pursuing the Israelites and fighting them.

^{18:16} ^{20:22} ²⁹ Abner and his men marched all night through the lowland, crossed the Jordan, and marched the whole morning until they reached Mahanaim. ³⁰ As for Joab, he stopped pursuing Abner and gathered all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's

servants were missing. ³¹ But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men from among the Benjaminites. ³² Asahel was taken and buried in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

3 ¹ There was a long war between Saul's party and that of David, but David grew stronger while Saul's party grew weaker.

• ² Sons were born to David at Hebron: his firstborn, Amnon, of Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³ his second, Chileab, of Abigail, widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom, son of Maacah the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur; ⁴ the fourth, Adonijah, the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah, the son of Abital; ⁵ and the sixth, Ithream, of David's wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.

⁶ While war was going on between the party of Saul and that of David, Abner was strengthening his position in Saul's family. ⁷ Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, on whose account Ishbaal chided Abner, "Why have you slept with my father's concubine?" ⁸ Abner was very angry because of Ishbaal's remark and exclaimed, "Am I a dog's head? Up to now I have been loyal to the family of Saul your father, to his brothers and friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David, and you come accusing me because of this woman. ⁹ May God deal with me severely if I do not do for David what Yahweh swore to him – ¹⁰ to transfer the kingdom from the family of Saul to that of David and make him king of Israel and Judah to rule over all the land from Dan to Beersheba." ¹¹ Ishbaal could no longer say a word to Abner for he feared him.

¹² Abner then sent messengers to David at Hebron saying, "To whom does the land belong? Enter into an agreement with me and I shall help you obtain all Israel." ¹³ David replied, "I will make an agreement with you, but on one condition: you may appear before me when you bring me Saul's daughter, Michal."

• ¹⁴ Then David sent messengers to Ishbaal, Saul's son, to tell him, "Give me my wife

his own tribe of Judah. The north remains faithful to Saul's son. With the aim of uniting them, David seeks the sympathy of Saul's allies, and praises the people from the north who gave Saul burial.

According to the custom of the time, the size of the royal harem was according to the importance of the king. David still has only two wives but before leaving for Jerusalem he will have six (3:2-5).

• **3.2** David's children will be the cause of much suffering for him. David's numerous wives

will bring about fratricidal struggles for succession to the throne: actually each of the firstborn, urged on by his own mother, will aspire to replace David. Consequently three of his sons: Amnon, Absalom and Adoniah will in turn lose their lives in this struggle for power, before finally leaving the throne to Solomon who had not yet been born when David reigned in Hebron (see also 1 K 2:1).

• 14. Sometimes, the Bible says that God intervened to guide David and lead him to victory. This does not negate the fact that David

Michal whom I married for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins.”¹⁵ Ishbaal sent for her and took her away from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish,¹⁶ who followed her weeping all the way to Bahurim. There Abner said to him, “Go back!” and he turned back.

¹⁷ Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and told them, “You have long wanted to have David as your king. ¹⁸ Well, make it come true; for Yahweh made a promise to David and said: By my servant David, I will save my people Israel from the Philistines and from all their enemies.” ¹⁹ Abner also spoke to the people of Benjamin; then he went to tell David at Hebron the proposals of Israel and the Benjaminites.

Joab murders Abner

²⁰ When Abner came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and the twenty men who were with him. ²¹ Then Abner said to David, “I will now go and assemble all Israel for my master the king, that they may enter into an agreement with you, and that you may reign over all those you want to rule.”

²² Just then, David’s men and Joab arrived from a raid taking along with them a great deal of booty. Abner was no longer with David at Hebron for he had departed quietly after David had dismissed him. ²³ When Joab arrived with his troops he was told, “Abner, son of Ner, came to see the king; then the king sent him on his way and he went in peace.” ²⁴ Joab then went to the king and said, “What did you do? When Abner came to you, why did you allow him to leave? ²⁵ You know what Abner, son of Ner, is like; he came to you deceitfully to observe and find out what you are doing.”

²⁶ Joab left David and sent messengers to go after Abner and they had him

brought back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know of that. ²⁷ When Abner arrived at Hebron, Joab took him aside within the city gate as though to speak with him, privately. There he stabbed him in the belly and he died. Joab did so in revenge for the murder of his brother, Asahel.

²⁸ Later on, David heard about this. Then he said, “Yahweh will not punish me and my kingdom for the blood of Abner, son of Ner. ²⁹ May justice for his blood fall on Joab and on all his father’s family, and may there be forever among them some member who has discharge, or is sick with leprosy, or who is only fit to hold a spindle, or who falls by the sword or hungers!”

³⁰ Joab and his brother Abishai slew Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.

³¹ David then told Joab and those who were with him, “Tear off your clothes, put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner.” King David himself followed the corpse. ³² They buried Abner at Hebron; there the king wept aloud over his grave and all the people joined in the lamentation.

³³ The king began the mourning song for Abner with these words, “Should Abner die as a fool dies? ³⁴ Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered; as one falls at the hands of the wicked, so you have fallen.” And all the people again wept over him.

³⁵ Then the people tried to persuade David to take some food while it was still day, but David swore, “May God do so to me and more if I touch food before sundown!” ³⁶ The people heeded this and it pleased them; in fact, they were pleased at whatever the king said. ³⁷ This day they realized, as did all the people of Israel, that the king had no part in the murder of Abner, son of Ner. ³⁸ Then the king

was an intelligent and capable man, and was able to impose himself on Israel. God was not acting differently at that time than he does today. It is always men and women who write history and, in so doing, write it with light and shadow.

The new king strives to create a united and strong nation. This account shows us an attempt to achieve unity which fails because of the mean and vindictive attitude of David’s military officers.

The story illustrates three successive steps in political fanaticism:

- he believes that those who belong to his party are good and those, in turn, who belong to the opposition are bad;
- later, he ascribes bad intentions to everything the opposition does;
- finally, he eliminates them by any means.

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31:13

16:10 said to his servants, "Do you realize that a
19:23 general and valiant warrior passed away to-
1S day in Israel? ³⁹Although I am the anointed
26:6 king, today I feel helpless to control the sons
of Zeruiah. May Yahweh repay the one who
did evil."

Ishbaal is murdered

4 ¹When Ishbaal, Saul's son, heard that Abner had died at Hebron, he was stunned and the Israelites were disheartened. ²Saul's son had two men, captains of raiding bands: one was Baanah, the other Rechab, both sons of Rimmon, a Benjaminite from Beeroth. For Beeroth was still considered part of Benjamin; ³the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and have remained there as immigrants to the present day.

⁴(Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son whose feet were crippled. He was five years old when the news came from Jezreel about the death of Saul and Jonathan. His nurse took him up and fled so hastily that the boy fell and became lame. He was called Mepibaal.)

⁵Now Rechab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon, the Beerothite, went their way and arrived in the heat of the day at the house of Ishbaal who was taking a nap. ⁶His doorkeeper had been cleaning wheat, but feeling drowsy, she slept; Rechab and his brother Baanah got into the house. ⁷They rushed into Ishbaal's bedroom as he lay asleep in his bed and struck him dead. They beheaded him, took his head and left, walking all night by the way of the Arabah. ⁸They brought Ishbaal's head to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ishbaal son of Saul, your enemy who sought your life. This day Yahweh has avenged my lord the king, on Saul and his son."

⁹But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "Let Yahweh hear, he who has saved me from all adversities. ¹⁰When somebody reported Saul's death to me, thinking he was bringing me good news, I took hold of him and killed him at Ziklag, instead of giving him a reward. ¹¹Will I do less when wicked men have murdered a just one in his own house

and on his bed? Shall I not now demand his blood from your hands and sweep you away?"

¹²So David commanded his young men to kill them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung them beside the pool at Hebron. Then they took Ishbaal's head and buried it in Abner's tomb on Hebron. 1:15 1S 31:10

David is anointed King over Israel

5 ¹All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your bone and flesh. ²In the past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel. And Yahweh said to you, 'You shall be the shepherd of my people Israel and you shall be commander over Israel.'" ³Before Yahweh, King David made an agreement with the elders of Israel who came to him at Hebron, and they anointed him king of Israel. 1S 18:5, 16

⁴David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years: ⁵he reigned over Judah, from Hebron, seven and a half years; and over Israel and Judah, from Jerusalem, for thirty-three years.

David captures Jerusalem

⁶The king and his men set out for Jerusalem to fight the Jebusites who lived there. They said to David, "If you try to break in here, the blind and the lame will drive you away," which meant that David could not get in. ⁷Yet David captured the fortress of Zion that became the "city of David."

⁸That day David said, "Whoever wants to defeat the Jebusites, let him reach these lame and blind, David's

• **5.1** This is a great day for David and for Israel. Those from the north acknowledge him as king, and the unity of all Israel is achieved. The tribes in the north were separated from those in the south by the district of Jerusalem, which was in the hands of the Canaanites. David conquers Jerusalem which becomes the capital of this united kingdom.

It is a definitive stage. God turns Jerusalem into the visible center of his presence among people.

Later, the one and only temple of God will be in Jerusalem, and the true kings of the people of God will be those who rule in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be the image of the Church and Chris-

tians will know that after the Jerusalem of Palestine, God has promised them another Jerusalem – that of heaven (see Rev 20 and 21).

Jerusalem is the image of heaven and, at the same time, of the church on earth. Often, in the Bible, Jerusalem is called *Zion*, since this was the name of the more ancient part of Jerusalem. It was also called the "City of David."

In the Bible, the unity achieved between the northern and southern tribes is a visible sign that they are living in God's grace: all unfaithfulness toward God leads to a division among people, and all such division is a sin against God.

enemies, through the tunnel for fetching water.” From this came the saying, “The blind and the lame shall not enter the house.”⁹ David lived in the fortress, calling it the City of David, and proceeded to build the city around it, from the Millo and inside as well.¹⁰ And David grew more powerful, for Yahweh, the God of hosts, was with him.

^{1K 5:15} ¹¹ Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David with cedar trees, carpenters and masons to build a house for David.¹² David then understood that Yahweh had made him king over Israel and had exalted his reign for the sake of his people Israel.

¹³ After David had come from Hebron he took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him.¹⁴ These are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon,¹⁵ Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia,¹⁶ Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

¹⁷ When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel, they went to search for him. On hearing this, David went down to the stronghold.¹⁸ When the Philistines overran the valley of Rephaim,¹⁹ David consulted Yahweh, “Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?” Yahweh answered David, “Go ahead, for I will certainly deliver the Philistines into your hands.”²⁰ So David

came to Baalperazim where he defeated them. He said, “Yahweh has scattered my enemies before me like a sudden bursting flood.” That is why that place is called Baalperazim.²¹ There the Philistines left their idols and David and his men picked them up.

²² The Philistines went up again and overran the valley of Rephaim.²³ David consulted Yahweh who said, “Do not go up straight but circle around and attack them from behind when you are in front of the balsam trees.²⁴ Once you hear a marching sound on top of the balsam trees, act quickly, for Yahweh is going ahead of you to attack the Philistine army.”²⁵ David obeyed Yahweh’s command and struck down the Philistines from Giba to as far as Gezer.

The ark is brought to Jerusalem

6^{*} ¹ David gathered together once more all the picked men of Israel, numbering thirty thousand in all.² Then he and all the people with him in Baala-Judah set forth to bring up from there the ark of God on which Yahweh of hosts pronounced and put his Name, he who rests on the cherubim.³ They placed the ark of God on a new cart and brought it out of the house of Abinadab on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart⁴ with the ark of Yahweh, with Ahio walking before it.⁵ David and the Israelites were joyfully celebrating before Yahweh,

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7:1
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8:1

Ps
68:25

• **6.1** The Ark was very important to the Israelites. It contained the Law which Moses received from God on Mount Sinai. The Israelites imagined God to be present above the Ark whose golden cap served as a footstool for his feet. God wanted them to understand that he was with his people, in a friendly but demanding presence.

But to whom did the Ark belong? It belonged to the twelve tribes and not to any one of them in particular. That is why it stayed in different sanctuaries: Shiloh, Gilgal, Bethel, depending on circumstances. And what is David’s intention in bringing it to Jerusalem, his new capital? Is it a political move to establish his authority over Israel? Most surely. But it is an inseparable religious act at a time when separation of political power from religious power was unknown.

Until then, Israel was, as a whole, Yahweh’s chosen one, God’s firstborn. But no Israelite felt worthy of special attention from the God of their people. Now David knows that he is the chosen one of Yahweh, the “son of God,” as the prophet Nathan says referring to David’s descendants. That is why David aspires to have the Ark very close to him, and he wishes God’s presence in a temple that serves as a private chapel for his family. Such a temple does not yet exist.

God certainly loves all people, but David is the first who becomes aware of this and lives by this truth in a very simple relationship with God. Later the prophets will understand that the promises made to David are for all of us who believe in Christ, God’s only Son.

In Israel only those of Levi’s tribe, being

singing and playing on lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets and cymbals.

⁶When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah stretched his hand to the ark of God to hold it. ⁷Yahweh's anger burnt against Uzzah and God struck him there; Uzzah died there beside the ark of God. ⁸David was angry because Yahweh had struck Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-Uzzah to the present day.

⁹David was afraid of Yahweh that day and said, "How can the ark of Yahweh come to me?" ¹⁰So David refused to take the ark of Yahweh into the city of David but had it brought, instead, to the house of Obededom the Gittite. ¹¹Yahweh's ark remained there for three months and Yahweh blessed Obededom and all his household.

¹²King David was told that Yahweh had blessed the family of Obededom and all that belonged to him because of the ark of God, so he went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David, rejoicing. ¹³After those who carried the ark of

Yahweh had walked six paces, they sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf.

¹⁴David whirled round dancing with all his heart before Yahweh, wearing a linen ephod, ¹⁵for he and all the Israelites brought up the ark of Yahweh, shouting joyfully and sounding the horn.

¹⁶As the ark of Yahweh entered the city of David, Michal, Saul's daughter, looked out of the window; and when she saw King David leaping and whirling round before Yahweh, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷They brought in the ark of Yahweh and laid it in its place in the tent which David had pitched for it. Then David offered burnt and peace offerings before Yahweh. ¹⁸Once the offerings had been made, David blessed the people in the name of Yahweh of hosts, ¹⁹and distributed to each of them, to each man and woman of the entire assembly of Israel, a loaf of bread, a portion of meat and a raisin cake. With this, all the people left for their homes.

²⁰When David returned to bless his

especially consecrated to Yahweh, have the right to serve him and to approach sacred things. Abinadab and his sons have welcomed the Ark into their home. But they cannot touch the Ark without being affected by the awesome power emanating from the Holy God.

We are told that Uzzah was "stricken by God." This phrase well reflects the mentality of these times when the distinction between sin, error and accidents was hardly made: all that troubled the traditional and divine order was considered as sin. The sudden death of Uzzah has the value of a sign for those who witness it; it helps them to understand how great God is above all, and, at the same time, really present among his people.

David had the Ark brought to the house of Obededom. Why is it brought to the house of an alien? Because Yahweh will not ask for an accounting of this non-Israelite? Or because it is better that a foreigner suffer the risk of God's anger?

But if the Ark brings blessings on the one who welcomes it, its natural place is beside the king!

Luke's gospel discovers other imagery in this story. Like the Ark, and in a more wonderful way, the Virgin Mary carried for nine months God himself who, on becoming man, sealed the Covenant with all the peoples of the world. This is why some have given her the title, "Ark of the

Covenant." Luke himself had this text before him when he was narrating the Virgin's visit to Elizabeth. (Pay attention to vv. 9 and 11 and compare them with Lk 1:39-45 and 56-64.)

• 14. Let us imagine the transfer of the Ark. There is a huge procession with thousands of people singing, dancing and playing music, with the king himself leading. Sacrifices beyond count are offered. It is a time of great joy, for the Lord is with his people. It is the triumphal entry of the Ark of the Covenant into its rightful place – in the capital of the country.

David whirled round dancing with all his heart before Yahweh. David understands very well that to give thanks worthily to God, all this is very little. He does not care what others think of him, when he is showing his joy to the Lord; so he sings and dances.

Michal despised David in her heart. Michal, Saul's daughter, understood nothing, being more concerned about "what people will say," than about praising God.

In this passage, a great king teaches us real greatness and brings to mind examples from daily life: a young man or woman who having finished studies go back to the barrio, and remain as simple as before; a Christian who is not ashamed of his faith and practices it, whether people are looking or not.

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6:19Gen
28:17
Ex
14:31Gen
30:30
39:51S
2:181K
3:4
8:63

household, Michal, Saul's daughter, met him and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, exposing himself before his servants' maids as uncouth men do!" ²¹But David said to Michal, "I did that before Yahweh who chose me instead of your father and his family, making me commander over Israel, Yahweh's people. By Yahweh's life I swear that I will dance and whirl again before him. ²²I will humble myself still more and you may look at me, but I will not be rejected by the maids you spoke about." ²³And Michal, Saul's daughter, had no child to the day she died.

The prophecy of Nathan

7 ¹When the king had settled in his palace and Yahweh had rid him of all his surrounding enemies, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look, I live in a house of cedar but the ark of God is housed in a tent." ³Nathan replied, "Do as it seems fit to you for Yahweh is with you."

^{1K}
^{8:17}

⁴But that very night, Yahweh's word came to Nathan, ⁵"Go and tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh says: Are you able to build a house for me to live in? ⁶I have not dwelt in a house since I brought the Israelites up from Egypt to the present day, but I went about with a tent for shelter. ⁷As long as I walked with the Israelites, did I say anything to the chiefs of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel? Did I say: Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

Acts
7:48

Ex
40:34

Jdg
19:30

⁸Now you will tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh of hosts says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the sheep, to make you commander of my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you went, cutting down all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great as the name of the great ones on earth. ¹⁰I will provide a place for my people Israel and plant them that they may live there in peace. They shall no longer be harassed, nor shall wicked men oppress them as be-

1S
16:11
17:15

Ps
89:27

Ex
15:17
Jer
24:6
32:41

• **7.1** *I live in a house of cedar but the Ark of God is housed in a tent.* David thinks that if the king has a palace, why should God not have one? God, who is greater, thinks otherwise and makes this known to his prophet Nathan.

In ancient times it was unthinkable that a capital city be without its temple and its palace. God and the king were inseparable associates to ensure the good order of the state. This concept strongly linked to the nature of religion (see commentary on Dt 4:1) will however be challenged by the Gospel.

God will be the one to make David a house. *House* in the Bible refers to both persons and things belonging to someone. David's "house" is his family, his servants, his counsellors and officials.

I will provide a place for my people Israel. God chooses this moment for a decisive step in the development of his people. Israel had been a people of twelve tribes since Joshua's time. Now, it will be a nation organized in its own land, with a central and stable authority: the kings descending from David.

Now I will make your name great as the name of the great ones on earth. Yahweh has accompanied David in all his undertakings; but now he makes use of him and his works to build something permanent for the salvation of humankind.

The same thing happened with Abraham (Gen 17:7).

The same thing happened with Peter (Mt 16:18).

The Kingdom of God from now on will be the kingdom of David.

I will raise up your son after you (see Lk 1:32). God's promise points to Solomon, David's son and successor, and also to those who will come after. To all appearances the promise was broken when, after four centuries, the kingdom of David was destroyed. Nevertheless, it is Jesus, one of his descendants, who, much later, will fully realize what Nathan announced. Several times in the Gospel, Jesus will be called *Son of David* (Mk 12:35).

Jesus will also be king, although not in the manner of this world's rulers. He will realize fully in his person what was merely sketched in the person of David:

- the shepherd who gathers together the scattered sheep;
- the conqueror who gives his people the peace he has won;
- God's deputy among people.

The way God gets ahead of David and answers him, gives us two remarkable lessons:

- As in David's case, very often people want to offer God something. In reality we can never anticipate him; he gives his favors even before we have begun to serve him.
- What pleases God is not so much the temples we build for him, as the spiritual temple which he wants to build in people themselves

fore. ¹¹From the time when I appointed judges over my people Israel it is only to you that I have given rest from all your enemies. Yahweh also tells you that he will build you a house.

^{1K}^{2:4} ^{Acts}^{2:30} ^{1K}^{5:18} ^{Heb}^{1:5} ^{1S}^{13:14} ^{15:20} ^{23:5} ^{Lk}^{1:32}
¹²When the time comes for you to rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your son after you, the one born of you and I will make his reign secure. ¹³He shall build a house for my name and I will firmly establish his kingship forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him and he shall be my son. If he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod, as men do. ¹⁵But I will not withdraw my kindness from him as I did from Saul when I removed him out of your way. ¹⁶Your house and your reign shall last forever before me, and your throne shall be forever firm.”

¹⁷Nathan repeated these words and related this vision to David.

^{1S}^{18:18} ^{Lk}^{12:30}
¹⁸Then King David went in, sat before Yahweh and said, “Who am I, O Yahweh God, and who is my family that you have brought me so far? ¹⁹Yet this was not enough for you, O Yahweh God, for you have also spoken of your servant’s house for a long time to come. Is this the way men act, O Yahweh God? ²⁰What more can David say to you? You know your servant, O Yahweh God! ²¹You fulfill your promise and carry out your plan, as you do now in bringing about all these great things and revealing them to your servant. ²²Therefore you are great, O Yahweh God, for there is no one like you, nor is there a God other than you from all that we ourselves have heard. ²³Is there on earth another nation like your people Israel, whom God has come to redeem, and to make his people? Indeed you made them famous when you did, for your glory, great and awesome things, rescuing them out of Egypt, from their people and their gods. ²⁴You have set apart your

people Israel to become your people forever; and you, Yahweh, have become their God.

²⁵Now, O Yahweh God, keep forever the promise you made and have now revealed to me regarding myself and my family, ²⁶that your name may be honored forever and people may say, ‘Yahweh of hosts is God over Israel.’ The house of your servant David will be secure before you ²⁷because you, O Yahweh of hosts, God of Israel, have made it known to your servant and have said to him: ‘Your family will last forever.’ This is why I have dared to address this prayer to you.

²⁸So now, O Yahweh God, since you are the faithful God, and have promised me this good thing, ²⁹please bless my descendants, that they may continue forever before you. For you, O Yahweh God, have spoken and, with your blessing, my family shall be blessed forever.”

David’s victories

8 ¹After this, David defeated the Philistines, crushing them in such a way that they were no longer in control of the land. ²Then he defeated the Moabites. He had them measured with a line and made them lie down on the ground; two thirds of them were to be executed, and one third to be spared. And so the Moabites became David’s servants and paid tribute to him.

³David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he tried to retake the valley of the Euphrates. ⁴David captured from him a thousand and seven horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all the chariot horses but left a sufficient number for a hundred chariots. ⁵The Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, but David won over twenty-two thousand of their men. ⁶Then David set up governors in Aram of Damascus and the Arameans became David’s servants, paying tribute to him.

Yahweh made David victorious wherever he went. ⁷David took the golden shields carried by the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem; ⁸he also took a great quantity of bronze from Bethah and Berothai, cities of Hadadezer.

⁹When Toi, king of Hamath heard that

^{1Chr}
18

^{Jos}
11:6.
9

– a project which he will realize after many centuries through his Church.

• **8.1** This chapter narrates David’s victories with pride. Through these wars, David’s kingdom came into existence; they were a necessary step in the long preparation of God’s Kingdom. The Israelites will remember David as the victorious warrior-king and, at the same time, will look forward to the Messiah, the son of David, as the king of peace who will conquer all enemies (see Is 9:5 and Mic 5:1-4).

At that time, primitive instincts were so powerful that the humble and merciful David did not hesitate to execute his prisoners. The Bible praises him for having spared some of them.

The fact is that faith does not replace culture; and all of us, faithful though we be, depend on the moral ideas of our surroundings. We know that during many centuries of Christianity believers and saints, who were ready to give up their life for a sick brother or sister, did not think of denouncing abuses which appear intolerable to us.

David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and thank him for having fought against Hadadezer and defeating him. For the latter had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold and bronze ¹¹ which King David consecrated to Yahweh together with the silver and gold which he consecrated from all the nations he subdued: ¹²from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, as well as the booty of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

• ¹³David became famous when he returned from defeating an army of eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴He set up governors in Edom and the Edomites became his servants. So Yahweh made David victorious wherever he went.

¹⁵David reigned over all Israel, issuing decrees and administering justice to all his people. ¹⁶Joab, son of Zeruiah, was commander of the army; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, recorder; ¹⁷Zadok, son of Ahitub and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, priests; Seraiah, secretary; ¹⁸and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites. David's sons were priests.

¹⁵ ^{18:3} **9** ¹David asked, "Is there anyone left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for the sake of Jonathan?" ²So they called a servant of Saul, named Ziba, and brought him to David who asked, "So you are Ziba?" He replied, "I am your servant." ³Then the king asked him, "Is there still someone of the house of Saul to whom I can give God's favor?" Ziba answered the king, "A son of Jonathan whose feet are crippled still lives." ⁴The king asked him, "Where is he?" And Ziba replied, "He is in the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, at Lodebar." ⁵So King David sent for him and had him brought from the house of Machir, son of Ammiel, at Lodebar.

⁶When Mepibaal, son of Jonathan, son of Saul arrived, he fell on the ground and paid homage to David who said, "Mepibaal!" He replied, "Your servant listens." ⁷David then told him, "Do not be afraid. I will do you a favor for the sake of your father Jonathan and give you back all the land of Saul your father. Besides, you shall always eat at my table." ⁸He bowed down and said, "What is your servant that you should show concern for a dead dog like myself?"

⁹The king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and

said to him, "I have turned over to your master's son everything that Saul and his family possessed. ¹⁰You yourself, your sons and servants shall till the land for him and carry in the harvest so that your master's family may have food, although your master's son Mepibaal shall always eat at my table." Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants ¹¹ said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands. Yet Mepibaal ate at my table like a king's son."

¹²Mepibaal had a young son named Mica; and all who lived in Ziba's house became Mepibaal's servants. ¹³But Mepibaal lived in Jerusalem for he always ate at the king's table. He was lame in both feet.

10 ¹When the king of the Ammonites died and Hanun his son reigned in his place, ²David said, "I will be kind to Hanun son of Nahash as his father was kind to me." So David sent his servants to comfort him over his father's death. When David's servants arrived in the land of the Ammonites, ³the Ammonite chiefs told Hanun their lord, "Do you think that, by sending men with condolences, David is honoring your father? Has not David rather sent his servants to you to explore the city, spy on it and overthrow it?"

⁴At this, Hanun seized David's servants, shaved off half their beard, cut away the lower halves of their garments even up to their hips and sent them away. ⁵When this was reported to David, he sent messengers to meet these men who felt greatly ashamed and to tell them, "Stay in Jericho and return after your beards have grown."

⁶The Ammonites saw that David could no longer bear with them, so they sent for and hired the Arameans of Beth-rehob and of Zobah numbering twenty thousand foot soldiers, the king of Maacah with one thousand men and also twelve thousand men of Tob. ⁷On hearing this, David sent out Joab with all the warriors. ⁸The Ammonites came out in battle formation at the entrance gate while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah grouped separately in the open country.

⁹When Joab saw that there were two battlefronts, one in front of him and the other behind, he selected picked men of Israel and arranged them in battle formation against the Syrians. ¹⁰Then he entrusted the rest of his army to Abishai his brother and arranged them in battle formation against the Ammo-

• 13. Neither Abraham nor Moses had secretaries or assistants: these wanderers had no offices, not even an archives-bearing donkey. David forms the first nucleus of officials in the kingdom, and only with Solomon will sacred literature start.

David's sons were priests. At that time, two centuries after Moses, priesthood was not yet reserved to the Levites. Solomon himself offers sacrifices and consecrates the Temple (1 K 8:64).

nites. ¹¹ And he said, “If the Syrians are too strong for me, you shall help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come to your assistance. ¹² Take courage! Let us act like men for the sake of our people and God’s cities; and may Yahweh do what seems good to him.”

¹³ Joab and the people who were with him launched the attack against the Arameans and put them to flight. ¹⁴ When the Ammonites saw the Arameans fleeing, they too fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from his battle against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

¹⁵ When the Arameans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they gathered together. ¹⁶ Hadadezer sent for the Syrians and had them brought from beyond the Euphrates. They came to Helam with Shobach, the commander of Hadadezer’s army, leading them. ¹⁷ This was reported to David who, in turn, gathered together all Israel and came to Helam after crossing the Jordan. The Arameans then arranged themselves in battle formation and fought against David, ¹⁸ but they fled before Israel. David had seven hundred of the men in chariots and forty thousand horsemen killed. Shobach, too, the commander of their army was slain and died there. ¹⁹ After having been defeated by Israel, all the kings who depended on Hadadezer made peace with Israel and became subject to them. So the Arameans no longer dared to help the Ammonites.

David and Bathsheba

^{1K 20:26} **11** ¹ In the spring of that year, when kings usually set out to fight, David sent out Joab, his officers and all the Israelite troops. They slaughtered the Ammonites and attacked Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem.

² One afternoon, David got up from his siesta and took a walk on the roof of the royal house. From the rooftop, he

saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. ³ David sent to inquire about the woman, and was told, “She is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah, the Hittite.” ⁴ So David sent messengers to have her brought to him; and he had intercourse with her after she had cleansed herself after her monthly period. Then she returned to her house.

⁵ As the woman saw she was with child, she sent word to David, “I am with child.”

⁶ David then sent a message to Joab, “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” So Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁷ When Uriah came, David asked him about Joab, how the people were and how the war was proceeding; ⁸ then he told Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.”

Uriah left the palace and the king had a portion from his table sent to him. ⁹ Uriah, however, did not go down to his house but slept by the door of the king’s palace with all the servants of his lord. ¹⁰ David was told that Uriah did not go down to his house, and he said to him, “Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?” ¹¹ Uriah replied, “The ark, the men of Israel and Judah are housed in tents while my lord Joab and his servants are encamped in the open country. Shall I go to my house to eat and drink there and sleep with my wife? As you live, I will not do this!” ¹² So David said to Uriah, “Remain here

Lev
15:19

1S
21:6

• **11.1** David’s “sin” helps us to reflect on the weakness and wickedness of which even God’s friends are capable.

We observe David’s defects in several incidents. He is impulsive and deceptive. Here (in chap. 11) everything contributes toward making his crime more odious:

– Uriah is a foreigner who came to serve the king.

– Uriah strictly observes the religious laws concerning war (to abstain from sexual relations), and he observes solidarity with his companions, while David abandons himself to passion far away from any danger.

– David kills Uriah treacherously after having instructed him to bring the letter to Joab.

How could a book intended to preserve the memory of the model king dare to narrate this event without hiding anything that makes David’s crime more odious and win greater sympathy for his victim? An official historian of another people would never have done this.

The Bible is not a book written to the glory of a king, or a people. It is “revelation of God” in the clearest sense of the word. In meditating on the Word of God, one learns to know God but also to truly know oneself in the light of God: everyone of us is a sinner in need of the Savior God sends us.

today also and I will dismiss you tomorrow.” Uriah therefore stayed in Jerusalem that day and the day after. ¹³David invited him to table and he ate and drank until he was drunk. When evening fell, however, he went to lie down on his couch with the guards of his lord instead of going down to his house.

¹⁴The next morning, David wrote Joab a letter to be taken by hand by Uriah, ¹⁵ in which he said, “Place Uriah in the front row where the fighting is very fierce and then withdraw from him so that he may be struck down and die.” ¹⁶When Joab was attacking the city, he assigned Uriah to a place which he knew was being defended by strong warriors. ¹⁷And the defenders attacked the men of Joab. Some of David’s soldiers and officers were killed; Uriah the Hittite also died.

¹⁸Then Joab sent a messenger to tell David everything that had happened during the battle. ¹⁹And he said to him, “When you have finished recounting the outcome of the battle to the king, ²⁰ perhaps he will get angry and ask you, ‘Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know they would shoot from the wall?’ ²¹ Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you go so close to the wall?’; then you shall say: Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead.”

Jdg
9:50

²²So the messenger went to tell David all that Joab instructed him. ²³So he answered the king and explained, “These men had overcome us and pushed us in the field; then we drove them back to the entrance gate. ²⁴ But the archers aimed at your guard from the top of the wall, killing some of them. Your servant Uriah the Hittite has also been killed.”

²⁵David said to the messenger, “Try to encourage Joab with this message: Do not let this thing disturb you, for the sword devours

one this time and another at another time. Intensify your attacks against the city and overthrow it.”

²⁶When Uriah’s wife heard of the death of her husband, she mourned for him. ²⁷After her mourning was over, David had her brought to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son. But Yahweh was displeased with what David had done.

12 • ¹So Yahweh sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan went to the king and said to him, “There were two men in a city: one was rich; the other, poor. ²The rich man had many sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb he had bought. He himself fed it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and slept on his lap. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now a traveler came to the rich man, but he would not take from his own flock or herd to prepare food for the traveler. Instead, he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared that for his visitor.”

⁵David was furious because of this man and told Nathan, “As Yahweh lives, the man who has done this deserves death! ⁶He must return the lamb fourfold for acting like this and showing no compassion.”

Ex
21:37

⁷Nathan said to David, “You are this man! It is Yahweh, God of Israel, who speaks: ‘I anointed you king over Israel and saved you from Saul’s hands; ⁸I gave you your master’s house and your master’s wives; I also gave you the nation of Israel and Judah. But if this

• **12.1** David will be a model of the repentant sinner. *Why did you despise the word of Yahweh?* What has David done that God should choose him? Everything in his life has been the work of Yahweh’s love. God chose a simple shepherd to make him king. Even more, he chose this “king” from a small nation, to establish the permanent kingdom. There are no excuses for David.

You did what displeases me. David easily forgets that Yahweh does not look for external

ceremonies, but rather for purity of heart and justice to the neighbor.

You killed Uriah and took his wife. God brings into broad daylight what David had hidden from everyone and from his own conscience.

David’s attitude: he humbly acknowledges his sin and accepts the consequences of his fault. Psalm 51, the moving prayer of a repentant sinner, is attributed to him.

God’s attitude:

– *God has forgiven your sin.* God remains

were not enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise Yahweh by doing what displeases him? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife for yourself. Yes, you killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now the sword will never be far from your family because you have despised me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself.

¹¹Thus says Yahweh: Your misfortune will rise from your own house! I will take your wives from you and give them to your neighbor who shall lie with them in broad daylight. ¹²What you did was done secretly, but what I do will be done before Israel in broad daylight.”

^{24:10} ¹⁵ ^{15:24} ^{Ps} ⁵¹ ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against Yahweh.” Nathan answered him, “Yahweh has forgiven your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴However, because you have dared to despise Yahweh by doing such a thing, the child that is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵Then Nathan left and went to his house.

• Yahweh struck the child that Uriah’s wife bore to David and it became sick. ¹⁶David entreated God for the child; he kept a strict fast and lay on the ground the whole night. ¹⁷The elders of his house asked him to rise from the ground but he refused. Nor did he join them to eat. ¹⁸On the seventh day, the child died. David’s servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead for they said, “When the child was still alive, we spoke to him but he would not listen to us. What will he do if we tell him the child is dead?”

¹⁹When David saw his servants whispering to one another, he realized that the child was dead and asked them, “Is the child dead?” They replied, “He is dead.” ²⁰Then David rose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He entered the house of Yahweh and worshiped.

faithful and keeps his promises to David’s descendants. More than that, Solomon, son of Bathsheba and David, will be the beneficiary of the promises mentioned: God will let grace pass through where sin had passed.

– *Your misfortune will rise from your own house.* In pardoning, God does not erase the consequences of the crime.

• 15. The child born without love between David and Bathsheba falls sick and dies. The king

After that, he went to his own house, asked for food and ate. ²¹Then his servants asked him, “Why are you acting like this? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but after it died, you got up and took food.” ²²David answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept thinking: who knows? Perhaps Yahweh will be kind to me and let my child live. ²³But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back to life? I can go to him but he cannot return to me.”

²⁴David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He went in and slept with her and she bore a son whom he named Solomon. Yahweh loved him ²⁵and made it known through Nathan the prophet, who named him Jedidiah on Yahweh’s behalf.

²⁶Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and conquered the king’s city. ²⁷Then he sent messengers to David and told him, “I have fought against Rabbah and conquered the city of waters. ²⁸Gather then the rest of the people to attack and capture the city lest I myself do it and the city be called by my name.” ²⁹So David mustered the people, attacked and captured Rabbah. ³⁰He took the crown of their god Milkom from its head, the weight of which was a talent of gold, and which had a precious stone embedded in it. This they put on David’s head. He carried off an amount of booty ³¹and brought away the people whom he set to labor with saws, iron picks and iron axes, making them work at the brick-kilns. David dealt like this with all the Ammonite cities, then he returned to Jerusalem with all the people.

Amnon and Tamar

13 • ¹Now David’s son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. It happened that Amnon, another of David’s sons, loved her. ²Amnon was so obsessed that he became ill and, as Tamar was a virgin, he

realizes that this is another sign to make him understand the gravity of his sin. God is not vindictive nor does he bear grudges. His heart is not like ours. He is “slow to anger and no one surpasses him in kindness.”

Another child is born of the same woman, now his wife; it is the future king Solomon, whom God chooses to succeed David. In spite of his sin, God has not abandoned David.

• **13.1** Amnon’s crime and assassination

could not do anything. ³ Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab, who was a very shrewd man, said to him, ⁴ "Oh son of the king, why do you look so miserable morning after morning? Will you not tell me?" Amnon replied, "I love Tamar, sister of my brother Absalom." ⁵ So Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come to give me bread to eat and let her prepare the food in my presence so that I may eat it from her hand.'" ⁶ So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill; and when the king came to see him, he told the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come to make some cakes in my presence; I will eat from her hand."

⁷ So David sent for Tamar and said to her, "Go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare him some food." ⁸ Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made and baked cakes before him. ⁹ But when she took the pan and set the cakes before him, he refused to eat and said, "Send everyone outside." After they all left, ¹⁰ Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food into the bedroom and let me eat from your hand." Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother Amnon in the bedroom. ¹¹ But when she brought them to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come, lie with me, my sister." ¹² She answered him, "No, my brother, do not force me. No such thing is done in Israel. Do not commit this foolishness. ¹³ Where will I hide my shame? And you yourself would be regarded as a foolish man by all the people. So please, talk to the king for he will not keep me from you." ¹⁴ But he refused to listen to her and, being stronger than she, forced her and lay with her.

¹⁵ Afterwards, Amnon hated her with a hatred exceeding the love he had had for her; and he said to Tamar, "Get up and leave." ¹⁶ But she answered him, "No, my brother. Sending me away is a greater offense than what you did to me." But Amnon refused to listen. ¹⁷ He called his servant and said, "Get this woman out and bolt the door behind her." ¹⁸ (Now Tamar was wearing a long robe with sleeves like the virgin daughters of the king used to wear.) So the servant brought her out, bolting the door behind her. ¹⁹ Tamar then put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. Laying her hand on her head, she went away crying aloud.

²⁰ Her brother Absalom spoke to her, "Has your brother Amnon been with you? Be calm and do not take this to heart for he is your brother." Desolate as she was, Tamar stayed in her brother Absalom's house.

²¹ When King David heard of this, he was very angry but he did not like to scold Amnon because he loved him as his firstborn. ²² Absalom, for his part, no longer spoke to Amnon. He hated him for having raped his sister Tamar.

²³ Two years later, when Absalom had celebrated the shearing of his flock at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons. ²⁴ He himself went to the king and said, "I have shearers; so please let the king and his servants accept my invitation." ²⁵ But the king answered Absalom, "No, my son, not all of us should go lest we be a burden to you." As Absalom urged him the king refused to go personally but gave him his blessing. ²⁶ Then Absalom said, "If you will not go, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king replied, "Why should he go with you?" ²⁷ But Absalom insisted until the king allowed Amnon and all the king's sons to go with him. Absalom prepared a royal feast. ²⁸ Then he commanded his servants, "Watch until Amnon gets drunk and when I tell you, 'Strike Amnon,' kill him. Have no fear for I myself have given you this order. Be brave and determined." ²⁹ So Absalom's servants did to Amnon what he had commanded. On seeing this all the sons of the king hastily mounted their mules and fled.

³⁰ While they were on the way, a report reached David, "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, leaving no one alive." ³¹ At this, the king tore his garments and lay on the ground; and all his servants around him also tore their garments. ³² But Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Don't imagine that they have killed all your sons. Only Amnon is dead, for Absalom had decided to kill him from the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. ³³ So let not my lord the king believe that all his sons are dead: Amnon alone is dead."

³⁴ Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Then the young watchman saw many people coming from the Horonaim road by the side of the mountain. ³⁵ Jonadab said to the king, "Was it not true what I said to you? It is your sons who are coming." ³⁶ As soon as he had spoken, the king's sons came, crying aloud; the king, too, and all his servants wept bitterly.

³⁷⁻³⁸ As for Absalom, he fled to Talmai

Gen
34:7
Dt
22:21

Gen
38:11

1Mac
16:16

Gen
37:35

appear to be a repetition of David's sin in his own family – a thing which hurts his feelings deeply.

Such incidents were common occurrences anywhere in ancient times. Other religions of that time demanded cult and sacrifice; they did not talk, or scarcely talked, of moral uprightness.

On the contrary, from the beginning of the Bible one sees how Yahweh demands moral behavior and justice on the part of his people. The people of the Bible are not always better than other peoples who do not know God, but they know better what sin is.

son of Ammihud, king of Geshur, where he remained for three years. ³⁹All this time King David mourned for his son. And when he had recovered from the death of Amnon he began to yearn for Absalom.

14 ¹Now Joab son of Zeruiah saw that the king was yearning for Absalom. ²So he sent a messenger to Tekoa to fetch a wise woman and he told her this, "Please pretend to be a mourner. Put on mourning garments and do not perfume yourself with oil that you may look like a woman who has been mourning for several days for the dead ³and go to the king with this message." And Joab told her what to say.

^{2K} ⁴When the woman of Tekoa appeared ^{4:1}before the king, she fell on her face in homage and said, "Help me, O king!" ⁵The king asked her, "What is wrong?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶I, your ^{Gen}handmaid, had two sons who quarreled with ^{4:8}one another in the field. Since there was no one to part them, one struck the other and killed him. ⁷Now the entire family demand that I give up the one who struck his brother. And they say: 'We will kill him and avenge his brother's death.' So they want to quench my remaining hope; with this they will leave my husband without name or posterity on the earth."

⁸Then the king said to the woman, "Go home and I will give orders on your behalf." ⁹But the woman of Tekoa said to the king, ^{1S} "Let me and my family be blamed, my lord ^{25:24}the king, and let the king and his throne not be criticized for this." ¹⁰The king said, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me and he shall never bother you again." ¹¹Then she said, "Please let the king swear by Yahweh, his God, that the avenger of blood may not deepen my disgrace by killing my son." The king replied, "As Yahweh lives, not one hair of your son shall perish."

¹²Then the woman said, "Please allow me to say something to my lord the king." The king told her, "Speak." ¹³And she went on, "Why do you yourself act against the people of God? In giving this decision, the king condemns himself for not having brought his banished son back home. ¹⁴We are all mortals and as water spilt on the ground cannot be gathered up again, so God does not make the soul return. So let the king find a way to bring back his banished son. ¹⁵Now, if I have come to talk about this to my lord the king, it is because the people scared me and I thought, 'I will speak to the king; perhaps he will listen to me. ¹⁶If he agrees to help me when I tell him about the man who seeks to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God gave us, ¹⁷he will surely give the ^{1S}decision which will bring us peace. For my ^{29:9}

lord the king is like an angel of God in understanding everything. Yahweh your God be with you!"

¹⁸Then the king said to the woman, "Do not hide anything from me when I question you." The woman replied, "Let my lord the king speak." ¹⁹The king asked, "Is Joab behind you in all this?" The woman answered, "As you surely live, my lord the king, all is as my lord the king says. It was your servant Joab who ordered me and taught me everything I had to say. ²⁰Joab did this to disguise the purpose. But my lord is as wise as an angel of God, knowing all things that happen on earth."

²¹Then the king told Joab, "Well, I shall do it. Go, fetch the young man Absalom."

²²Joab fell on his face to the ground in homage and blessed the king, saying, "Today I know that you look kindly on me, my lord the king, because you have granted this my request." ²³Joab went on his way to Geshur to fetch Absalom and bring him to Jerusalem. ²⁴The king, however, told him, "Let him stay in his own house for I shall not receive him." So Absalom stayed in his own house and was not received by the king.

²⁵In all Israel, there was no one as praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom, from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head he was without defect.

²⁶When he cut his hair (every year he cut his hair when it became too heavy for him), he weighed it, and it weighed two hundred shekels by the king's weight. ²⁷There were born to Absalom three sons and a daughter named Tamar, a beautiful woman.

²⁸For two years Absalom stayed in Jerusalem but the king did not receive him. ²⁹Absalom called for Joab to send him to the king, but Joab refused to see him. He called for him a second time but Joab would not come. ³⁰So Absalom said to his servants, "You know Joab's field which is next to mine, planted with barley. Go set it on fire." And so they did. Then the servants of Joab came to him to tell him, "The servants of Absalom set your field on fire." ³¹Then Joab went to Absalom's house and asked him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" ³²Absalom replied, "Come over, for I want to send you to the king with this message, 'Why did you let me return from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there yet.' Now I want to be received by the king. If I am guilty, let him send me to death!" ³³Joab went to the king and brought him the message. So the king called for Absalom who appeared before the king, bowing low with his face to the ground. And the king embraced Absalom.

15 ¹After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, as well as fifty men

to run before him.² Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the gateway. Whenever a man with a grievance came before the king's tribunal, Absalom would call to him and say, "From which city are you?" Should he say, "Your servant is from such and such a tribe in Israel,"³ Absalom would tell him, "Your cause is good and just but there is no one to hear you on behalf of the king."

⁴ Absalom added, "I wish I were judge in the land! Then every man with a grievance or cause could come to me and I would give him justice."⁵ Whenever a man approached to pay him homage, he would stretch out his arms to hold and embrace him.

⁶ Absalom did this to all Israelites who came to the tribunal of the king, winning their hearts for himself.

⁷ After four years, Absalom said to the king, "Please allow me to go and fulfill the vow I have to pay to Yahweh in Hebron."⁸ For while I lived at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: 'If Yahweh will really bring me back to Jerusalem, I shall go there to worship him!'"⁹ The king said to him, "Go in peace," and he left for Hebron.

Gen
28:20

Absalom's rebellion

¹⁰ Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel with this instruction, "As soon as you hear the trumpet sound, proclaim: 'Absalom is king in Hebron!'"

16:23

¹¹ Two hundred men from Jerusalem had left with Absalom as invited guests. But nothing of his purpose dawned on them.¹² While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahitophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. Meantime, the conspiracy grew strong and the number of people with Absalom kept increasing.

• **15.10** God wanted the Israelites of the period before Christ to have an image of him in the person of David, their first king. Those happy and glorious days of the young ruler, beloved by all, are followed by days of sorrow for the old king. During those years the countenance of Christ appears more clearly through King David.

The sword shall never be far from your house. Nathan has announced the consequence of David's adultery. In the trial, what emerges is only the humble loyalty of David who, without complaint, accepts Yahweh's will.

The way David bears with the curses of Shimei astonishes us. How much more puzzling it was to people of those times who could only understand revenge. David knows that God will never leave

¹³ A messenger came to report to David that the Israelites were siding with Absalom.¹⁴ Then David said to all his servants who were with him in Jerusalem, "Let us flee, for we cannot resist Absalom. Go quickly, lest he come hurriedly and overtake us. Surely he will put the city to the sword if he can bring disaster upon us."¹⁵ The king's servants answered him, "Your servants are with you in whatever my lord the king decides."

¹⁶ The king departed with all his household, but left ten concubines behind to take care of the house.¹⁷ The king left on foot and the people followed him. They stopped at the last house of the city and ¹⁸ his servants marched past him, as well as the Cherethites, the Pelethites and all the six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, and went ahead of him.

¹⁹ Then the king said to the commander, Ittai, the Gittite, "Why are you also coming with us? Go back and stay with your king, for you are a foreigner, an exile from your home."²⁰ Are you setting out when you have just arrived? Shall I make you wander about with us? Go back, take your brothers with you and may Yahweh show you kindness and faithfulness.²¹ Ittai, however, answered the king, "As Yahweh lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether in life or in death, there also will your servant be."

15
27

Ru
1:16
Lk
9:57

him; his present misfortune is like an invitation from Yahweh to have greater trust. In order to attract Yahweh's mercy, he refuses to defend himself or to take revenge.

In chapters 15–17, what happens to David is like a prefiguring of the Messiah in his passion and resurrection. Even the details suggest this:

15:12 – a traitor from David's council... who hangs himself 17:23.

15:23 – the crying, the river of Kidron.

15:30 – the Mount of Olives.

15:32 – the small group of followers on the hilltop.

16:9 – the general wants to defend his king with the sword; David forbids him to do so.

16:13 – the insults, the brief flight that ends with the death of the rebel.

²² Then David said to Ittai, "Go then, march on." So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and all the children who were with him. ²³ Meanwhile, all those in the countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. Then the king crossed the brook Kidron and all the people moved on to the desert.

^{1K}
^{2:37}
^{Jn}
^{18:1}

²⁴ The priest Zadok came with all the Levites bearing the ark of the Covenant of God. They set down the ark of God where Abiathar stood until the people had all gone out of the city; ²⁵ after which the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If Yahweh looks kindly on me, he will bring me back and allow me to again see the ark and its lodging place. ²⁶ But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' I am here; let him do to me what seems good to him."

^{1S}
^{3:18}

²⁷ The king also said to the priest Zadok, "See, better go back to the city in peace and take with you your son Ahimaaz, and Jonathan, son of Abiathar. ²⁸ I will wait in the desert fords until you send word for me." ²⁹ So Zadok and Abiathar carried the ark of God back to Jerusalem and remained there.

³⁰ David himself went up the Mount of Olives, weeping. He was barefooted and had his head covered, and all the people who were with him had their heads covered and wept as they went.

Humiliation for David

³¹ When David was informed that Ahitophel was among the conspirators with Absalom, he said, "O Yahweh, turn the counsel of Ahitophel into folly."

^{Ps}
^{33:10}

³² When David reached the summit where God is worshiped, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn and dust strewn on his head. ³³ David said to him, "If you come with me, you will be a burden to me. ³⁴ It would be better for you to return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king! Just as I have been your father's servant in the past, I will now be your servant.' In that way you will be useful to me in thwarting the counsel of Ahitophel. ³⁵ The priests Zadok and Abiathar are there to help you. Report whatever you hear from the king's house.

³⁶ Both their sons are there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and you shall report to me through them everything you hear." ³⁷ So David's friend Hushai arrived in the city just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

16 ¹ When David had gone a little beyond the summit, Ziba the steward of Mepibaal met him with saddled asses laden with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred bunches of raisins, a hundred summer fruits and a skin of wine. ² The king then asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The asses are for the king's household to ride on. The bread and summer fruit are for your servants to eat, while the wine is drink for those who faint in the desert."

^{1S}
^{25:18}

³ Then the king asked him, "Where is your master's son?" Ziba replied, "He is staying in Jerusalem, for he said, 'Today the Israelites will give me back my father's kingdom!'" ⁴ To this, the king said, "Everything that belongs to Mepibaal is now yours." And Ziba said, "I pay homage to my lord the king. May I always find favor with you."

^{19:30}

⁵ When King David came to Bahurim, a man from the clan of Saul's family named Shimei, son of Gera, came out cursing him. ⁶ He threw stones at David and his officers although the king's men and warriors flanked the king on the right and left. ⁷ Shimei said as he cursed, "Go away! Go away! You bloodthirsty good-for-nothing! ⁸ Yahweh has brought down on your head all the blood of the family of Saul. You became king in his place, but God has now placed the kingdom in the hands of your son Absalom. Ruin has come upon you because you are a bloodthirsty man."

^{19:17}

⁹ Then Abishai, son of Zeruiah, said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go and cut his head off." ¹⁰ But the king said, "Why should I listen to you, sons of Zeruiah? If Yahweh has ordered him to curse me, who shall ask him why he acts like this?" ¹¹ Then David said to Abishai and his officers, "If my own son wants to kill me, how much more this Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse me if Yahweh has ordered him to do so. ¹² Perhaps Yahweh will

^{1S}
^{17:46}

^{19:23}

look on my affliction and turn to good things the curses heaped on me today.”

¹³ So David and his men went their way while Shimei, following on the hillside opposite him, continued to curse as he threw stones and flung dust at him.

¹⁴ The king, together with his men, arrived exhausted at the Jordan where he refreshed himself.

¹⁵ Now Absalom, accompanied by Ahitophel, entered Jerusalem with all the Israelites. ¹⁶ When Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, appeared before Absalom and exclaimed, “Long live the king!” ¹⁷ Absalom said to Hushai, “Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with your friend?” ¹⁸ Hushai said to Absalom, “No, I will be with the one Yahweh and this people and the Israelites have chosen, and with him I will remain. ¹⁹ Whom am I now to serve? Are you not his son? As I have served your father, so will I serve you.”

Lev
26:25

15:31
15:34
Ne
4:9

²⁰ Then Absalom said to Ahitophel, “Have a meeting to decide what we shall do.” ²¹ Ahitophel said to Absalom, “Go and be with the concubines your father has left to keep his house. When the Israelites hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, all those of your party will be strengthened.” ²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the terrace and Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of the Israelites. ²³ In those days, Ahitophel’s counsel was deemed as sound as the oracle of God, and so it was deemed by both David and Absalom.

15:27

17 ¹ Ahitophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men that I may set out and pursue David tonight. ² I will attack him while he is tired and discouraged and throw him into a panic. All those who are with him will flee so I will strike down only the king. ³ Then I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. Seek the death of only one man and then all the people will be unharmed.” ⁴ The advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

Jos
2:4

⁵ Then Absalom said, “Call in Hushai the Archite to hear what he has to say.” ⁶ When Hushai came before Absalom, Absalom asked him, “Ahitophel has given this advice. Shall we follow it? If not, you speak.” ⁷ So Hushai said to Absalom, “This time, Ahitophel’s advice is not good. ⁸ You know that your father and his men are warriors. When enraged, they are like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert enough in war not to spend the night with his men. ⁹ Right now he is hiding in one of the pits or in some other place. If some of

your men fall in the first attack, whoever hears of it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the men who follow Absalom.’

¹⁰ Then even the valiant man whose heart is like that of a lion will utterly melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a warrior, as are the men who are with him. ¹¹ My advice is for you to gather all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, as many as the sands of the sea, and go to battle in person. ¹² Then we shall find him wherever he is and fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. ¹³ If he withdraws into a city, all Israel will bring ropes and drag it into the valley until not even a pebble of it remains.” ¹⁴ Absalom and all the Israelites said, “The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahitophel.” For Yahweh had decreed that the good counsel of Ahitophel be defeated, so that he might bring evil upon Absalom.

21:17

¹⁵ Then Hushai reported to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, “Ahitophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel in this way; but I have advised them in this manner. ¹⁶ Therefore send word to David quickly, ‘Do not lodge tonight at the desert fords. Go beyond them lest the King and all the men with him be trapped!’”

¹⁷ Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at Enrogel where a maidservant regularly went to report to them so they could go and tell king David, for they themselves must not be seen in the city. ¹⁸ But a lad saw them and reported to Absalom. The two hurriedly left the place and entered the house of a man of Bahurim who had a well in his courtyard, and they got down into it. ¹⁹ The woman took a covering and spread it over the well’s mouth, then scattered grain over it without anyone noticing. ²⁰ When Absalom’s servants came to the woman’s house, they asked, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?” The woman answered them, “They left, following the brook.” They looked for them but could not find them; and so they returned to Jerusalem.

²¹ After they had gone, the men came up out of the well and went to tell David, “Hurry and cross over the river, for this is what Ahitophel has counseled against you.” ²² So David and all those who were with him crossed over the Jordan; and by daybreak, not one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

²³ When Ahitophel saw that his advice was not followed, he saddled his ass and rode back home to his own city. After setting his house in order, he hanged himself and died. He was then buried in the tomb of his father.

²⁴ David had already entered Mahanaim when Absalom crossed over the Jordan with all the Israelites. ²⁵ Absalom had put Amasa in charge of the army instead of Joab. Amasa

was the son of Ithra, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail the daughter of Isai, sister of Zeruiah, the mother of Joab.²⁶ The Israelites and Absalom pitched camp in the land of Gilead.

²⁷When David arrived at Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim,²⁸ brought beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, meal, roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep and cheese from the herd. All this was for David and the people with him to eat²⁹ for they said, "The people are hungry, weary and thirsty in the desert."

18¹David then mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of a thousand men and commanders of a hundred men. He sent forth the army, of which one third was under the command of Joab; ²one third, under the command of Abishai, son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third, under the command of Ittai, the Gittite. Then the king said to the men, "I myself will go out with you."³ But the men replied, "You shall not go out. They could not care less if we flee or if half of us die. But you are worth ten thousand of us and it is better if you are able to send us assistance from the city."⁴ So the king said to them, "I will do whatever seems best to you." Then the king stood by the side of the gate while the entire army marched out by hundreds and by thousands.⁵ The king ordered Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Don't hurt the young man Absalom for my sake." All the army heard the king giving orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

Defeat and death of Absalom

•⁶The army of David went out into the field against Israel. The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim⁷ where the Israelites were defeated by the men of David. The slaughter there on that day was great, numbering twenty thousand men.⁸ The battle spread over the entire country and more people perished in the ravines of the forest than were killed by the sword that day.

⁹Absalom was riding a mule and

happened to meet the guards of David.²⁵ As the mule passed under the thick branches of a big oak tree, his head was caught in the oak tree and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule he was riding went its way.^{14:16, 27} ¹⁰Someone reported to Joab, "I saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree."¹¹ Joab said to the man who reported this, "What! You saw him but did not strike him at once? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt."¹² But the man answered Joab, "Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not raise my hand against the king's son, for we heard the king command you, Abishai and Ittai: 'For my sake, spare the young man Absalom.'¹³ If I had not done my duty, the king would come to know about it and you yourself would have kept your distance."¹⁴ Joab replied, "I will not waste time talking with you." So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's heart while he was still alive in the oak tree.¹⁵ Then ten guards, Joab's armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him down.

¹⁶Joab blew the trumpet and the troops stopped pursuing the Israelites as Joab restrained them.¹⁷ They then took Absalom, threw him into a deep pit in the forest and covered him with a great heap of stones. In the meantime all the Israelites fled, each one to his own home.

¹⁸During his lifetime Absalom had a memorial created for himself in the king's Valley for he said, "I have no son by whom my name may be remembered." He called the pillar after his own name and, to this day, it is called Absalom's monument.

¹⁹Then Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, said, "Let me run and report to the king that Yahweh has delivered him from the power of

¹⁵
^{15:12}

^{2K}
^{9:20}

• **18.6** This account, very lively and beautiful, is difficult to abridge.

The scene, doubtless, reminds us of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Even though the son left his father's house and did him much harm, the father does not lose hope. Moreover, so

much love has he that he stands at the gates of the city waiting for word, like the father in the parable who was the first to see his son as he returned.

Joab is right from the political standpoint, but David is closer to God's thinking.

his enemies.”²⁰ But Joab said to him, “Today you would not be a bearer of good news; another day you will run, but today there is no good news because the king’s son is dead.”²¹ Joab then said to a Cushite, “Go tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed before Joab and ran.²² But Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, again said to Joab, “Come what may, let me also run behind the Cushite.” Joab asked, “Why must you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for this news?”²³ Ahimaaz insisted, “It does not matter, I will run.” So Joab allowed him to go, and Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, outrunning the Cushite.

David is told of Absalom’s death

²⁴ David was sitting between the two gates. The watchman posted at the roof of the gate, on the wall, saw a man running alone.²⁵ So he called out and reported to the king who said, “If he is alone, he brings good news.” As he was drawing near,²⁶ the watchman saw another man running. So he called to the gatekeeper and said, “Look, another man is running alone!” The king said, “He also brings good news.”²⁷ The watchman said, “The first man runs like Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok.” The king replied, “He is a good man, so he comes with good news.”

²⁸ Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, “All is well.” Bowing before the king with his face to the ground, he said, “Blessed be Yahweh your God who has delivered up the men who rebelled against my lord the king!”²⁹ The king asked him, “How is the young Absalom?” Ahimaaz answered, “When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult but did not know what it was all about.”³⁰ So the king said, “Move away and stand here.” He moved aside and stayed there.

³¹ The Cushite arrived and said, “Good news for my lord the king! Yahweh has done you justice today and saved you from all those who rebelled against you.”³² The king asked the Cushite, “How is the young Absalom?” The Cushite answered, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who

rebel against you end up like that young man.”

19¹ The king was greatly disturbed and, going up to the room over the gate, he wept and said, “O, my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

² It was reported to Joab, “The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.”³ So the victory that day turned into mourning for all the people, when they heard that the king was grieving over his son.⁴ The people quietly entered the city that day, like those fleeing from battle in shame.⁵ The king covered his face and was crying aloud, “O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!”

⁶ Joab then came to the king’s house and said, “You have today put to shame all your servants who saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, and of your wives and concubines.⁷ Yes, you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that your commanders and guards mean nothing to you. I know that if Absalom were alive today and all of us dead, you would be pleased.⁸ You must now show yourself and say a good word to your guards for, I swear by Yahweh, if you do not, no one will stay with you tonight, and this will be worse than all the evil that has happened to you from your youth to the present day.”

⁹ So the king took his seat at the gate and as the people were informed that the king was sitting at the gate, they came before him.

The people of Israel had fled, each man to his own home.¹⁰ Yet throughout all the tribes of Israel, the people were arguing, “The king who delivered us from the Philistines has had to flee because of Absalom.¹¹ We ourselves anointed Absalom to rule over us. But if he died in battle, what prevents us from bringing back the king?”

David returns to Jerusalem

¹² King David heard what the Israelites

16:5

16:10
15
11:13

said. So he sent this message to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "Say to the elders of Judah: 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house? ¹³You are relatives, of my own race. Why should you be the last to bring back the king?' ¹⁴Say also to Amasa, 'Are you not of my own family? I swear before God that I will make you general of my army in place of Joab.'"

¹⁵So he won over the men of Judah and, as one man, they sent word to the king, "Please return with your servants." ¹⁶So the king came back and the men of Judah went over to Gilgal to welcome him and help him cross the Jordan.

¹⁷Shimei, son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, hurried down with the people of Judah to meet King David. ¹⁸He had taken with him a thousand men from Benjamin. Ziba also, the steward of Saul's family, hurried down to the Jordan before the king with his fifteen sons and twenty servants. ¹⁹He helped the king's household cross the ford and attended to his needs.

Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, ²⁰and said to him, "Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember the wrong your servant did when my lord the king left Jerusalem. Let not the king remember this, ²¹for I confess that I have sinned; and therefore I have come today, the first from Joseph's tribes to welcome my lord the king."

²²Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, "Shall not Shimei be put to death for having cursed Yahweh's anointed?" ²³But David said, "Far be it from me to listen to you, you sons of Zeruiah! This is bad advice; no one shall be put to death in Israel today. Do I not know that I am ruling again over Israel this day?" ²⁴So the king assured Shimei with an oath, "You shall not die."

²⁵Mepibaal, the son of Saul, came down from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not washed his feet, or trimmed his beard, or cleaned his clothes since the king departed. ²⁶When he arrived to meet the king, the king said to him, "Why did you not go with me, Mepibaal?" ²⁷He answered, "My lord, O king! My steward deceived me. For I said to him, 'Saddle an ass for me so that I may ride on it and go with the king,' since I am lame." ²⁸But

he has slandered me to my lord the king. And yet my lord the king is like an angel of God. Do, therefore, what seems good to you. ²⁹My father's family was doomed to die before my lord the king, but you counted your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right do I have to complain to the king?" ³⁰The king said to him, "Why talk more? I have decided – you and Ziba shall divide the land." ³¹Mepibaal answered, "Oh, let him take it all since my lord the king has come home safely." ^{1K 12:16}

³²Now, Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim and he crossed the Jordan with him; then he said goodbye to him. ³³Barzillai was a very old man of eighty, who, being a very wealthy man, had provided the king with food when he remained in Mahanaim. ³⁴The king said to Barzillai, "Come, join me and stay with me; I will take care of you in Jerusalem." ³⁵But Barzillai said to the king, "How many more years will I live that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem?" ³⁶Today, I am eighty years old and can discern neither what is pleasant nor what is not. Can your servant still taste what he eats or drinks; or listen to the voice of men and women singing? Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? ³⁷Your servant will accompany the king just a little past the Jordan. Why should the king reward me for this? ³⁸Please allow me to return to my own city where I may die and be buried near the graves of my father and mother. But let this my son Kimham, your servant, continue with my lord the king. You can do for him whatever it may please you. ³⁹The king answered, "Kimham will come with me and I will give him whatever seems fit to you. Besides, I will do for you whatever you desire of me." ⁴⁰As all the people had crossed the Jordan, the king also crossed. Then the king embraced and blessed Barzillai who then returned to his own home. ^{16:21}

• ⁴¹The king went on to Gilgal accompanied by Kimham, together with the men of Judah and some Israelites. ⁴²Then the Israelites came to the king and asked, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, grabbed you and brought the king and his entire family over the Jordan together with

• **19.41** David's victory does not really solve the problem, which is lack of unity among the tribes, since Absalom only took advantage of and worsened the existing division. The people of Judah are resentful of Israel, forgetting that in their own tribe many assisted Absalom; thus they prevent David from becoming king over all and their victory is one more split in the recently gained unity.

When we are personally engaged in a conflict, the exclusion of those who oppose us or our

party often seems to be the best solution. When we see things from outside, we quickly condemn those who exclude others. The Bible reveals that human beings are sinners: there will always be tension between our thirst for unity and the necessity to impose sanctions on the culprit (1 Cor 5) or the one who seems to be one. We should always be modest both when we decide for exclusion and when we proclaim our attachment to unity and peace.

all your soldiers?”⁴³ The men of Judah answered the Israelites, “Because the king is our immediate relative. But why does this rouse your anger? Have we fed ourselves at the king’s expense or received any gift from him?”⁴⁴ But the Israelites answered the men of Judah, “We have more right to the king than you because we are ten tribes. Why did you disregard us? Were we not the first to have the king brought back?” But the men of Judah argued more vehemently than the Israelites.

Sheba rebels against David

20¹ There happened to be there a base fellow named Sheba, son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, who sounded the trumpet and said, “We have nothing to do with David. What can we expect from the son of Jesse? Go back, O Israelites, each man to his home!”² So all the Israelites left David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. The men of Judah, however, steadfastly followed their king from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

³ When David reached his house at Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines whom he had left to keep the palace and put them under guard. He provided for them but had no relations with them. So they were secluded until the day of their death and lived like widows.

⁴ The king said to Amasa, “Assemble all the men of Judah within three days; then come here to me.”⁵ So Amasa left to summon the men of Judah but he failed to show up at the appointed time.⁶ David then said to Abishai, “Sheba son of Bichri, will do us more harm than Absalom. Take my guards and pursue him lest he flee to any fortified city and escape from us.”⁷ So Abishai, with the men of Joab, the Cherethites, Pelethites and all the warriors, left Jerusalem to pursue Sheba, son of Bichri.⁸ When they reached the big stone in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Now Joab was wearing over his tunic a belt with a sheathed sword. The sword slipped out.⁹ Joab said to Amasa, “How are you, my brother?” And he held Amasa’s beard with his right hand as if to embrace him.¹⁰ Amasa did not notice the sword which he held until Joab stabbed him, shedding his entrails to the ground. Amasa died on the spot without need of a second thrust.

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba, son of Bichri.¹¹ Meantime, one

of Joab’s men stood beside Amasa and said, “Let him who is for Joab and stands by David follow Joab.”¹² Amasa then lay bathed in his blood, lying on the highway. When the man saw the people stopping to look, he carried Amasa from the highway into the field and covered him with a garment.¹³ When he was removed from the highway, the people followed Joab in pursuit of Sheba, son of Bichri.

¹⁴ Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel and entered Abel of Bethmaacah with all his allies who had assembled to follow him.¹⁵ Joab’s men came and attacked him in Abel of Bethmaacah. They set up a mound against the city, and all the men of Joab dug under the wall to throw it down.

¹⁶ Then a wise woman called out from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here that I may speak to him.”¹⁷ As Joab approached, the woman asked, “Are you Joab?” He answered, “I am.”¹⁸ The woman continued, “They used to say in olden days to settle a matter, ‘Seek advice at Abel if you want to know the ancient customs¹⁹ of the faithful of Israel.’ And you want to destroy a city which is a mother city in Israel. Why do you want to destroy the heritage of Yahweh?”²⁰ Joab answered, “By no means do I want to destroy it!”²¹ But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, named Sheba, son of Bichri, has rebelled against King David. Only surrender him and I will withdraw from the city.” So the woman said to Joab, “We shall throw his head over the wall to you.”²² The woman then gathered the inhabitants and spoke to them so persuasively that they beheaded Sheba, son of Bichri, and threw his head out to Joab who then sounded the trumpet for the people to depart from the city. Then everyone went home and Joab himself returned to the king in Jerusalem.

²³ Joab was in command of all the army of Israel while Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in command of the Cherethites and the Pelethites.²⁴ Adoram was in charge of the forced labor, and Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, was the recorder. Sheva was secretary,²⁵ and Zadok and Abiathar were priests,²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was David’s priest.

The great famine

21^{• 1} There was famine during the reign of David for three consecutive years and David consulted Yahweh. The answer was, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and his

• **21.1** This episode shows us the most inhuman religious prejudices existing at that time.

David consulted Yahweh... The answer was... We have already seen this practice of consulting God by means of the Urim and Thummim, i.e., by casting lots. It is possible that God guided them through these means since

they believed that this was authorized by God. This episode also confirms that seeking a response from God can lead to worse deviations: “those responsible for the famine are the descendants of Saul because he killed the Gibeonites...”

A disaster occurs and the people say it is God’s

8:16

Dt
7:221S
20:1518:3
1K
11:361S
17:4

family because he put the Gibeonites to death.”

²The Gibeonites were not of the people of Israel but descendants of the Amorites. Although the Israelites had sworn to spare them, Saul had attempted to wipe them out on behalf of the people of Israel and Judah. ³So David called the Gibeonites and asked them, “What shall I do for you? And how shall I repay you that you may bless the people of Yahweh?” ⁴The Gibeonites answered him, “Our quarrel with Saul and his family is not over silver or gold, nor is it our task to put any Israelite to death.” The king asked again, “Tell me then what I shall do for you”; ⁵and they replied, “That man slaughtered us and planned our destruction so that we would no longer occupy any place in Israel. ⁶Surrender seven of his sons to us so that we may hang them up before Yahweh at Gibeon on the mountain of Yahweh.” To this, the king said, “I will surrender them.”

⁷David spared Mepibaa, son of Jonathan, Saul’s son, because of the oath David and Jonathan took before Yahweh. ⁸But he took the two sons of Rizpah, daughter of Aiah whom she bore to Saul – Armoni and Mepibaa; and the five sons of Merab, daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite. ⁹He delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites who hanged them on the mountain of Yahweh where all seven perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest.

¹⁰Then Rizpah, daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens. She did not allow the birds of the air to come on them by day or the beasts of the field by night. ¹¹When David was told what Rizpah, Aiah’s daughter and Saul’s concubine, had done, ¹²he asked the men of Jabesh-gilead for the bones of Saul and those of his son Jonathan. (They had taken them from the wall of Bethshan where the Philistines had nailed them when they killed Saul on Gilboa.) ¹³So David had brought up from there the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan, and the bones of those who had been hanged were gathered. ¹⁴All of them were buried in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of Kish their father. When all that the king had commanded was done, God had pity on the land.

punishment and, if it is a punishment, they must find the one responsible. Possibly David himself shares the common belief; except that he uses his authority to save the son of his friend, Jonathan.

We cannot say that this mentality has completely disappeared. If something goes wrong in

¹⁵The Philistines waged war again with Israel, and David went down together with his servants to fight against them. When David was already tired, ¹⁶Ishbibenob, one of the descendants of the giants whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of bronze and who had put on a new sword, thought of killing David. ¹⁷But Abishai, son of Zeruah, came to his help, attacking and killing the Philistine. Then David’s men urged him, “You shall not join us anymore in battle lest the lamp of Israel be extinguished.”

¹⁸After this, there was more fighting with the Philistines at Gob; there Sibbecai the Hushathite, slew Saph, one of the descendants of the giants. ¹⁹There was another battle with the Philistines at Gob where Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim, the Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was the size of a weaver’s beam. ²⁰In another encounter at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, numbering twenty-four in all. He too was a descendant of the giants. ²¹When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimei, David’s brother, slew him. ²²All four descendants of the giants fell by the hand of David and his guards.

David’s song of praise

22 • ¹David sang this song to Yahweh on the day Yahweh delivered him from his enemies and from Saul. ²He said,

*The Lord is my rock, my rampart,
my deliverer³ and my God,
the rock in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield, my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my Savior; you save me from violence.*

⁴*I call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise;
he saves me from my enemies.*

⁵*Waters of death carried me along,
torrents of destruction terrified me.*

⁶*Caught as by the cords of the grave,
I was utterly helpless before the snares of death.*

⁷*But I called upon the Lord in my distress,
to my God I cried for help;
and from his temple he heard my voice,
my cry of grief reached his ears.*

⁸*Then the earth reeled and rocked;
the foundations of the heavens shook;
they trembled in his fury.*

⁹*From his nostrils smoke rose,*

society or in an institution, many search out whom to sacrifice before finding out if they themselves have had a share in the fault.

• **22.1** This “canticle” of David is reproduced almost identically in the Psalms: Ps 18.

13:3
1S
17:10

Ps
18

from his mouth a devouring fire
throwing off live embers.

¹⁰ He bent the heavens and came down
with dark clouds under his feet.

¹¹ He rode on a cherub and flew,
he was seen on the wings of the wind.

¹² He set darkness around him as his tent,
a heap of waters in the thick clouds.

¹³ Then from the brightness of his presence
flared up fiery embers.

Mt
22:43

¹⁴ From heaven the Lord thundered;
the voice of the Most High resounded.

¹⁵ Sending out a hail of arrows,
he scattered them;
flashing forth bolts of lightning,
he routed them.

¹⁶ The beds of the seas lay uncovered
as the foundations of the world
were laid bare,
at your rebuke, O Yahweh,
at the blast from your nostril's breath.

¹⁷ Reaching down from above,
he drew me out of the deep water.

¹⁸ Too strong for me were my enemies,
but he rescued me from my adversaries.

¹⁹ They have launched their attack
in an opportune day
but the Lord has been my stay.

²⁰ In the open he has set me free.

How great indeed is his love for me!

²¹ Yahweh rewarded me according to my
justice,

and according to my righteousness.

²² For I have been faithful to Yahweh's
way

and I did not sin far from him.

²³ With his ordinances all before me,
I have always followed his statutes.

²⁴ Before him I have done uprightly
and kept myself from iniquity.

²⁵ Therefore Yahweh has given me
recompense according to my righteous-
ness.

²⁶ To the faithful you show yourself faith-
ful;

to the blameless you show yourself
blameless;

²⁷ to the pure you show yourself pure;
but to the crooked you show yourself
astute.

²⁸ For you raise up the humble
and humiliate the arrogant.

²⁹ Yahweh, you are my lamp.

O my God, you brighten up my darkness.

³⁰ Yes, with you I can crush an armed
band,

and by my God I can leap over a wall.

³¹ This God - his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord is always fulfilled.

To those who seek refuge in him, he is a
shield.

³² There is no other God but Yahweh;

there is no other rock but our God.

³³ This God is my stronghold
and keeps my path unerring and safe.

³⁴ He has made my feet as swift as the
hinds;

he has set me secure on the heights.

³⁵ He trains my hands for war
and my arms to bend a bow of brass.

³⁶ You have given me your shield for pro-
tection,

and your help has made me great.

³⁷ You have given wide room for my steps,
so that they have never faltered.

³⁸ I have pursued my enemies and wiped
them out,

I did not turn back till I had destroyed
them.

³⁹ Thrusting them through,
I did not give them time to rise
as they fell under my feet.

⁴⁰ You have given me strength for the
battle;

you have subdued my adversaries be-
neath me;

⁴¹ you have put my enemies to flight
and destroyed those who opposed me.

⁴² They cried for help, but no one came.
They cried to the Lord;

he did not answer them.

⁴³ I pulverized them as dust of the earth;
like mud in the streets I trampled on
them.

⁴⁴ You have delivered me from
the people's assault

and have made me head over the nations.
They came to serve me -

people I had not known.

⁴⁵ Foreigners approached me,
cringing and fawning.

At the sound of my voice,
they rose to obey.

⁴⁶ Foreigners succumbed
or locked themselves in their fortresses.

⁴⁷ Yahweh lives! Praised be my rock!
Exalted be my savior God -

⁴⁸ the God who grants me vengeance
and subdues the peoples for me.

⁴⁹ He brings me out from my foes;
he exalts me above my adversaries;
he rescues me from men of violence.

⁵⁰ For this I will extol you, Yahweh,
among the nations;

I will sing praise to your name.

⁵¹ You have given your king great victory;
you have shown your love forever
to your anointed, to David and to his
descendants.

23 ¹ These are the last words of David:
The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the
oracle of the man whom God exalted, the
anointed of the God of Jacob, the singer of the
songs of Israel:

^{Dt 32:31} ²“The Spirit of Yahweh speaks through me, his word is on my tongue.

^{Is 33:12} ³The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: when one rules justly over people, ruling in the fear of God,

⁴he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,

making grass sprout from the ground after the rain.

⁵Yes, is not my family like this before God? He has made with me an eternal covenant, orderly and secure.

Will he not complete my salvation and fulfill my desire?

⁶But the godless are like thorns that are thrown away.

They cannot be held with one’s hand

⁷but are uprooted with iron and the shaft of a spear,

and they are burned in fire.”

David’s champions

• ⁸These are the names of the warriors who were with David: the first of the Three was Ishbaal, a Hachemonite who wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he slew in a single encounter.

⁹Next was Eleazar, son of Dodo, son of Ahohi, who was with David when they challenged the Philistines who were gathered there for battle. When he saw the retreat of the Israelites, ¹⁰he fought and struck down the Philistines until his hand grew tired from holding the sword without pause. Yahweh brought about a great victory that day. The others returned after him, but only to strip the slain.

¹¹Next was Shammah, son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground planted to barley, and the men fled from the Philistines. ¹²But Shammah stood in the middle of the plot to defend it and slew the Philistines. And Yahweh worked a great victory.

¹³At about harvest time, three of the Thirty went down to David at the cave of Adullam while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴David was in the stronghold while the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵David longed for water and

said, “Who will give me water to drink from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!” ¹⁶At this, the three warriors broke through the Philistine camp, drew water out of the well by the gate of Bethlehem and brought it to David. But David refused to drink of it and poured it out as an offering to Yahweh. ¹⁷He said, “By no means should I do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who risked their lives?” Therefore, he refused to drink it. These were the deeds of the three warriors.

¹⁸Now Abishai, brother of Joab, son of Zeruiah, was chief of the Thirty. He wielded his spear against three hundred men and slew them, winning a name beside the Thirty. ¹⁹Though he was the most popular of the Thirty and became their commander, he did not equal the Three.

²⁰Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a warrior of Kabzeel, was a man of great achievements who killed the two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and slew a lion. ²¹He slew a handsome Egyptian who held a spear. Benaiah went against him with a staff, snatched the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. ²²Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, did these things and won a name beside the thirty warriors. ²³He was popular among the Thirty but did not equal the Three. David put him in command of his bodyguard.

²⁴Asahel, brother of Joab, was one of the Thirty; Elhanan, son of Dodo of Bethlehem; ²⁵Shammah of Harod, Elika of Harod; ²⁶Helez, the Paltite; Ira the son of Ikkes of Tekoa; ²⁷Abiezor of Anathoth; Mebunnai, the Hushathite, ²⁸Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai of Netophah; ²⁹Jeleb, the son of Baanah of Netophah; Ittai, the son of Ribai of Gibeath of the Ben-jaminites; ³⁰Benaiah of Pirathon; Hiddai, of the brooks of Gaash; ³¹Abialbon, the Arbathite; Azmaveth of Bahurim; ³²Eliabha of Shaalbon; the sons of Jashen, Jonathan; ³³Shammah, the Hararite; Ahiam, the son of Sharar, the Hararite, ³⁴Eliphelet, the son of Ahasbai of Maacah; Eliam, the son of Ahithophel of Gilo; ³⁵Hezro of Carmel; Paarai the Arbite; ³⁶Igal, the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani, the Gadite; ³⁷Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, ³⁸Ira, the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; ³⁹Uriah, the Hittite – thirty-seven in all.

• **23.8** In dedicating this chapter to the memory of David’s “valiant men” (see also commentary on 1 S 22), the Bible gives them what they deserved. These men lived their faith and accomplished their human mission through fighting and killing their enemies – which seems to us to be very far from Gospel values. Yet David became king because of them, their sword, their strength and their courage. Here again faith does not suppress human reality, nor the time

needed for the evolution of moral standards. It was to take centuries to complete the education of God’s people and for this education to take place this people had to survive: wars were at that time the necessary condition to survive.

• **24.1** The kingdom has grown very much in territory, animals and wealth. Israel is a numerous people and so David is tempted to count them and orders a census.

The census

Num
25:3
Jdg
2:14
2K
13:3

24 ¹Again the anger of Yahweh blazed out against Israel. So he let David harm them in this way, “Count the people of Israel and Judah.” ²The king said to Joab and the commanders of the army who were with him, “Go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and count the people that I may know how many they are.”

³Joab told the king, “May Yahweh your God multiply the people a hundred times and may my lord the king see this blessing. But why does my lord the king want to take a census?”

⁴But the king’s word prevailed so that Joab and the commanders of the army went out from the king’s presence in order to count the people of Israel. ⁵They crossed the Jordan and started with Aroer, the city in the middle of the valley, and went on toward Gad and to Jazer. ⁶Then they proceeded to Gilead and to Kadesh in the land of the Hittites. They then went to Dan, and from Dan to Sidon, ⁷and arrived at the fortress of Tyre and the cities of the Hivites and the Canaanites. They went out through the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba and ⁸after having gone through all the land, returned to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. ⁹Joab gave the total count of the people to the king: eight hundred thousand sword-wielding warriors in Israel and five hundred thousand men in Judah.

12:13
1S
13:13

¹⁰But after he had the people counted, David felt remorse and said to Yahweh, “I have sinned greatly in what I

have done, but now, O Yahweh, I ask you to forgive my sin for I have acted foolishly.”

¹¹The following day, before David awoke, Yahweh’s word had come to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, ¹²“Go, and give David this message: I offer you three things and I will let one of them befall you according to your own choice.” ¹³So Gad went to David and asked him, “Do you want three years of famine in your land? Or do you want to be pursued for three months by your foes while you flee from them? Or do you want three days’ pestilence in your land? Now, think and decide what answer I shall give him who sent me.”

¹⁴David answered Gad, “I am greatly troubled. Let me fall into the hands of Yahweh whose mercy is abundant; but let me not fall into human hands.”

¹⁵So Yahweh sent a pestilence on Israel from morning until the appointed time, causing the death of seventy thousand men from Dan to Beersheba. ¹⁶When the angel stretched forth his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, Yahweh would punish no more and said to the angel who was causing destruction among the people, “It is enough, hold back your hand.” The angel of Yahweh was already at the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite.

Ex
12:33
2K
19:35

¹⁷When David saw the angel striking the people, he spoke to Yahweh and said, “I have sinned and acted wickedly, but these are only the sheep; what have they done? Let your hand strike me and my father’s family.”

Ezk
34:31

The census in itself is not bad. What is bad is to feel greater because one has so many people or soldiers, or to have an obsession for quantity, for numbers, forgetting the essential which is quality. David forgets that he is the administrator and deputy of God in Israel: the sheep do not belong to him. At all levels of life, people like to count their animals, or recall their accomplishments. There are many ways of feeling oneself “owner” when, in reality, all belongs to God.

Here, the author presents the pestilence as God’s intervention to punish the king. People of that time easily accepted an intervention of

Yahweh to kill the Israelites even if they were not responsible for the sin of their king. It seems more accurate for us to say that God intervened by sending the prophet Gad a few days before the pestilence broke out, a pestilence which, of course, was not miraculous in nature. Thus he wanted to impart to David a lesson and a sign of the gravity of his sin, using a language he could understand.

See what is said about collective punishment in Joshua 7, and about the Angel of Yahweh in Genesis 16.

¹⁸Gad went to David that day and said to him, "Go, set up an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."¹⁹ So David left to follow Yahweh's command made through Gad.²⁰ When Araunah saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went forward, paid homage to the king with his face to the ground, and said,²¹ "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" David answered, "I will buy your threshing floor in order to build an altar to Yahweh so that the plague may end among the people."²² Then Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take the threshing floor and offer the sacrifice

that seems good to him: here you have my oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges, and the oxen's yokes for the wood.²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king. May Yahweh your God hear you."

²⁴ But the king said to Araunah, "No, I will pay you for all this, for I will not offer to Yahweh my God something that costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.²⁵ David built there an altar to Yahweh and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So Yahweh had mercy on the land and the plague ended in Israel.