"He Who Rules Over Men Must be Just": The Life and Reign of King David

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Understanding justice is perhaps one of the most difficult political questions to engage. Justice is the very essence of political rule, abstract in its nature but necessarily concrete in its practical application. Great political rulers are those who desire justice for their nation and dedicate their life to its cause. One such character is King David, a man known as the greatest political rule of the Bible and a ruler known for the depth and breadth of character and rule. He was a successful King, a poet, a warrior, a lover and "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14 NKJV). David stood out among all other men and the Biblical account gives a transparent view both to the historical events of his reign as well as into his heart through the psalms. Each man throughout the Davidic account, including the king that preceded David and David's chief military officer, operated with a different sense of justice, and David stood out among them all. He ruled over the nation whose name means, "One who wrestles with God" during the height of its history. If his greatness was found in the justice he did for Israel, the question is then begged—what was the nature of justice for King David?

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The Glory Has Departed from Israel
1 Samuel 4-16

The situation in Israel was grim—the nation was scattered, defeated, and weakening in faith. Their judges were not successful military leaders; the judges' sons were corrupt and wicked. Without political or military success, the Israelites doubted that their God had set up a successful system of government. The Israelites were aware of the promises given to them. They were to be a "blessed" nation "set apart from the peoples," for the purposes of the Lord (Gen. 28:14; Lev. 20:26). What they saw around them was defeat and disarray, not prosperity and blessedness. Why had the Lord abandoned His chosen nation?

The prophet Samuel entered to judge the nation twenty years later, imploring them to "return to the Lord with all [their] hearts, then put away [their] foreign gods" (1 Sam. 7:3). The Philistines had influenced the weak Israelite nation, whose faith in the Lord was waning, to also worship their gods that promised prosperity. Samuel's promise was that their whole return to the Lord would result in deliverance from Philistine domination, and his efforts were successful—the people returned to serving only the Lord (1 Sam. 7:4). Despite that return, the people looked at the prosperity of their neighbors and believed that it stemmed from the leadership of their kings, and so the Israelites demanded of Samuel, "Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations" (8:5).

The Lord granted that request in the form of Saul, a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul was not a man of ambition or faith and was, in fact, hesitant to accept his post as king. When Samuel announced Saul publicly as the first king, Saul was found, only after the people inquired of the Lord, hidden among the armor (9:22). Saul was an able military leader but was never able to move past his insecurities to find his legitimacy in the anointing of the Lord. Seen through the lenses of structure, roles and systems, Saul's conception of Israel was not rooted in its covenant with the Lord or its anointing. Rather, Israel was a loose collection of tribes held together by common enemies and a common prophet who spoke for their common God upon their common Law. Saul's inability to recognize the authority of the anointing made him unable to see himself as anything more than a normal political king. As Saul's office became an end in and of itself rather than a tool for bringing about the glory of the Lord in Israel, the compass that guided Saul's sense of justice was the necessity that his office demanded at the time. That conception drove him to make decisions that violated the Law when he believed that the necessities of his role demanded it; the Law was simply another 'office', a set of rituals that were a part of culture rather than a tool for moving towards holiness. His willingness to place necessity above even the Law drove a wedge between the King and the prophet, and the punishment for those trespasses foretold that neither Saul nor his household was to reign forever, for "The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him *to be* commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" (13:14). Fifteen years after the beginning of Saul's reign,[1] and not long after Samuel declared those words, the Lord sent the prophet to anoint the next king of Israel. In the presence of Jesse and all of his sons, Samuel anointed David, the "ruddy, bright-eyed and good looking" young man, and "the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward" (16:12-13).

Definitions of Holiness

The thread that extended throughout Saul's life was the degeneration of insecurities and fears into tyranny. His insecurities made justice subservient to whatever was necessary to maintain authority. Insecurity itself is not necessarily a sin—it is a natural emotion—but unbridled, it overshadowed Saul's soul. Insecurity was both a tyrant to the man and also made him a tyrant. Fear made the road to trust very narrow or impassable because fear kept man on the defense. It is easier to defend and to guard against every possible threat and danger. For the King, this translated into open displays of power. What this also seems to suggest is that a ruler cannot act out of what he does not possess, and vice versa. Force only works because it operates from fear; Saul was moved by fear, and it was the only way that he knew to move his people. When Saul wanted the people to join him in battle, he threatened their lives if they did not (11:7). Fear also has the tendency to see more enemies than friends. A man with fear deep in his heart, Saul constantly saw the number of his enemies growing because he was constantly looking for those things which

[1] The exact dates of the events in the Davidic account are argued over by scholars, but most commentaries and resources generally agree on the length of the time periods. For the duration of this work I will try to use general time gaps rather than dates. The beginning of this account starts with Saul's coronation, which is placed somewhere between 1065 and 1050 BC. The *Reese Chronological Bible* is the resource used most often when determining time periods, and was confirmed by other resources.

threatened his power. Thus, fear made Saul a slave to his circumstances because he was always concerned with maintaining his authority.

The great degeneration in his office occurred when the rituals and necessities overrode the purpose of the office. At first, his office as king was a means to the end of security and justice, but once he occupied the office of king for a short amount of time, that office becomes an end in and of itself, and thus, Saul has to scramble and act in power in order to maintain it. That great degeneration is likely the reason why Samuel pointed to the inevitable failure of a king over Israel, and this is perhaps why the Lord said that a king was a mistake to begin with. In human hands, the office became an end unto itself rather than a means to becoming a holy nation. Saul replaced God's providential rule and refused to accept divine rule for a divine end, replacing it with human means for what he hopes will be a divine end.

That divine end—to become a holy nation—presented its own peculiarity. Human means will never achieve divine end, for it is perhaps in the means that the divine is revealed and learned. For Israel, the only way to fully achieve her calling, the fullness of her anointing, was to be willing to become a holy nation, a process that centered wholly on denying earthly momentary desires for the sake of divine principles. In essence, when the Israelites were sorrowful over their insecurity, the Lord would respond "Good." When they cried out for security and supposed justice, the Lord welcomed their need to depend on Him for their sustenance and security. The goal of hardship and chastisement was not to be made safe, comfortable or secure—it was to be made holy. That begs the question, "What does it mean to be holy?" The Hebrew word used to describe Israel as "holy nation" implies purification found by purging earthly desires that are abhorred by the Lord (Exod. 19:6). In essence, holiness implied a denial of all human tendencies toward sin, moral or physical.[2] Israel was to be set apart by her holiness, by her people's ability to deny momentary security by placing faith in God. Prosperity often coupled the pursuit of holiness, but prosperity was not the end goal. The Israelites lost their sense of purpose within prosperity and, thus, had to relocate that purpose in order to reenter prosperity.

Enemies of the Living God
1 Samuel 16-17

When a spirit sent from the Lord was not tormenting Saul, the King was often busy with conquering enemies of Israel. The Philistines had readied for battle against the Israelites in Sochoh and Saul gathered his army is the Valley of Elah, The battle was already on Israelite territory, and the Philistines stood ready on one side of the Valley, with the Israelites waiting on the other. David had served in the palace, playing music to soothe Saul's soul, but had returned home approximately two years after he was anointed.[3] Soon after the war broke out, he was sent to carry supplies to his three oldest brothers who were awaiting battle, but he brought more than food and drink—he brought a completely new perspective of the battle to the Israelite camp.

Running to greet his brothers, David was struck by the noise of the taunting Philistine Goliath and the fear that hung over the Israelite camp. David challenged that fear that ran rampant throughout the

[2] Gesenius, Heinrich Freidrich Wilhelm. *Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon of the Old Testament,* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[3] Reese, Edward. *Reese Chronological Bible.* Bethany House Publishers, 1980.

camp, asking, "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26). Immediately, the difference of his perspective is evident and contrasts greatly to the fear of the rest of the men. That one statement set David apart from the rest of the men. He was not only outraged with a holy anger towards the enemy, but that outrage was rooted in his understanding of the men of Israel as an exceptional army—the army of the living God. Goliath was not only defying a neighboring nation, but was defiling the very name and character of God. David even viewed Goliath through the lenses of his faith. Goliath was an "uncircumcised Philistine," set against the Israelites because of his lack of covenant with the Lord, a covenant that was symbolized by circumcision (Gen. 17:19-20). David's reaction also displayed his concern for the nation as a whole—concern for their reputation because they were the representation of the Lord on the earth. He was ambitious and full of zeal, fueled by a desire to redeem Israel, and thus the living God. Cleansing Israel from reproach proves the nature of the living God, another important distinction for David. The Lord was alive to David, a living, breathing presence that intervenes on the behalf of His people.

David's zeal was an important part of his character and a component that must be paid attention to as his life develops. In the camp, David's oldest brother translated his zeal as "pride and insolence of [David's] heart" and accused David of using the guise of bringing supplies in order to get involved in the battle and make a name for himself (1 Sam. 17:28). Perhaps his brother saw some potentially dangerous nature to his zeal in that it could become pride, or perhaps he simply translated that zeal into pride automatically. Rarely in the account of David's life will a man remark on David's heart, so this statement should be paid attention to. In response to his brother's accusation David defended himself and retorted, "What have I done now? *Is there* not a cause?" (17:29). He did not deny Eliab's accusation but rather defended his zeal by reminding Eliab that the situation was cause enough to be zealous and perhaps even ambitious if it meant avenging the enemies of Israel. Zeal was not bad in and of itself as long as it was channeled into righteous pursuits.

David also turned to other men around them and asked them the same challenging question (17:30). David was not meek, not deferential and did not respect the 'office' of his older brother. He did not try to veil what he said and had a confident sense of his own blamelessness. The young warrior was set apart from the King from the beginning. Saul doubted David's ability as well, first refusing David's help because of his age and then desiring to outfit him with his armor. Again, David's justification for battle, for facing Goliath himself, was because he had known the living God to act on his behalf before with the lion and the bear (17:34). David knew that he was bringing holy justice to Israel by eliminating the enemy that defiled God and he knew that the Lord would come to his aid in that exploit.

Young David headed into battle with Goliath, defeating the mammoth warrior with five small stones. The conversation between David and Goliath, though, was incredible revealing of David's perspective and heart, which will be the bases for his sense of justice. David was a musician and had a soul that was alive to the beauty of the world, specifically the beauty that he found in the Lord. Beauty mobilized David, and this meant that the reverse was also true—ugliness was just as motivating. Goliath was arrogant, disdainful, ruthless and barbarous, taunting David by asking if he thought he was a dog that he could defeat with sticks. David was consumed by the ugliness of the

rebellion that Goliath represented. His response to Goliath was full of this consuming hatred:

> I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand…And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Than all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will you into our hands. (17:45-47)

David's statements were not of simple defeat, but rather of total extirpation of the object of that hatred which was rooted in a holy anger. That was justice, as Goliath was an undeniable enemy of the living God. This is the principle of David's justice for enemies of God. Goliath was categorized as an enemy because of his lack of covenant coupled with his open defiance. Justice for enemies was brutal but it served a divine end, and David was the instrument of that end. David used Goliath's own sword to decapitate him, and he took Goliath's armor back to his own tent as a trophy of the defeat (17:54). That sort of justice brought glory to the Lord by avenging his name. David's faith inspired bravery in the rest of the camp and they charged the Philistine camp and had victory that day (17:51-53). The courage and enthusiasm that David stirred in that moment was something that Saul had yet to conjure in his men the only caveat being the one battle that he led at the peak of his reign. And thus, the friction between the old king Saul and the spirited youth David began.

The peculiarity of David's perspective, exemplified in the battle with Goliath, begs questions concerning his connection with the Lord and root of his piety—a faith that was not seen in any other man thus far in the account. It was clear that David operated by a different set of principles than the rest of the men. The smallness of his stature was juxtaposed with the bigness of his heart. David acted out of faith even before he was anointed with the lion and the bear, and so it was not the anointing of the Lord that alone provided him with the capacity for such large-heartedness. A musician and lover of beauty, shown in his psalms, David would have naturally been drawn to explore these higher, holier things because they are more beautiful than the necessitous. David loved what was beautiful—they were the things that made his heart beat and the things that ignited his zeal. The presence of the Lord was David's ability to see the Lord's beauty at work, and that beauty and presence empowered his sense of justice. Thus, the Law was beautiful not simply because it was a part of Hebrew culture, but because it was a mechanism for exploring the Lord's ways and therefore holiness. Holiness was beautiful because it involved operating on the Lord's terms rather than man's. In Psalm 19, he said "The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul…The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. And in keeping [the Law] there is great reward," an important statement that will later play a great role in his understanding of justice. The Hebrew word for "keep," שָׁמַר, actually means to preserve, to protect, and to guard. The Law was not just something that David observed; its principles deeply penetrated his heart, and the substance of the Law, the higher living that it called the Israelites to, truly made it "sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. 19:10).

For David, the covenant that the Lord made with Israel was beautiful and made Israelites beautiful. His own anointing

gave him a sense of purpose in the same way that the Lord's anointing on Israel dictated her purpose. When the purposes of Israel's covenant or David's covenant were attacked, David's zeal was catalyzed to movement. David naturally had the zeal and now he had the purpose to pair it with, shown in the situation with Goliath. These, then, are the things that motivate his zeal and his passion: bringing about beauty through seeking holiness and bringing about the glory of the Lord on the earth.

Having meditated on this Law, and burdened with the constant desire to continue that meditation, David naturally desired and acted in a way that encouraged others to elevation of the soul (19:14). He was so moved by the beauty of the Lord that he could not help but work to bring that revelation to those around him. Thus, when David confronted Goliath, his desire was not only to show to the Philistines that the God of Israel was mighty, but he desired to show that to the entire assembly. He emphasized their anointing and the beauty of that gift. Recognizing the beauty of their calling allowed them to become teachable and gave David, who naturally desired to elevate them, a platform to teach. David also had to get the people to see that beauty in order to teach them the justice that he operated under. And so David is often found writing about the beauty of the Lord in his psalms, teaching through his art, or pointing out the presence and the covenant of the Lord to his fellow Israelites.

Faith was not simply a conceptual understanding or a faculty of logic; the type of faith that would make Israel a truly holy nation was transformative, shifting the heart and souls of the Israelites to find their dependence on the faithfulness of God rather than the bleakness of their circumstances. This moved the men beyond simply seeing Israel as a nation with a common Law, a common prophet and the same God. David knew this: Israel was the instrument of the Lord in the earth but that instrument was damaged and faulty because the Israelites did not understand the beauty of their covenant. Justice for the nation was found in repairing that broken instrument so that it could again be the conduit of the Lord's glory upon the earth.

Flowing from the beauty of their covenant, David believed in some general goodness that every Israelite shared because of their covenant with the Lord. The covenant gave him access to the presence, anointing and Law of the Lord, all of which are transformative to the human soul. Because of that beauty, there was a different sort of justice that David believed was applicable to the Israelites as individuals. David's sense of justice always seemed to air on the side of mercy for Israelites because David always held onto the hope that men could change and become better because they always had the option of experiencing their anointing, and thus, the presence and beauty of God. Thus, David seemed to believe that he has to grant them more mercy because the Lord has granted them a means through which they can become holier and David always believed that he could aid in that elevation. David's work was cut out for him. The people experienced the 'presence' of the Lord solely when He provided tangible security for them, and any assault on that security quenched any 'faith' that they had. In fact, they believed that justice was for them to be prosperous, not necessarily holy, and this was why they despaired over their circumstances at the beginning of the 1 Samuel account. David had to help them see the beauty of God in more than just survival or military success, and so David's sense of justice, which flowed from his own perception of the Lord's presence, was an instrument for bringing the people back to their purpose.

"So David played music with his hand…but there was a spear in Saul's hand."
1 Samuel 18-20

Immediately following David's victory over Goliath, the young warrior enjoyed great favor in the palace and with the people. The manner in which David spoke to Saul evoked Jonathan to a great love, and "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). David found such favor in Saul's house that Jonathan even gave him his armor and robe, a sign of his right to the throne. Saul set David up "over the men of war" (18:5). David's response to the promotion was obedience to a king whose position he knew he had been anointed to inherit, and not only did he obey, but he "behaved wisely" (18:5). David's favor with the people grew as well—"he was accepted in the sight of all the people and also in the sight of Saul's servants" (18:5). David's popularity continued to grow, and as the Israelite women sand, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands," David's favor with the King was brought to a swift end, as Saul saw that David moved the people in ways that he only dreamt of (18:7). Saul's sense of justice, then, was given to what was necessitous and advantageous to maintaining authority and he determined that by his definition of friends and enemies. Those who deserved punishment those who subverted his authority in some perceived way—they were his 'enemies.' But even that definition of enemy was always subject to popular opinion if changing it seemed to be a better way of maintaining authority.

Aware that his kingdom was to be ripped from his hands and threatened by the people's great elation over David, Saul found himself on the defense and "[he] eyed David from that day forward" (18:9). It was not long before Saul's jealousy was acted upon. David was a threat to his authority and that placed him in the category of enemy. The juxtaposition of the two men is perhaps the most apparent 1 Samuel 18:10: "So David played music with his hand…but there was a spear in Saul's hand." In an attempt to eliminate his enemies, Saul cast his spear at David twice, but David escaped both times. Saul recognized that the Lord was with David, adding to his fears, and so the King decided to send David out of his presence (18:10-13). Despite the fact that this removed David from Saul's sight, "David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the Lord was with him" (18:14).

For the rest of chapter 18, Saul schemed to have David killed, and though he tried many different methods, David escaped every one of them and even emerged with more allies, including David's daughter Michal who became his wife. The last of these schemes involved Jonathan slaying David, which also backfired—Jonathan was perhaps David's greatest friend and ally. And "so Saul became David's enemy continually," and "David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed" (18:29-30).

David fled to Samuel, and Saul was unable to reach him there, but there was a gradual shift into a new season of David's life—a man on the run. David would not act against Saul because he was anointed, meaning that he was, in some way, a part of the Lord's purposes. The anointing did not make him innocent, but it did make him subject only to the Lord's justice rather than David's (Ps. 59). Saul's anointing prohibited David from acting against him, meaning that justice demanded that David respect Saul and live honorably before him. This did not restrict David from being strategic in his actions. As a musician, his psalms were his

way of releasing his anger, and they are most present when his heart is alive and connected to the beauty of the Lord. The psalms of these times show his frustrations: "The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man…For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue" (Ps. 5:6, 9).

Despite Saul's anointing, David also knew that he had to survive because he was also anointed. After all, if the Lord had willed for David to become king, in preserving himself he was actually upholding the will of the Lord. It was just to do such a thing, and so David's actions from this point forward try to walk that line of honor and survival. In order for David to have the opportunity to bring about justice for the nation of Israel through his reign as king, he had to wait on divine justice to rid him of Saul. David could not establish a precedent that an Israelite could kill the king—politically, it was a dangerous precedent to set.

One of David's strategic moves was to test Jonathan's loyalty and use that friendship to determine whether or not he would be unwelcome in the palace permanently. This required Jonathan to betray his father's trust to inform David, but this was not beyond the zealous and passionate prince, who "loved [David] as he loved his own soul," Jonathan also made another covenant, this time with the whole house of David. Eventually and with great sorrow, Jonathan informed David that Saul planned to continue his pursuit, and they "wept together" before David left Israel (1 Sam. 20:16-17, 41).

The Outlaw of Israel
1 Samuel 21-24

In the time period before David became king, there were many instances when David's sense of justice seemed to change, often to become a bit colder and crueler. The struggle between Saul and David lasted for five years total, beginning with David's victory over Goliath.[4] David became more demanding and cunning and then some particular event caused a visible shift in his behavior and the position of his heart. These instances are always connected to times when David can sense the beauty and presence of the Lord and when he believes it is absent. The first example of this switch occurred when David fled to the dwelling place of Ahimilech the priest. Ahimelech's reaction to David was not one of welcoming, but one of fear because to the rest of the kingdom, David was a fugitive (21:1).

> So David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found." (21:2-3)

Here, with a priest of all people, David employed explicit lying and deceit in order to obtain something, which seems to be a departure from his previous methods of survival. His psalms beg God for mercy and redemption (Ps. 26:11), but what caused this switch? David was fearful. He had to worry about surviving and there is little glory and honor—the rewards of upholding the Law

[4] *Ibid.*

—in simply surviving. David could not understand where the Lord was in the midst of his flight from Israel. Because beauty mobilized his justice, David's justice shifted and made room for deceit if it meant that it kept him alive. And David was not without cunning to fall back upon. There was some justice his survival, but it wasn't the glorious sort of justice that he experience with Goliath, for example. David took the holy bread and Goliath's sword from Ahimelech that day and then fled to Gath, a Philistine city (1 Sam. 21:6, 9). He stayed there only for a short while, as he was not accepted with open arms, and from there retreated to a cave in Adullam closer to Israel.

There in the cave, David built his army of mighty men. The group of men was composed of outcasts and even fugitives who were "in distress…in debt…and discontented" (22:2). These men were drawn to David—400 fugitive men drawn to their outcast leader. Despite their certain type of 'hardness' attributed to them because of their fugitive status, David was able to gain authority over them. Beyond mere authority, David also won their loyalty (22:2). That being said, the aggregation of 400 criminals in a cave, lead by Saul's greatest enemy, was obviously troubling to the King.

While in pursuit of David, Saul discovered Jonathan's covenant with David and became outraged. Saul's anger always arose when he lost another 'friend', and Jonathan had seemingly crossed that line many times. His anger was a sign that he felt an injustice has been done to him but is also a reflection of the deep hurt that he experienced. Were his insecurity a stake set on Saul's heart, every new 'enemy' was another blow that sent the stake deeper. His reaction revealed his confusion. Saul believed that he had satisfied the desires of the people for security—why was this not enough to maintain their love?

> All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day (22:7-8).

In the midst of his supplications for support, Doeg the Edomite burst into the camp, delivering the message that David had been with Ahimilech. Doeg had spied on David while he was with the priest (22:9). Churned with anger over his son's betrayal, Saul proceeded to avenge David's allies in the cruelest of ways. The King, filled with rage "said to the guards who stood about him, 'Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand is also with David…'" (22:17). Notice that despite his willingness to sentence the priests to death, Saul would not kill the priests on his own. Saul's guards refused to kill the priests, but Doeg was willing and that day he slew eighty-five priests and the entire city of Nob for Saul. This was perhaps Saul's lowest moment. No longer did he even care to respect the office that the priests held. Their status as 'enemies' trumped the special protection that they office gave them. The King, then, dwelt in a paradigm of great hurt and pain but also great cruelty and hardness. The deeper his wounds went, the farther he was willing to go to gain revenge over his enemies and he proceeded with his men to find David in Keilah.

One of the priests, Abiathar, escaped the slaughter and ran to David delivering the message of Saul's massacre. David became aware that Saul was willing to stop at nothing and that he was on the move and headed for the camp in Keilah (23:8-11). The new of the slaughter seemed to shift David back into a connection with the Lord

because for the first time in a long time, David inquired of the Lord concerning the forthcoming battle and his plans (23:3). The reason for this reconnection was probably twofold—one being that he was incredibly concerned for the men he was now in charge of but also because of the grief that he experienced over the death of the priests. David was again reminded that the Lord had to rescue him because Saul would do whatever was in his reach to kill David. In some ways, the intense ugliness of the situation shifted David; no longer was David simply unable to find beauty, but ugliness had impacted his heart. He *had* to refocus on the Lord's goodness to balance the ugliness. Here, when inquiring of the Lord, David wrote multiple psalms begging for mercy and redemption—"For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me" (109:22)—but he also wrote very strong words against his adversaries, most exemplified in Psalm 109 which contains fourteen verses explicitly full of curses against a man, most likely Saul. David, reconnected and assured of this, "I know that the LORD will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the poor," had deliverance for his men that day, as again they escaped the hands of King Saul (140:12). From there, David and his men trekked all around the countryside through the Wilderness of Ziph to En Gedi on the run from Saul. Despite a short interval when Saul had to deal with the Philistines, he did not relent in his pursuit (1 Sam. 23:19-29).

While David's men found refuge in a cave in En Gedi, David was handed the perfect opportunity to rid himself of his predecessor and great antagonist. Saul stumbled into the very cave where David and his men were hiding. Unaware of David's presence there, Saul was completely vulnerable, a state that David's men recognized right away. But rather than take the chance to eliminate the King, David "arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe" (24:4). Even that seemingly insignificant, un-offensive act caused David to be troubled in his heart. Moved by that conviction, David turned to teaching his men: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord" (24:6). David let Saul leave the cave unscathed.

But David did not want Saul to leave without the knowledge of his mercy towards him. Pursuing him outside the cave, David cried, "My lord the king...[and] stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down," at which time he told Saul of the opportunity that he purposefully relinquished (24:8-11). Even in his requests for deliverance, though, David was not without his cunning—he referred to Saul as his father, which was not a departure from the truth but was absolutely an appeal to Saul's desire for compassion and paternal trust. David knew that Saul's children had wounded their father in their alignment with him, and David therefore sought to allure the deepest places of Saul's heart. David also worked to convince Saul of his innocence, and asked for a cease to the pursuit, but not without implying that a judgment would still take place but on the Lord's terms (24:12). Perhaps David's plea seems surprising, as he was trying to reason with a clearly unreasonable king, but David still hoped that such a magnanimous and merciful act would cause transformation in his heart. David made clear to Saul that he had not committed any injustices and then sealed it with a promise—a politically risky one at that—"'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.' But my hand shall not be against you" (24:15).

How did David determine that justice demanded that he act in mercy towards the mad king? The just act in the cave was determined not by Saul's actions, but by the Lord's anointing upon him, which

trumped David's right to exact revenge. It is arguable that David's sense of justice was also administered through the distinction of friends and enemies—protecting friends and bringing justice upon enemies—but David's definition of friends and enemies was very different than Saul's. The anointing of the Lord was beautiful and a sign that these men were part of the Lord's plan for Israel. That anointing rested on Saul, which, for all of his madness, made him beautiful in some sense. This does not mean that David believed that everything that Saul did was beautiful, but rather, that his anointing gave him protection. David could not look at Saul without seeing that the Lord had anointed him. Even the slight move of power, to cut off Saul's robe, troubled David in the depths of his soul because he had moved against the King according to his own ability. To violate the anointed man of God was to move against the Lord. David had to trust final justice to God because he was unable to bring it about on his own, and David did suggest in his psalms that the Lord would bring justice even to anointed men if they act wickedly (Ps. 17).

Outside of his own justice, David also set a political precedent. Armed with the knowledge that he is the anointed and will someday be king, David also preserves himself in showing restraint by sparing Saul. For David, because of the peculiarity of Israel, the political and the pious served the same end—to bring justice for nation of Israel by bringing the glory of the Lord into the earth. Conversely, justice served both political ends and pious ends. Thus, acting justly by observing the anointing was advantageous for the soul and for David's political career. Saul responded to David's mercy with recognition not only of David's righteousness but also of his right to the throne—"Therefore may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand" (1 Sam. 24:19). Saul did not guarantee David any refuge, though, and so despite David's magnanimity, there was no immediate reward of safety.

The Reward of Justice: David, Nabal, and Abigail *1 Samuel 25*

"Then Samuel died…and David arose and went down to the Wilderness of Paran" (25:1). In the wilderness there was also a wealthy man named Nabal whose wife Abigail, was "a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings" (25:3). When David came to Nabal's camp, he sent ten of his men to barter with Nabal to allow them to feast in the camp, and to "please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David" because David had guarded Nabal's shepherds in Carmel (25:8). Nabal refused to give them hospitality though he had more than enough for his own camp. Nabal answered asking, "Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?" The question was not one of ignorance but of insult, for Nabal was obviously aware of the family that David came from. "Then David said to his men, 'Every man gird on his sword.' So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David…" (25:12-13). Just as they were preparing, Abigail, who had been told by her own servants of the goodness of David's men, rode out to David's camp to ask for mercy. When she met them David declared that "[Nabal] has repaid me evil for good. May God do so, and more also to the enemies of David, if I leave one male of all

who belong to him by morning light" (25:21-22).

This situation is another example of a shift in David's ability to see the beauty of the Lord, and thus, his sense of justice shifted to some extent. The question then becomes, why was David again unable to sense or see or feel the presence of the Lord in the situation that he is in? His statement to Abigail's supplication revealed not only that he believed an injustice was done to him—good was not returned with good—but it also revealed that he was thinking of himself autonomously. His language of "enemies of David" and "if I leave one male…" suggest a shift from David's rather consistent perspective before that his enemies are the enemies of the Lord and that it is the Lord who fights his battles. Before the situation with Nabal, David spared Saul. For others, it was a magnanimous moment but to David, this is simply what justice demanded—it was not as much of a leap for David. But in the aftermath of that situation, there was no apparent reward. In fact, there was even greater cause for distress because of Samuel's death. Samuel had been one of David's greatest allies and was a source of authority in Israel. David had even sought refuge with Samuel when he had to first flee from Saul (19:18-23). But David's time in the wilderness has been prolonged longer than he anticipated and the goodness of the Lord did not seem to be shining through anywhere.

Saul was like an immovable rock for David. Divine justice did not permit David or his men to kill Saul, but on the other hand the justice of the Lord also seemed to require that David become King. That ambiguity, the mystery of the Lord's purposes, left the visionary in the dark without a compass to guide his actions. What David always believed to be true—that the Lord would carry out justice and uphold the righteous—was now deeply shaken. Before this, the Lord had preserved David and done so rather immediately. David was enduring much longer than he anticipated, and had no idea how and if the Lord would truly make him king. In the midst of that fear and perceived absence of beauty, his pride became operative in his actions. Sometimes David was willing to do justice and then let the Lord take care of judgment and reward, as in the situation with Saul. But at other times when the Lord did not seem as present, David lost the second part of that belief and took control of judgment and reward. What exactly was that reward? David believed he deserved the same reward that was given when Israel as a nation acted justly and according to the Law—honor and glory. When he sensed the presence of the Lord, David trusted that God would see to David's honor and glory. But disconnected, David's pride became the problem. He took responsibility for procuring honor into his own hands because he was not sure that Lord would see to it.

Why was David so outraged at Nabal's refusal? First, Nabal was a bad man—"harsh and evil" (25:8). David's hatred and anger was ignited by that sort of ugliness, but perhaps even more important was that David presumed that Nabal would repay him good for the good that David's men did for his servants in the wilderness. In fact, David believed that Nabal had done an evil thing by not repaying David's men for the good they had done. But what good did David actually do for Nabal? He did not take Nabal's possessions when he had the power to do so, which he seemed to believe was some good. Restraint from revenge against an antagonist was magnanimous, but restraint from evil against an innocent foe was not as difficult nor as great.

David's outrage was over Nabal's refusal to share resources and over his insult. What great harm was the insult unless it was to David's pride? Nabal did not honor David

for his good, for in honoring him he would have provided David's men with supplies. Nabal was an ordinary man, a foolish one, without the hand of the Lord upon him, which David believed gave him some right to compel Nabal to honor him. His problem was twofold—one, that he believed that he had acted out of magnanimous justice by not taking advantage of Nabal's man, and two, that he believed it was just to compel honor because he was responsible for the reward of justice.

At his declaration, Abigail "fell at his feet" and begged for David to save Nabal but in the most persuasive and prudent of manners (25:24). Abigail, in her wisdom, took care of David's men and then placed herself as the one asking for mercy, knowing that David would not punish her. Then Abigail reminded David that he had yet to avenge himself and that he had kept himself from having blood on his own hands. She reminded him of the beauty of his innocence and that he "[fought] the battles of the Lord" (25:24-28). Abigail reminded him of the truth that had been shaken by reminding him of the long-term vision and the promise that he would be king (25:29-31). By bringing back to David's remembrance the promise of that great beauty, Abigail shifted David from depending on his own might and restored his faith. David leaned on her faith when his was thin and reacted with the utmost gratitude:

> Blessed in the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advance and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand…Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person. (25:32-33, 35)

And so, when the Lord struck Nabal dead, David rejoiced because the Lord took care of justice: "Blessed be the lord, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept His servant from evil!" And David took Abigail to be his wife (25:39).

David Again Spares Saul
1 Samuel 26

It wasn't long before Saul was alerted of David's position and again took up the chase. David, by now, was accustomed to the wilderness and knew where Saul had camped. In the early morning while all of his guards were asleep, David snuck into the camp with Abishai, one of his greatest warriors. They found Saul sleeping, unguarded, with his spear next to his body (26:1-7). "Then Abishai said to David, 'God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at one with the spear..." David, nonetheless, would not let Abishai kill Saul, reminding him "for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed?" (26:9). He took Saul's spear from near his head and a jug of water, and then left the camp. When the men awoke, David called from atop a hill in the distance to Abner, Saul's chief military leader, rebuking him publicly:

> Are you not a man? And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head. (26:15-16)

David continued on by asking Saul why he was still engaged in pursuing him. Why was David even concerned with trying to reason with Saul? After all, their last encounter, Saul promised to preserve David and that was clearly no longer his objective, if it ever really was in the first place. Though David may have hoped beyond hope that Saul would still turn from his ways, David's greater purpose in this situation was probably first to display justice to the rest of the soldiers, and secondly to be politically strategic in embarrassing Saul's commander. David knew that he would have to depose of Abner eventually and lead many of the men that currently serve Saul in the army. Abner's public humiliation drove a wedge between Abner and Saul, because Abner left him vulnerable, but even more importantly, it drove a wedge between Abner and the rest of the soldiers. In place of their leader's incompetence, they have been shown David's mercy and magnanimity.

Perhaps most puzzling was Saul's reaction: "I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly" (26:21). Saul may have wanted to save his reputation as much as he could with his men. Or perhaps the mad king truly did feel conviction when he was vulnerable. The entire encounter between David and Saul and Abner took place in the morning when Saul awoke to find his spear gone. Saul possibly did not even have time to figure out the best means of defending himself, as he was somewhat in shock. For a quick moment, Saul may have been able to recognize that his treatment of David was 'unjust' because David was truly innocent, but Saul had to defend the office and the system that he has created. He has to defend the office because the office defined him—he cannot see himself outside of that role, and David posed a major threat to its livelihood. Saul's fear was his tyrant; it translated into a need to control even when Saul knew that David was innocent. His fear made him a victim because he could never publicly display that he was wrong. Clearly, Saul was able to recognize that he had been, to some degree, unjust, but without conquering the constant need for self-defense, his office demanded a return to the hostility towards David. Even though David may have hoped against hope that Saul would recognize his cruelty, again the encounter with Saul did not result in a welcome return to Israel.

David in Ziklag: Saul in Battle
1 Samuel 27-31

After once again exercising great restraint and justice without any immediate reward, David was downtrodden and believed, "Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul" (27:1). And, per his pattern, the next year of David's life is another example of a shift. David ran to Gath with King Achish once again. In Gath, David experienced the greatest absence of the beauty of the Lord because the only way out of his tribulation was through Saul's death. David would not kill him nor did he allow his men to kill the King, and so David's ability to see the end of the tribulation diminished greatly. As in the past, when David was unable to see the beauty of the Lord anywhere, he relied on his natural political and strategic talents. David and his men stayed at Ziklag for a year and claimed that they were defeating enemies of the Philistines. In reality, they attacked the enemies of Israel, slaughtering all of the inhabitants so that none could return to Achish and reveal their disguise (27:7-12).

Even when disconnected from the Lord, David could still work to bring about justice for Israel; this justice was rooted in

his own political cunning. He may not have known how the Lord would make him king, but he knew that it would be advantageous to eliminate some of their enemies. It was cruel, but it was helpful for Israel. David found favor with the Philistine King, Achish, but as Achish gathered the Philistine armies from outside of Gath for war against Israel, the princes of other cities wondered at the presence of the Hebrews in their camp (29:2).[5] Faced with that opposition of the princes, Achish sent David and his men out from his camp. Even Israel's enemies had rejected him. There were no viable options; where was the Lord's presence?

David saw the beauty of the Lord in the Law; he saw it in the anointing on individuals; he saw it in the covenant; he saw it when the Lord brought glory and honor to His name through His people. David's situation with Achish, the despair in his heart, also suggests that there was another thing that David found beauty in. As a visionary, always with eyes to the biggest picture (bringing justice to the nation of Israel, for example), beauty must also be the potential or the promise of some good thing. The covenant between Israel and the Lord was beautiful because it promised that He would be their source. The anointing promised that an individual would be a part of the Lord's purpose in the earth. The Law promised movement towards holiness as it was followed.

But at this time David could only see the ugliness of his circumstances and could not sense the promise of a good thing on the horizon. David had restrained from killing Saul twice and still there was no reward. In fact, there was greater oppression because of Achish's rejection of his camp. David's anointing gave him purpose and direction—a clear sense of purpose and a defined goal, but it did not grant him a clear sense of how the Lord will cause His promises to come to fruition. A tough-minded man may not have wavered in the way that David did, but the tough-minded would never have grasped hold on vision in the way that David could. This may be the lover's dilemma, that they forget that what causes beauty is the promise of potential, meaning that it is on the horizon, and thus, may be difficult to hold on to in the midst of the worst circumstances. The difficulty for David was that his potentials are dependent on God, meaning that David may not always be aware of what the potentials could possibly look like. And those are the moments in which David despaired—when he was unaware of what the Lord is doing in the potential.

To make matters even worse, when David and his men returned to Ziklag to ready their camp for the move, they found that the Amalekites had raided "and burned it fire and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away…" (30:1-2). Among the captives were David's wives Abigail and Ahinoam. The situation in Ziklag was so deplorable that David had heard rumors that his men were planning to stone him due to their intense grief "but David strengthened himself in the Lord his God" (30:6). In that moment, David returned to the restoration of his connection with the Lord, signifying that there must have been some beauty that David could grasp onto. Perhaps what David realized, once again, was that his *only* potential was in the Lord—he had nothing left to run to and all of his pursuits and left him in this poor position. David inquired of Lord, petitioning Him to reveal whether or not David was to pursue the Amalekites (30:8). David was obviously capable as a military leader, as he had been leading his men in campaigns for over a year success-

[5] 1 Samuel is chronologically incorrect according to the *Reese Chronological Bible*, which places 1 Samuel 29 and 30 before 1 Samuel 28.

fully at this point, but David had been humbled—his dependency had been switched. Given the green light to attack the Amalekites, David went with four of his six hundred men who were not too weary to pursue the enemy. "David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled" (30:17). Thus was the great wrath of David. He was finally able to avenge an injustice because the Amalekites were not protected by any bounds of the favor of the Lord. David not only defeated the Amalekites that day, but "nothing of [David's camp's] was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all" (30:19).

Meanwhile, the Philistines were still gathering for battle against the Israelites, and so Saul readied his armies. Overwhelmed by the sight of the formidable Philistine army, Saul reverts to a solution that he has not touched for thirty-some years—he inquires of the Lord. But unlike David, the Lord did not answer Saul on that day personally or through the prophets, and so Saul found another spiritual source by consulting a medium even though he had outlawed mediums years before. When he came to the witch at En Dor he requested to see the only person that he had known that communicated with God—Samuel. When she called up Samuel, she was immediately made aware of Saul's identity, but Saul encouraged her to continue. Saul bowed to Samuel's spirit, a posture very different than the one that he occupied while Samuel was alive, and he made his request concerning the war known to Samuel (28:3-15). Much to Saul's dismay, even the grave could not rid Samuel of his anger with Saul, who responded to Saul not with answer but rebuke: "So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? …For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David" (28:16-17). This was the first named recognition of David's promised inheritance of the throne. Though Saul sought answers, he was delivered another level of fear, or perhaps an affirmation of his greatest fears. In addition, Samuel prophesied the outcome of the battle and the reasons for Saul's damnation: "And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines" (28:18-19). On the battlefield of Mount Gilboa, the Philistines fought the Israelites and claimed the lives Saul's sons, including Jonathan. King Saul was severely wounded, and in his final moments of life, shared with his armor bearer, he asked for the servant to thrust his sword through his body in order to avoid death and abuse by the "uncircumcised men" (28:4). Saul thrust himself upon his own sword, and his armor bearer followed suit. The victorious Philistines occupied the cities of Israel that day, and the reign of the first king of Israel came to a lamentable and dishonoring end (31:7-10).

David Becomes King and "There Was Joy in Israel" *2 Samuel 1-5*

Though the King of Israel had fallen at Gilboa, David and his men were still back in Ziklag. On the third day after their victorious return to Ziklag, an Amalekite messenger from Saul's army stumbled into Ziklag with the news—"The people have fed form the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also" (2 Sam. 1:4). David and all of his men tore their clothes "and they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and Jonathan this son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of

Israel, because they had fallen by the sword" (1:11-12). The Amalekite had brought the news to David but had also fabricated a story that he had been the one to kill Saul, believing that it would bring him favor. After David and his men had finished weeping and David realized the political situation, he came back to the Amalekite and set a precedent, executing the messenger because, "[he] was not afraid to put forth [his] hand to destroy the Lord's anointed" (1:14).

That being said, the execution of the Amalekite was not an act of passionate hate for men without respect for God. Though they appropriately mourned for the King and for David's greatest friend, there was a great shift here in David's focus. Immediately David became aware of the gravity of the political situation. David could not allow men to believe that there was anything honorable or just in killing the Lord's anointed because he was now the man occupying that office. The execution of the messenger was followed by a poetic lamentation of David, which he told the people to teach to their children. In every event, David saw a possibility for teaching the people. In his lamentation, David grieved the loss of Saul but through these lenses: "The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!" (1:19). The emphasis of the entire lamentation was both personal and political. The verses mention Saul's name but are directed at the achievements that Saul gave the people—"[he] clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; [he] put ornaments of gold on your apparel" (1:24). Besides noting those achievements, David made a point to say that "Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided" (1:23). These were the political ends. There was nothing worse than for the nation to see more division. Justice for the people was to see unity between Jonathan and David, and also some element of unity in David's honor of Saul so that they were not moved towards division in any way. The ends of this emphasis may be twofold: first, to prevent the people from looking at David as a divide between father and son, and second, because it preserved the reputation of the house of Saul, which was the house of Jonathan, and David had made a covenant to preserve that family.

David went to Hebron and, at the age of thirty (1 Chron. 29:27), the elders anointed him to be king "over the house of Judah" (2 Sam. 2:4). David was anointed only over the house of Judah and not also of Israel because Abner, Saul's chief military officer, had taken Saul's son Ishbosheth and "made him king over Gilead, over the Ashurites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin, and over all of Israel" (2:9). Abner's ability to split the kingdom in this way suggests that tribal allegiances were still very strong. Conflict between Israel and Judah could not be avoided for long, though. The tensions between the camps brought about the introduction of a man who played a crucial role in David's kingdom—Joab.

One day Abner and servants of Ishbosheth went out to the pool at Gibeon where Joab, David's chief military officer, was residing. Abner challenged Joab to battle, and twelve men of each of their tribes lined up (2:15). Among David's men were three brothers—Joab, Asahel and Abishai—and after the twelve men of David had defeated Abner's men, Asahel pursued Abner but to his own demise. After he killed Asahel, Abner fled from both Joab and Abishai until he reached a Benjamite camp. At that place, he called out to Joab saying, "Shall the sword devour forever? ...How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?" (2:26). Even Abner was afraid of Joab's wrath, indicating that Joab was a formidable character (2:27-32). An incredibly calculat-

ing military man, Joab had not let go of Asahel's murder—he was biding his time.

Eventually, Abner became frustrated with Ishbosheth and sent to David to make a covenant with him. David made sure to ask for the return of his wife, Michal, who had been given to another man by Saul while David was in the wilderness. Her return procured a political marriage between Israel and Judah. Ishbosheth complied, Michal was returned, and "David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him" to celebrate the covenant between Israel and Judah. David's celebration had little to do with elation over Abner and more to do with diplomacy. The benefits of celebrating the union of the kingdoms greatly outweighed David's frustration with Abner and his awareness that Abner would need to be disposed of. The most important key of this significant event, though, is that Joab was away when Abner made the covenant with David. Before Joab returned, David sent Abner away in peace (3:20-21). Again, justice served both political and pious ends. Politically, it was prudent for David to win over Abner; in terms of piety, David was forwarding unity of the nation. Justice was always to move toward that unity because David needed the people to realize that the Lord had called them to function as a nation—the covenant made every Israelite beautiful, not just those within a man's own tribe.

David accurately gauged Joab's reaction. As soon as he heard of Abner's presence and covenant, Joab ran to David asking "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone?" (3:24). Joab's also feared Abner's deception, thinking through his military lenses, as he worried that Abner only hoped to find out details of David's coming and going. His anger was heightened because David had helped a man that Joab deeply believed was an enemy. Joab's fears as well as his deep-seated grudge against Abner led him to take matters into his own hands.

He sent for Abner behind David's back, meeting him at the gate of the city "and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother" (3:27). David and Joab were in a difficult balance with Abner. Joab held a personal grudge and believed Abner to be a threat; David knew that Abner was no help to his kingdom but did not want to eliminate him. That would not have been just according to David's definitions of friends and enemies. David wept over the death of Abner and publicly declared "My kingdom and I are guiltless before the Lord forever of the blood of Abner…Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house" (3:28-29). Though David was probably somewhat grieved at the death of another Israelite, he was also probably relieved. Joab took care of a man who was going to be a problem for David. After all, David had said in front of Saul's entire army that Abner deserved to die (1 Sam. 26:15-16).

The usefulness of Joab to David became apparent immediately. David knew that there were certain things that he could not do because he had to keep the unification of Israel in mind. If he had raised his hand against Abner he would have lost the house of Israel that was tied to him. In addition, there was something that was ugly about killing another Israelite himself. Though ridding himself of Abner may have helped him forward the cause of Israel, David was never able to willingly accept killing another Israelite.

In David's lament he also made this statement made to his servants: "And I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, [Joab, Abishai and Asahel] are too harsh for me" (2 Sam. 3:39). The relationship between David and Joab was a difficult one for David to maintain.

David needed Joab because he was too soft to perform the sometimes-necessary harsh things. It was advantageous to have Abner gone, but it was harsh and ugly. Additionally, as the king, he could not want to be associated with the brutish, cold realities of kingdom building. And though David said publicly that Joab and Abishai are too harsh, he was probably not too despondent over the outcome of their harshness. This will not be the case in the future, but for now, their nature was useful to David politically.

The sense of justice that Joab and Abishai shared was much harsher than David's. Joab's justice was harsher because of his distinction between friends and enemies. For Joab, enemies were those who stood against or in the way David and his kingship. Enemies were not just those without a covenant; enemies could be Israelites willing to trespass David. Thus, Joab exacted justice by killing those who stood in opposition to David and to himself. This understanding of friends and enemies contrasted greatly with David's, and consequently, the relationship between the military man and his lover king continued to be a source of tension throughout David's reign.

The great distinction between all of the men in this account is their definition of friends and enemies. David was trying to teach Israel to redefine friends and enemies, a definition that would extend to their relationship with their own kinsmen, with other nations and with God. His definition of 'friend' was not based on political allegiance to a man or loyalty to a tribe. Israelites were friends because they shared the same covenant, the same Law and the same God. The Israelites shared an anointing, but it was what that anointing granted them that unlocked David's definition of friends and enemies. The covenant, the Law and their faith were all vehicles for pursuing holiness. Thus, David's definition of friends was that they were men on the search for holiness—men on the journey towards holiness. This justice is sometimes extended to other men, as will be seen later in David's reign, if they are helpful to Israelites in this journey. It is also important to note that David seemed to assume that men were friends until they are proven enemies, not in a naïve way, but in the sense that he always believed that men could always be better than what they were perhaps naturally disposed to. In rare cases it was obvious who enemies were, such as Goliath, but often men had to prove themselves enemies.

The bloodshed continued when two of Ishbosheth's captains slew him in his sleep and brought his head to David in Hebron, believing they would win his favor (4:1-8). David explained the dilemma:

> As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all adversity, when someone told me, saying, "Look, Saul is dead," thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag—the one who thought I would give him a reward for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed? Therefore, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and remove you from the earth? (4:9-11)

David had the two men executed for their trespass—killing a righteous person while he was sleeping. Ishbosheth was righteous because he was placed on the throne by another man and was following what would seem to be the normal ascension for princes. The protection of the righteous also begins to make its way into David's justice, a facet that will continue to evolve.

Politically, David was actually in a place of great strength. He was anointed for

his position. Military officers wiped out men that stood in opposition to him. And, true to the covenant, the tribes of Israel came to David and their elders made him king at Hebron, and not only committed to him as their future king, but also recognized his leadership during the years of Saul (1 Chron. 11:1-2). David also had an incredibly capable and loyal army that aided him in becoming King. The unification of Israel politically and in their hearts was obvious and perhaps the strongest that it had ever been. 1 Chronicles 12 outlines the great numbers of these men, thousands of men armed and ready for battle and "all these men of war, who could keep ranks, came to Hebron with a loyal heart to make David king over all Israel; and all the rest of the Israel were of one mind to make David king" (12:38). The gathering of all of the tribes to establish David as King was also the birth of transcendence from the tribal system to that of a strong nation, not a small feat for the Hebrews who had held their greatest allegiance to their tribes since the time of Jacob. All the men of Israel came to Hebron and had a feast to celebrate David's reign, and "there was joy in Israel" (12:40).

David and Joab: The Lover and the Warrior

Joab was a man full of passion, but not the type of passion that David is full of. Joab's blood ran with a sort of 'cold' passion as opposed to his King David, whose blood run with 'hot' passion. Their passion was for different ends and manifested in very different ways. The former was given to calculation and scheming, the latter given to immediate emotional outbursts. Joab was a cunning, strategic military man whose conception of the world stood in stark contrast to David's. Joab loved David but thought he often operated with naïveté because Joab believed the world was not a glorious place with potential for beauty—the world was cold, cruel and brutish, full of men willing to take advantage of others. This made him a great hater. He owned his offenses and his anger but did not express them right away, not because he has intentions of never expressing them, but because there was safety in waiting, calcula-ting and scheming for the best way to exact revenge.

Joab's worldview denied the existence of a common good and the possibility that all men could become better. In a cruel, brutish world it was seemingly the best thing to preserve one's self—the goal was to find a way to make his world as secure as possible because *the* world was fragile and dangerous. It was riskier to hope for change than to plan for reality, which could be determined in a split second by measuring a man's actions rather than his heart. An Israelite was a circumcised Jew but also someone who was loyal to the King of Israel, and the second part of that definition could negate the first. Judging a man based on his actions made it easier for Joab to distinguish between friends and enemies and this was why David said that the sons of Zeruiah were too harsh for him. Quick judgments guaranteed that he would not be caught off guard or taken advantage of while waiting and hoping for redemption or some noble transformation. The common good, then, was only what was held together by force for friends alone. And so, justice was necessarily tied in with loyalty—helping friends who helped you, and harming enemies by means of elimination.

Once Joab made that distinction, he internalized his offense and anger out of a desire to control his own emotions and allow them to become calculated. Control was a means to lessen risk; emotions were a risk, and voicing them in the heat of the moment was even riskier. Thus, his internalized anger turns to bitterness and hardens into

hate as it resides in his soul. There is a clear difference between anger and hate, then, because both David and Joab experience great anger but that anger manifests in different manners. This was exemplified in the situation with Abner. Joab let Abner walk free long enough that he could figure out a way to take care of the threat that he was to Joab and to the kingdom. This was another facet of his cold passion—when it did manifest, it always did so in great cruelty, because that was what enemies deserved. Hate did not leave any room for mercy, love, hope or redemption, and so justice was incredibly cruel and brutal for enemies.

The reasons for Joab's loyalty to David, then, start to become clear. Joab had a trust built with David, a deep sense of loyalty. But Joab was also a political man, a cunning man, and his loyalty was to a king and the nation because of their distinction as political beings. Joab believed that the King should respect the Mosaic Law, defend the borders and maintain this authority in Israel. For Joab, being attached to David *the King* was to be attached to all the great things that the King could do for Israel in providing a better nation but not for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to the Lord or being a vessel of His greatness. Loyalty to David guaranteed his own security, self-preservation and the preservation of the nation that he served.

The pursuit of security along gave a ceiling to his soul because he was confined to always be concerned with the tangible things of this world. He could never take the risk to hope and to love because there is the possibility of being ruined, and there was nothing comfortable or secure about ruin. Joab's greatest fear was to be shattered, a reality that becomes possible when one is not ready for all of the bad things that can occur. Just as Joab's control over his emotions made him safer, so did his control over the variables around him. Control was a means to avoid being shattered. Joab sacrificed the experience of those greater things in life in favor of making the ground level secure.

The sort of passion found in the King, "hot" passion, was rooted in a different view of the world. Because he believed in a common good and the constant potential for betterment and holiness, David knew that a life based on security violated the very covenant that makes Israel a nation set apart. David was not opposed to prosperity, but believed in prosperity with purpose higher than mere security. David's life, then, was not focused on making his own existence the most secure because he learned to shift that responsibility to the Lord. This is not to say that David never saw provision for the sake of his own security or that he did not delight in the great things that the Lord did on his behalf. Rather, David was willing to be broken and that made the breakthrough of the Lord even more humbling and glorious. And because he was not concerned with lessening his risk, the sort of passion or anger that David experienced was expressed in the moment, not bottled up and internalized. This sort of passion always left the door open to redemption and mercy—acts that Joab would have deemed risky. David's soul was open to being shattered; the ability to experience great love brought with it the possibility of experiencing great disappointment, and it was a risk that David was always willing to take.

That openness made David's character was full of magnanimity, holiness, and nobility that moved those around him. Joab's character was useful, but not moving, David was free to give and to teach because he was not concerned with his own preservation. While Joab was concerned with securing the office of the king and the King himself, David would have probably served other kings if it served God's ends (and he

did this before he was King). The lack of concern with his own security fed into his sense of justice. While making the world more secure drove Joab's justice, David's justice had room to be concerned with justice for the nation, even if that meant his own suffering. He was free to care about his fellow men. David quickly realized, though, that even his right hand man Joab did not operate in this way, and thus the friction between the two became more apparent the longer that David reigned.

David Sets Up His Kingdom
2 Samuel 5-6, 1 Chronicles 11-16

The Israelites' beginnings were rooted in the gifts of a few key men. Abraham gave birth to a son, the father of the people of Israel. Moses gave birth to the Law, the guiding force for Israel. David was finally able to give birth to a unified kingdom and the grand vision of Israel that burned in his heart. Because he always had an eye for the potential—he was a visionary—David loved the process of building and creating.

Within the first two years of his reign over both Israel and Judah, David built a new kingdom.[6] The first step in that process—the process of bringing justice for the nation to make them a place of honor and glory—was to combine the political and spiritual realms and to establish a new foundation for the Israelites to unite upon. David's first move was found the capital city, Jerusalem. The city was not originally an Israelite city; David ousted the Jebusites in order to take the land. Establishing the capital in a city that was not owned by any tribe helped to transcend the tribal mindset, as no group could lay claim to the city as their own. Joab was essential to the founding. In 1 Chronicles 11:8 it says, "And [David] built the city around it, from the Millo to the surrounding area. Joab repaired the rest of the city." David was the visionary and the leader while Joab took care of the smaller or perhaps even more menial, difficult or harsh parts of the job. After a great defeat of the Philistines "the fame of David went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him upon all nations" (12:17).

David then had to reconcile the spiritual realm to his newly established kingdom, and he did so by bringing the Ark to Jerusalem. Before making the necessary preparations to bring the ark into the city, David consulted the captains of the military as well as "all the assembly of Israel" and asked them,

> If it seems good to you, and if it is of the LORD our God, let us send out to our brethren everywhere who are left in all the land of Israel, and with them to the priests and Levites who are in their cities and their commonlands, that they may gather together to us; and let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we have not inquired at it since the days of Saul. (13:2-3)

Their ownership in journey of the ark created a personal connection to the kingdom, a personal connection to the process of unification and a connection to the glory that the ark represented. "So David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel, for his kingdom was highly exalted for the sake of His people Israel" (14:2). David was affirmed in the justice of his creation because the Lord brought honor and glory to the kingdom.

David journeyed with the men to bring the ark from Kirjath Jearim (13:5). As they brought the Ark back on a cart, David and all the Israelites went forth in front of the ark with music and song, fully cele-

[6] David set to building Jerusalem immediately. The ark was established approximately two years later.

brating the beauty of its return. But during their trip back, the oxen that were carrying the cart stumbled and Uzza stretched his hand out to catch the ark. "Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God" (14:10). At the death of Uzza, David first became angry with the Lord. That anger then transformed to fear, as he petitioned of the Lord, "How can I bring the ark of God to me?" (14:12). The Lord had not moved against David's actions before. Did this mean that the Lord's hand was not on this journey? In essence, David suddenly felt a great absence of the Lord's presence and beauty in the moment that he was giving birth to a dream—the worst time for David to feel that void. Though David left the ark in Obed-Edom for three months, he eventually realized that he had not followed correct form (14:14). The Lord's justice always operated within the bounds of the Law, and David was reminded that even he could not be unaware of what the Law demanded. In Exodus 25:14 the Law specifically commanded the men to, "put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark with them." Having recovered from that roadblock, David entered Jerusalem with great ecstasy. Accompanying the Levites were David's two head priests, Zadok and Abiathar, who came to him while in the wilderness and the ark was brought in with music and the "raising [of] the voice with resounding joy" (15:16).

At the near arrival of the ark, the priests offered sacrifices and David reacted in what is often misunderstood as a moment of foolishness for a king. "Then David danced before the Lord with all his might" (2 Sam. 6:14). David wrote an abundance of psalms during this journey, all showing that David felt deep in his soul that the glory of the Lord was entering the city—"Lift up your heads, O you gates; yes, lift them up, you age-abiding doors, that the King of glory may come in" (Ps. 24:9). Then David offered up a psalm recorded in 1 Chronicles 16 as well as in multiple psalms, reminding the people to always remember the covenant of the Lord and all that He had done for the nation (Ps. 105; 96; 98; 106).

As David danced recklessly before the Lord during the arrival of the ark, Michal watched in disgust—"she despised him in her heart" (2 Sam. 6:16). When David "returned to bless his household" he was greeted with an angry wife. She reproached him: "How glorious was the king of Israel today, uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (6:20). David's response was sharp and full of correction:

> It was before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the Lord. And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight. But as for the maidservants of whom you have spoken, by them I will be held in honor. (6:21-22)

David punished her with his words, and his punishment was confirmed by the Lord's punishment of barrenness (6:23). Again, David knew he was just because of the honor that came to the Lord and to his kingship. What was the great injustice that she had done? Michal could not see the honor and the glory that was being brought to the Lord on that day. She still saw the kingship through solely political lenses, and no political king would do such a reckless thing. Her insult cheapened to the moment and showed that she had no conception of the beauty of the Israelite covenant. The

moment of the arrival of ark was so significant, such a manifestation of the entrance of the glory of the Lord, that David was driven to express his joy in a significant way.

The Covenant with David's House and David's Military Conquests *2 Samuel 7-10, 1 Chronicles 17-19*

There was one thing that still troubled David's heart—that he, "[dwelled] in a house of cedar but the ark of the covenant of the Lord [was] under tent curtains" (1 Chron. 17:1). Through Nathan the prophet, the Lord revealed that David's purpose was not to build the Temple. The Lord followed with a new covenant:

> Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Furthermore I tell you that the LORD will build you a house. And it shall be, when your days are fulfilled, when you must go to be with your fathers, that I will set up your seed after you, who will be of your sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build Me a house, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him, as I took it from him who was before you. And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever." (17:10-14)

The Lord also promised the existence and favor of David's line beyond his own reign. David did not have to worry about the continuance of his house now, for the Lord had promised His favor over David's son.

With an established covenant, David was emboldened to conquer more of the enemies of Israel, evidenced in the psalms written after the covenant, which proclaim:

> The Lord will extend your powerful kingdom from Jerusalem; you will rule over your enemies. When you go to war, your people will serve you willingly. You are arrayed in holy garments, and your strength will be renewed each day like the morning dew. (Ps. 110:2-3)

The great manifestation of the Lord's beauty through the covenant gave David extra zeal to conquer the enemies of Israel. Because his kingdom was now secure both within the people and through the Lord's blessing, he was free to begin pioneering new conquests. This nature—to not sit and maintain but to constantly be developing and spearheading something—is a trait that is and important mark of David. As discussed before, he enjoyed the process of creating something new, and David was at his best and most confident when he was doing so. Thus, David set out to expand the kingdom. For somewhere between six and ten years, David destroyed and subdued the armies of Philistia, Moab, Zobah, Syria, Hamath and Edom, slaying a large number of people and amassing the spoils of the nations unto Israel (2 Sam. 8:1-14; 1 Chron. 18:1-13). The Samuel account of these defeats is much more David-centric, while the Chronicles account credits some of David's mighty men such as Abishai with some of the victories. Either way "the Lord gave David victory everywhere he went" (1 Chron. 18:13).

Even while involved in foreign wars, "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people," on account of the impressive system of government that he established back at home (18:14). In addition to this special band of military men, David had an extensive and structured administration, including Joab,

who was over the army. The officials also consisted of a "recorder"—one who chronicled the operations of the King and the army—a scribe or secretary of state, Zadok and Ahimilech as priests, and his sons who functioned as chief ministers or counselors (2 Sam. 8:15-18; 1 Chron. 18:14-17). David's kingdom was set up with purpose. David knew that he needed an able team around him, but this team was not only made up of the most talented men—it was made of men who were with David before he became king.

The Lord avenged David's suffering—"in my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears" (2 Sam. 22:7)—and brought him up in glory—"the Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands He has recompensed me" (22:21). The Lord's goodness had been tested and found true. David wrote, "As for God, His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him" (22:31).

The two strong aspects of David's character—the poet and the warrior—may seem to be at odds with each other, and for many men they would not be found mixed in the same soul. But for David, his warrior nature was not grounded in love for the carnage and strategy of war. War was another means for achieving justice and honor and glory for Israel, and so once those ends were established or in progress, David was not consumed by war. In other words, for David, enemies were not just enemies of Israel but also enemies of the Living God, because they stood in the way of the Lord's glory in the earth. David's motivations for war made him do things that professional military men, like Joab, would not do because his goal was justice for Israel, not complex strategy and imperial domination.

In the efforts to expand the kingdom of Israel and build its strength, David stretched his hand out in friendship to the new king of Ammon, Hanun, whose father had been kind to David (10:1-2). "So David sent by the hand of his servants to comfort [Hanun] concerning his [father's death]" (10:2). Because Hanun's father had aided David's cause, he had aided the cause of the Lord and was therefore a friend. Since justice requires that good and reward is given to friends, David was able to make this offer.

But David's hand in friendship was refused, and refused in an embarrassing and very public manner. "Hanun took David's servants, shaved off half of their bears, cut off their garments in the middle, at their buttocks, and sent them away" (10:4). Beards were a sign of freedom—only slaves were clean-shaven, and the insult was made even more grievous by the fact that Hanun left half of the beard to show that they had been publicly humiliated.[7] David, concerned for the dignity of his men and the humiliation of Hunan's rejection, told his men to stay in Jericho until they could return with fully-grown beards. The people of Ammon, though, were acquainted with David's power and "when [they] saw that they had made themselves repulsive to David" they hired thirty-two thousand mercenary Syrians and gathered for battle (2 Sam. 10:6; 1 Chron. 19:6). David "sent Joab and all the army of mighty men" to fight the Ammonite and Syrian armies. Joab encouraged Abishai, "Be of good courage, and let us be strong for our people and for the cities of our God. And may the Lord do what is good in His sight" (2 Sam. 10:12; 1 Chron. 19:13). Both armies fled before Joab and Abishai, but they regrouped and attacked again. This time David led the

[7] Guzik, David. *Verse by Verse Commentary: 2 Samuel.* Santa Barbara: Enduring World Media, 1994.

armies out and he defeated the Syrians (2 Sam. 10:13-19; 1 Chron. 19:14-19).

The poet King did not love war, though, and these were not the first set of battles that the Israelites had fought against the Syrians. These were not wars that determined Israel's existence and there was little honor or glory that came with them like the battles that David fought immediately after his covenant was established. If maintaining Israel's established strength was not glorious, could the visionary and builder also be the maintainer and manager? What would David do when he was not creating? As time went on, the wars became a regular part of Israelite life; David was twenty years into his reign (starting with his reign over Israel alone) and had been at war for nearly ten years. In other words, monotony began to set in, and without the able to birth something new, King David was bored.

David and Bathsheba
2 Samuel 11-12

"It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with you, and all Israel"[8] to finish the work with the Ammonites that had begun in 2 Samuel 10 (2 Sam. 11:1). And while the armies of Israel went out to battle "David remained at Jerusalem" (11:1). David was, again, sitting out battles and leaving maintenance to Joab and the army. David's strength as a visionary was also a weakness, for a king has to do the necessitous, or at least has to be content with seasons that are not full of glory.

The King, then, was left with much time on his hands without a project and a task, and "it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house" (11:2). From that root David's eyes beheld a great beauty—Bathsheba bathing on her roof. This was a different type of beauty. And so his eyes wandered looking for beauty, and they locked onto a beautiful woman. She was beautiful externally and beautiful because of her purity and David would never have been allured unless she was both pure and beautiful. David did not tarry to inquire of her identity; he was told that she is the wife of Uriah the Hittite, one of David's mighty men, and seemingly without blinking an eye, David sent for her. The King lay with Bathsheba and then he sent her back to her home.

There was nothing heard from Bathsheba until she realized that she was pregnant which probably meant that for some months David lived with the weight of the situation and did not repent or seek a remedy. Immediately after hearing of Bathsheba's pregnancy David sent for Uriah, and upon his arrival in the palace, David tried to trick him into being intimate with his wife. All of David's efforts failed. In covering up his sin and as his last desperate resort, the great King David did the cruelest of actions—he sent Uriah back to the front-lines, carrying the letter that sealed his fate. David told Joab to place Uriah on the front-lines of the "hottest battle, and retreat from him, that he may be struck down and die." Joab sent Uriah out to "a place where he knew there were valiant men" and Uriah died in battle that day (11:16-17).

Why did David go to such great lengths to cover up his sin—cruel enough to commit murder to avoid being found out? David was aware that the king could not, should not, do what he did. He knew it was injustice, that it served only his selfish desires and did not serve his call to bring glory and honor to the Lord through his position as king. He had used his platform of authority for sinful designs. David had much zeal, and when it was channeled towards building Israel and forwarding the cause of the Lord, it was one of his greatest assets.

[8] 2 Sam. 11:1

His zeal was directed at those things that he believed to be beautiful—that were full of honor and glory. But with no new beautiful thing to set his hand to, David's zeal latched onto the next beautiful thing he saw while wandering about—a pure woman. In the same way that Saul's insecurity became a tyrant over his soul, David's unbridled zeal became his tyrant. It ruled his actions and caused him to act unjustly.

When Bathsheba's time of mourning was over, "David sent and brought her to his house, and she become his wife and bore him a son" (11:27). But despite David's crafty cover-up, "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (11:27). Not long after the murder, the Lord sent Nathan to deal with David. Nathan, not the cantankerous sort of individual that Samuel was, came to David under the guise of being troubled over an unjust situation. He recounted the situation to the King, saying that there were two men living in the same city, one rich and the other a poor. The poor man owed only a little lamb that was "like a daughter to hi[9] while the rich man had an excess of wealth and livestock (12:3). When the rich man had a visitor in his home, the rich man refused to take from his own animals but, rather, decided to take the poor man's only lamb to serve for a meal. The analogy was a smart one on Nathan's part, for he could not have chosen a better story to reach David's heart. David undoubtedly knew the value of the bond between a shepherd and his sheep because it was his post for his youth. David flew into rage in a way that he had not before—"his anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity'" (12:5-6).

[9] 2 Sam. 12:3

David's great outrage at Nathan suggested that he believes justice was violated, but this situation brings out a new aspect of David's justice. There seems to be a significant place in justice for the weak and righteous. David's idea divine justice entailed temporary discomfort but eventual redemption—judgment for the oppressor and reward for the oppressed. David had learned this in the wilderness before he became king. Part of David's call to bring about justice for nation was to be the instrument of justice among the people. Per his reaction to Nathan's story and even in his mercy towards men like Abner, it seems that David has a weak spot for those that he believes to be weak, righteous or poor. David seemed to believe that he was an instrument of guaranteeing justice for those who would not normally receive it.

The weak were the most able to be transformed by the strength of the Lord—they were the most malleable, in a sense—and so their potential for transformation was the greatest. David always had his eye to the potential. Their potential was based on their current status. The weak and poor were in a low place and were thus the best positioned for seeing the beauty of the Lord because His ability to rescue them seemed greater. David had experienced this when the Amalekites raided his camp. Strong and rich men did not need rescuing in tangible ways, which limited their ability to see the beauty of the Lord. Justice for the weak and the poor was a vehicle to elevating them and those around them who witnessed justice. For the righteous, giving them justice was to uphold the very cause of justice itself. Being in a place of authority, David had the ability to bring that justice around as an instrument of the Lord. But David could not defend the weak and righteous that day because he had killed Uriah, as Nathan revealed, "You are the man!" (12:7) and then he spoke the words of the Lord,

> …Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? … Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised Me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will raise up adversity against you from your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, before the sun." (12:7-12)

David responded to the curse upon his household, the first true punishment from the Lord, was to admit his iniquity—"I have sinned against the Lord" (12:13). And Nathan, in return, promised David that the Lord would not hold his sin over him and that he would live, but "because by this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also who is born to you shall surely die" (12:14). David did not try to justify his sin but, rather, knew of the injustice of his actions and acknowledged that his sins were not just against Uriah or Bathsheba, but also against God. Secondly, what is similar between the punishments is that each concerned the house of the kings. David had patriarchal responsibility as king to guard the glory of Israel, as it was a reflection of the goodness and glory of the Lord. David violated the calling of Israel—to be a holy nation—by defiling the palace and the nation with his own actions, a transgression that required the death of the child.

Soon after, "the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had bore to David, and it became ill" (12:15). David pleaded with the Lord for the child. He fasted, would not eat even when encouraged to by the elder, and "lay all night on the ground." David was in agony: "I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long… I am feeble and severely broken; I groan because of the turmoil of my heart" (Ps. 38:6-8). What David struggled with was the not the internal purification, but the reality that sin may result in external consequences, such as the death of the child or the success of Israel's enemies. David could accept punishment for himself, but despaired over the punishment of the child, an innocent human being. He did not refuse punishment altogether because it was a means to becoming holier—"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (51:10). Most of all, David cried out for the Lord to stay close to him. David has gone through seasons in which the Lord was far off—when he could not sense the Lord's beauty, and David's constant request is echoed in the psalms: "Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (51:11).

But on the seventh day, despite David's mourning, the child died. When David realized that the Lord had stayed true to His promise, he "arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped" (12:20). And after he worshiped, the King went to his home and ate a full meal. His servants were perplexed at the seemingly heartless actions of their King and his complete turnaround. David's responded:

> While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?" But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. (12:22)

The process of punishment had righted his injustice and it was now complete. In fact, David wrote joyful psalms when he went to worship the Lord, and their content reveals why David was not wrecked after the death of the child.

> Bless the LORD, O my soul,
> And forget not all His benefits:
> Who forgives all your iniquities,
> Who heals all your diseases,
> Who redeems your life from destruction,
> Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies,
> Who satisfies your mouth with good things,
> So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Ps. 103:1-5)

Beyond the beauty of the completion of the punishment, David was probably renewed in his "youth" because he no longer carried the burden of his sin in secret, shown in Psalm 32: "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer." His injustice had been righted by the process of punishment. Ending this season in David's life, he went in and lay with Bathsheba because she was distraught over the loss of her child, and she bore David a son—Solomon, and "the Lord loved him" (2 Sam. 12:24-25). Though David worshiped with elation, he perhaps forgot about the first part of the curse upon his house, a punishment much graver and difficult to bear.

David's Rebellious Sons
2 Samuel 13-15

Three years later, 2 Samuel 13 opens with the introduction of David's oldest son, the heir-apparent, Amnon and his half-sister, Tamar (who was also Absalom's full sister). Amnon became sick with love over Tamar and through a series of manipulative circumstances, Amnon was able to be alone with Tamar and in that time raped her. Her mourning was public, and when Absalom came to the knowledge of Amnon's transgression he encouraged her to "hold [her] peace… do not take this thing to heart" (13:20). David was also made aware of the transgression and "he was very angry," but neither man took action right away (13:21). Absalom, instead, stored his hatred for Amnon in his heart.

Despite the gravity of Amnon's sin, David did not punish Amnon—not at the time of the incident and not in the two years after it happened, but the text does say that he was very angered by Amnon's actions (13:21). Here, again, was David's soft spot for the weak. He was outraged at the actions of Amnon against his innocent sister but unlike the situation with the poor man, David was not moved to action of any kind. To David, Tamar was righteous but Amnon and Absalom were weak, and his justice protected both. David did not negate the severity of their offenses but recognized that they were caught in a powerful current—the current that the Lord had predicted when He cursed David's house. Their weakness was, in fact, the result of David's own transgressions making them innocent in the eyes of their father, even though their actions grieved him. To punish Amnon would be, in a sense, resisting the justice of the punishment of God. On top of that, Amnon was the eldest son. As a father, David did not want to destroy the unity and love between them—a unity that was already fractured by his own sin with Bathsheba and the consequences of that choice. The difficulty this principle, this justice, was that David was no longer dealing with normal Israelites—he was dealing with the princes of Israel. Did

justice mean that he could not punish family members? Their inclusion in the punishment of the Lord seemed to grant Amnon and Absalom the same protection that the Lord's anointing granted Saul.

While David waited for the punishment of the Lord to play out, Absalom commanded his servants to kill Amnon, encouraging them to be "courageous and valiant. So the servants of Absalom did to Amnon as Absalom had commanded" (13:28-29). The king's sons returned to David's camp and the King and his sons wept greatly. Meanwhile, Absalom fled to Geshur and stayed there for three years. David mourned over Absalom daily and longed to go to Absalom as the harshness of Amnon's death wore off and David's heart longed for reunion with his son (13:34-39). But despite that longing, David did not seek reconciliation with Absalom.

After two years of David's mourning, Joab schemed to convince him to bring Absalom back to the kingdom. After a complex scheme that Joab created to persuade the king, David conceded and told Joab to bring Absalom back to the kingdom but to return him to his own house, that he may not be permitted to be in David's presence (14:24). Joab's reasons for Absalom's return had little to do with sympathy for Absalom or a desire to see redemption in David and Absalom's relationship. Joab was more aware of the security threat that Absalom was becoming while in exile. This was why David needed Joab. David did not know what justice was—if it required inaction or action. He could sense beauty anywhere, and without that compass to guide his decisions, David was immobilized. Disunity within his own family was part of the punishment, but disunity was so loathsome to the poet King. Joab, though, was accustomed to being in the midst of 'dirty' situations. Because Joab had accepted that the world was an ugly place, 'ugliness' did not paralyze him. In fact, Joab probably did not perceive this situation as ugly at all—this was the reality of how the world worked, and his compass for justice was unaffected. While David knew that Joab was right to bring Absalom back, he did not enjoy that truth because it seems to suggest an acceptance of Joab's view of the world.

For two years Absalom stayed in Jerusalem without seeing his father. His rapport with the Israelites was not damaged. In fact, "in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks." Absalom had all the outwardly makings of a King. He boasted a beautiful head of hair, great stature and "there was no blemish on him" (14:25). After two years he grew restless and sent for Joab, but twice Joab refused to come to him. Not one to be refused and probably tired of being the outcast of the palace, Absalom commanded his servants to burn one of Joab's fields for his refusals. Finally Joab responded and came to Absalom, asking, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?" (14:31). Absalom made his request to see David, and Joab communicated his message. Even though Absalom's actions were extreme—almost in the form a tantrum from a child—Joab did not respond in rage because doing so would have been to rashly express his anger. This was a political move—a dirty one—but Joab was a political man and was accustomed to these sorts of interactions because he prepared for the worst.

Through deception, manipulation and schemes, Absalom "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (15:6). At this point in the narrative, the psalms of David reappear—psalms that declared that the Lord would be his defense: "He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved" (Ps. 62:6). But while David waited for the Lord to correct the situation, Absalom deceitfully took two hundred men with him to Hebron, including Ahithophel

"and the conspiracy grew strong, for the people with Absalom continually increased in number" (2 Sam. 15:12).

When David heard that the hearts of his people were being moved to support Absalom, he did what seems like the most submissive thing a victorious King could do—he told his people, "Arise, and let us flee, or we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword" (15:14). And thus, David entered into what is arguably the second of the two lowest points of his life—leaving the city and kingdom that he built from the ground up. David preferred to walk away from his throne than be involved in fracturing the kingdom that he had labored to unite. Because this was part of the Lord's punishment, and because the Lord had said that His favor was on David's line, perhaps this was actually justice for the nation of Israel, even if only for a time.

The exiled King's psalms show his internal conflict. David felt betrayal deeply —"Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me" (Ps. 41:9). He felt great responsibility in the creation of the conflict—"I said, 'Have mercy on me, LORD; heal me, for I have sinned against you'" (41:4). In the midst of his departure, the psalms also seemed to show shreds of faith that the Lord would redeem him in the end for his just act of leaving—"But the king shall rejoice in God; everyone who swears by Him shall glory; but the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped" (63:11). And so David left Jerusalem with all of his servants as well as other groups of people that were loyal to him. Zadok and Abiathar the priests, along with the Levites, even tried to bring the Ark with David, but David commanded them to "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and His dwelling place" (2 Sam. 15:25). But David also left room open for a different outcome —"But if He says thus: 'I have no delight in you,' here I am; let Him do to me as seems good to Him" (15:26). The departing King left the kingdom as whole as possible.

Any form of dissension ate at David's heart. It was ugly, it was dirty and it brought out the worst in men. His heart for unity was connected to, if not wholly rooted in his sense of justice, which is built upon the faith that there is a common good that all share, whether that be all individuals involved in a family or in the nation of Israel. Thus, David's psalms could be somewhat hopeful—David could even see beauty in his exile into the wilderness, yet again, because he could see what the Lord was about. David also trusted that the Lord would restore him because he had fully repented for his transgressions. Absalom's rebellion would bring completion to the consequences for his sin. Again, justice served spiritual ends, as David did not work against the punishment of the Lord, but it also served political ends. If he left the nation whole, he could reenter a whole nation. David also strategically placed his prophets in the city, knowing that they would be loyal to him and could serve as instruments of information and spiritual insight.

"David went up by the Ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot." Grief did not keep David from keeping in touch with his nation. David sent Hushai, a trusted friend, to combat the counsel of Ahithophel and to communicate with Zadok and Abiathar so that they could relay information back to David (15:31-37). David's sorrow ran deep in his soul as he grieved over his nation, his family and his own sin. The cries of David's heart ranged from belief that the Lord would be a shield (Ps. 3:3), to despair over the lack of right-

eousness among the people (Ps. 14), to great distress over the sense of departure of the Lord from his side—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?" (22:1). Even if divine justice meant his own suffering, David still revered its purposes, and even in his darkest hour he did not doubt that the Lord was great and good; the King only doubted whether or not the Lord's goodness was on his side any longer.

David's waning confidence was evidenced on his journey into the wilderness when Shimei, one of Saul's kin, cursed David openly:

> You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! The Lord has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man! (16:7-8)

Though David's men readied to kill the man, David responded, "What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David.' Who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'" (16:10). David turned to the rest of his servants and declared, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite?" (16:11). David no longer knew who was part of the Lord's purposes, making it difficult to judge who the Lord's hand was upon, and thus, he could not let his men kill Shimei.

Absalom Pursues David
2 Samuel 17-18

Absalom, in the meantime, moved into Jerusalem and occupied the city. Through the advice of Ahithophel and Hushai, Absalom decided to pursue his father, but not before Hushai alerted Zadok and Abiathar (who alerted David) of the prince's plans. Absalom pursued his father across the Jordan river outside of Israelite land (2 Sam. 17). Though he worked to ready his men for battle, David's people kept him from engaging in the fight as they cried,

> You shall not go out! For if we flee away, they will not care about us; nor if all of us die, will they care about us. But you are worth ten thousand of us now. For you are now more help to us in the city. (18:3)

The people had able military commanders in Joab, Abishai and Ittai, but outside of the city and in exile, David was now the hope of Israel. David accepted their request without challenge—"Whatever seems best to you I will do" (18:4).

This was a battle that the King was willing to sit out. The circumstances—Israelite against Israelite, father against son—grieved his soul greatly, evidenced through his psalms.[10] "My tears have been my food day and night while they continually say to me, 'Where is your God?'" (Ps. 42:3). "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" (42:5). His soul dwelled in darkness—"fearfulness and trembling have come upon

[10] David wrote many psalms at this time—perhaps the greatest number written in one particular time period. These included: Psalm 42; Psalm 43; Psalm 55; Psalm 71; Psalm 28; Psalm 143; Psalm 40; Psalm 70; Psalm 27; Psalm 69; Psalm 120; and Psalm 121.

me, and horror has overwhelmed me" (55:5)—because the King was unable to see beauty or the goodness of God anywhere. Absalom was David's son, his political enemy but perhaps he was also the instrument of God's judgment. David was paralyzed. Though justice always served both political and spiritual ends for David, there seemed to be a fracture in that system. Justice may have demanded that he allow God's punishment to be carried out, but that meant that an unwise prince would have authority over God's chosen nation. How was that justice for Israel? Did David have any place in that purpose any longer? Internally conflicted, David gave Abishai, Ittai and Joab special instructions when they went into battle—"Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (2 Sam. 18:5). David had to protect Absalom as his son and potentially as the next ruler of Israel.

On his way out to meet David's servants, Absalom rode his mule underneath trees "and his head caught in the terebinth" (18:9). One of Joab's servants found out about Absalom's vulnerable position and told his master, aware that David had said to be merciful to Absalom. Joab had harbored grudges and was finally given the opportunity to eliminate the man who had been a great source of dissension for years. The cold military captain decidedly rid Israel of the man he believed was David's great enemy, but Joab did not do so on his own. Joab "took three spears in his hand and thrust them through Absalom's heart, while he was still alive…and ten young men who bore Joab's armor surrounded Absalom, and struck and killed him" (18:14-15). With that, the Israelites all went back to their tents, for the fight was over.

Joab was afraid of suffering. It was easier, emotionally, to bottle up offenses and allow them to turn into hatred than to work through hurt and have to extend mercy or redemption. Why was suffering something that Joab avoided and David embraced? Joab could not let himself deal with suffering because he believed that suffering equated to a lack of self-sufficiency, and he could not be without his self-sufficiency in a cold, cruel world. His ability to make his world secure was all that he had to hold onto because men were inconsistent and savage. Love, redemption and hope were risks and could only be birthed out of situations of pain and offense, all of which Joab avoided. Again, all of these limitations were founded in Joab's conception of the world. Because David knew that the God of Israel was a living, good God who was on the side of the Israelites. Unless Joab could be convinced that God was good and that there was more than evil in the world, he would never be able to operate outside of this coldness and his justice would always be harsh acts of power against all-to-easily classified enemies.

Joab chose in moments of offense, such as when Absalom burned his fields, to internalize his anger rather than openly display it. That moment of restraint was not based on strength of character; it was, in fact, rooted in Joab's awareness of his weakness and his fear of suffering. As discussed before, waiting for a moment of weakness in his enemy made Joab's world safer than if he dealt with his offenses immediately. When he experienced anger, Joab stopped, calculated whether or not he could get away with revenge, decided that there would be a more advantageous way of exacting revenge at a later time, and gathered the resources or schemes to make that revenge possible. The internalized hatred necessitated holding on to offenses and often deviates into involving others in the hatred or revenge, for what better way is there to hold onto an offense than by gathering a whole group to brood on the hatred. This was why Joab did not just kill Absalom while they were alone. He

brutally murdered him and involved his own men in the slaughter. There was some sort of safety in numbers as well as a natural tendency for haters to involve others in their hate. If others were on Joab's side and just as involved in the murder, Joab was not alone in the gruesome nature of the act.

If Joab had gone to kill Absalom on his own, he would have to confront the meanness of his actions and possibly have to face redemption if that meanness results in compassion. If he had approached the Prince alone, he might have been internally conflicted, knowing that, even if he believed it was a just act, the murder would ruin David. Determining enemies and friends would have been more difficult if he had gone alone; it would have been easier to question whether or not the murder was actually just according to his standards. Hatred was easier to hold on to if ten other people around him join in the experience.

Justice for Joab's enemies was incredibly harsh and cruel, another aspect of his character was rooted in that internalized hatred and desire for power. Because the world was a horrible, ruthless place it was always engaged in a constant struggle for power, and Joab's moment of revenge was a full restoration of his power against an enemy who had offended him and his King for years. In a moment of revenge, the victim recognizes his own weakness—recognizes the power of the avenger. Joab was given to acts that displayed his power because power was a product of his own self-sufficiency and ability to make his realm secure. This is contrasted with David's sense of justice, which was always aimed at glory rather than power.

Joab tried to be careful with the messengers that he sent back to David to report Absalom's death, but no care could have kept David from the great sorrow that rocked his soul. He "went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went, he said thus: 'O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I have died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!" (18:13). David viewed his son as a victim to his own sin. The justice of this situation in carrying out the punishment was so ugly to the lover King. Absalom's actions, despite being weak, were also ugly as he spurred on a battle that pitted Israelite against Israelite, a great fracture of the unity that David's heart longed for and that his reign had created. Beyond David's sorrow over Absalom, there was also ugliness found in Joab's disobedience and scheming.

Unable to see the Lord's presence anywhere, David cried out to the Lord asking where He is in all of this. Psalm 10, written during David's despair, gives voice to this sadness—"Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide in times of trouble?" But the rest of the psalm chastises the wicked man that preys on the poor man, a great oration on the fault that David found in Joab.

> The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor… The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thought… He has said in his heart, "I shall not be moved; I shall never be in adversity"… He lies in wait secretly, as a lion in his den; He lies in wait to catch the poor;… He has said in his heart, "God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see."

David concluded this psalm by making a request of the Lord to "break the arm of the wicked and the evil man," a revelation that David was completely angered over Joab's sin, even if it was meant to secure David's own reign (Ps. 10:15). David knew Joab's great fault in his emphasis on self-sufficiency that stemmed from an inability to trust God. That insecurity was the root of

Joab's 'wickedness' and the catalyst for his calculating, cold nature and the cause of the ever-deepening chasm between the military commander and his King. David's song of sorrow concluded with a prompt that the Lord had heard all of David's heart and had prepared him "to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed," a reflection of his desire to see justice reign in the kingdom once again (10:18).

David Restored as King
2 Samuel 19-20

David reentered Jerusalem nearly a year after leaving voluntarily and approximately thirty-three years after he first became king. The victory of David's people turned into a shared time of sorrow when they heard that David was not triumphant but deeply grieved over Absalom "and the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle" (19:3). While they felt victory, they knew that their King felt sorrow, and that difference was the cause for their lack of jubilation. But should the people feel shame in their victory? Was it just for David to create a culture of shame instead of victory? Joab recognized this dissension. He knew the people wanted jubilation as they reentered the city, and to Joab, it was a necessary rejoicing in the renewed security of David's position as King. David was doing a great injustice to his friends by continuing to publicly mourn. Beyond that, David's sorrow failed to recognize the sacrifice of his people and lacked any sense of gratitude for their willingness to follow him into the wilderness.

Even after the people came into the city, David's grief continued as he "cried out with a loud voice, 'O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" (19:4). Joab approached the king in his household with strong words.

> Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life [and the lives of your loved ones] in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now. (19:5-7)

Before, David's personal life and personal experiences of emotions—when he danced in front of the ark, for example—all aided the people in understanding the glory of the Lord. His situation was different now, as he had to mend a nation that had been divided. The sorrow of the situation made it difficult for David to focus on justice for nation because he was so consumed with grief. While Joab's understanding of what would be just for the nation was quite different than David's, he was at least concerned with the people as a whole.

Joab reproached him on the basis that the men he was punishing were friends because they aided David in re-securing his reign. Even though David did not operate within justice according to those definitions, he heeded Joab's reproach but did not respond to him. The ends seemed purely political to David and perhaps even necessitous—these were the necessary political moves that he had to make even if they did not reflect his heart, and that was a path that was very difficult to David to walk. Before,

his heart was already full in whatever was just. That was fractured by the situation with Absalom. Eventually David understood that he had to focus on the entire nation, and this was what motivated him to come to his people: "Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together…For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, 'Peace be within you'" (Ps. 122:3, 8).

David had been reminded of the cause of unity in the city, the beauty of Israel, but appearing before the people at the gate was only the beginning of his work. David had to reunite the members of the Israelite family, as the elders of Judah did not welcome him in with open arms. "He swayed the hearts of all the men in Judah, just as the heart of one man," for David knew that hearts could not be commanded or won but swayed (2 Sam. 19:14). David also had to appeal to Amasa, the man in charge of Absalom's army, and did so by making a grand gesture by giving him Joab's position as commander of the armies. David had to preserve this beauty and unity, even against men like Abishai, who asked to kill Shimei when he came to David to ask for forgiveness. Again David had to correct Abishai—"Shall any man be put to death today in Israel? For do I not know that today I am king in Israel?" (19:22). It would have been unjust to execute Shimei because it did not forward the cause of reunification in Israel. David's reign had been secured once again and Abishai did not have to war for it any longer. This was the problem with the sons of Zeruaiah. War was not a means to an end of justice for the nation of Israel through glory and honor. These sons were constantly at war, and that was a problem for David. His psalms expressed a renewed confidence in that truth that the Lord had restored him to his kingship and that he had been renewed in his anointing as King. His doubt over his righteousness seemed to wane a bit, for he felt in his heart that "[he had] been anointed with fresh oil" and that his strength had been renewed (Ps. 92:10).

David still had to settle internal disputes, as a man from the tribe of Benjamin named Sheba raised a rebellion in the same year that David was restored to the throne (2 Sam. 19:40-43; 20:1-2). When Amasa failed to complete his job as commander, David sent Abishai, saying: "Now Sheba the son of Bichri will do us more harm than Absalom. Take your lord's servants and pursue him, lest he find for himself fortified cities, and escape us" (20:6). David believed Sheba to be more troubling because there was no way that he was part of God's plan for Israel, unlike Absalom's insurrection. Even though David was more willing to classify Sheba in this way, David did not go out into battle, possibly suggesting that he still had difficulty stomaching a fight of Israelite against Israelite. The other possibility is that he knew that Joab and Abishai would have to be ruthless—he needed them to take care of the problem—and David could no longer stomach that reality either.

In pursuit of Sheba and his rebellion, David's mighty men, including Joab, came to a field and there met Amasa, the failed commander. As he went to kiss Amasa in deceit, Joab thrust his sword through Amasa's stomach and killed him in front of the entire army, exacting justice against another enemy (20:7-11). Joab had become an even greater liability to David as he held the attention of all the soldiers during his ruthless acts. It is also possible that Joab had become more frustrated with David, who seemed to be unable to take care of his kingdom in the way that Joab saw fit, and as his frustration grew, so did the ruthlessness of his actions. When they arrived at the place where Sheba had gathered his men was willing to give Sheba up rather than feel the wrath of Joab's armies (20:14-21). Joab

returned to the King with Sheba's head, triumphant and powerful (20:22).

In the years following Sheba's rebellion that fragility did not go away as famine swept through the land. Reconnected with the Lord, David inquired for His direction for the first time since 2 Samuel 5 according to the text. The Lord revealed that the famine was caused by Saul's sin of killing the Gibeonites unjustly. To atone for the old wound, David had to sacrifice seven of Saul's sons (21:1-9). The sacrifice was just because it upheld the higher ends that Israel was called to and because the Lord had given him a platform for the action (21:11-14). It was also at this time that the Israelites met their old foes the Philistines on the battlefield, and David's men gave their last strong refusal of his involvement. David had reached old age and his men promised that "[he] shall go out no more with [them] into battle, lest [he] quench the lamp of Israel" (21:17).

Census
2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21, 27

Tensions were high between Joab and David. Israel was fragile, having just survived civil wars and famine. Three years after Sheba's rebellion the narrative moves to 2 Samuel 24, which opens with a strong statement: "Again the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah'" (24:1). The Chronicles account, though, says something different: "Now Satan stood up against Israel, and moved David to number Israel" (1 Chron. 21:1). Because of the Lord's response to David's census, it would seem that the Chronicles account would be the most accurate, especially considering that in Exodus 30:12 the Law says, "When you take the census of the Israelites, every man shall give a ransom for himself to the Lord when you number them, that no plague may fall upon them when you number them." Why did David make a complete departure from the Law, especially since the Law always held up as justice against David's decisions? The census gave him a number of his soldiers—an account of his own strength as King. It is again possible that David became bored or that he was frustrated enough with Joab that he decided to involve himself in matters of the army.

Joab objected, "Now may the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" (2 Sam. 24:3). Joab was angered by the census because it gave David some control in the army, an arena that Joab did not seem to believe that David could manage. In the situation with Absalom, Joab suggested that David did not know how to army because he had the wrong notion of friends and enemies. And in addition to not wanting David to control his realm, Joab also suggested that the census was harming friends by taxing and burdening the people. The census was also taxing to Joab's army, as they had to travel for many months to conduct the survey. Joab also seemed to allude to David's pride by promising him that the Lord would multiply the army. David was the instrument of the Lord's work in Israel and as long as his zeal stayed subservient to that purpose. Perhaps his zeal was once again unbridled, leaving it open to prideful purposes. "Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army." The census took "nine months and twenty days" to complete, although complete is a relative term here because "[Joab] did not count Levi and Benjamin among them, for the king's word was abominable to Joab" (2 Sam. 24:8; 1 Chron. 21:6).

Before the census was completed, the Lord sent judgment against David and Israel (1 Chron. 27:23-24). David had once again used kingly authority for selfish ends, whether the ends were to know his own strength or to retaliate to some degree against Joab. David's sin with Bathsheba gave "great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme [Israel]" (2 Sam. 11:14). This sin hurt all the Israelites and violated the Law. David knew his injustice and repented, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly" (2 Sam. 24:10). For the first time in David's life, the Lord chose not to communicate to him directly when he repented. Instead, He brought David a choice through the prophet Gad:

> Thus says the LORD: "Choose for yourself, either three years of famine, or three months to be defeated by your foes with the sword of your enemies overtaking you, or else for three days the sword of the LORD—the plague in the land, with the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the territory of Israel." Now consider what answer I should take back to Him who sent me. (1 Chron. 21:11-12)

The severity, the harshness of the curse was that its fulfillment did not only affect David or his house—it affected the entire nation. No single option could be chosen without the creation of suffering for his people though each option targeted different groups of people. The wealthy could withstand famine; the army would be the victim of the second; the third could affect every household.[11] There was no way for David to escape the anger of his people as well as the anger of God, and David told Gad: "I am in great distress. Please let me fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are very great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man" (1 Chron. 21:13).

David's decision was to subject his nation and his household to the third option—the only option that was not carried out by men but by the hands of the Lord. In choosing the third option, David did not save any specific group nor did he subject any certain group to punishment, a smart move but also a move of vulnerability. Perhaps it was the most just option, for had he chosen the first two, David could have known how to guard his own house and himself; the third option left his house as vulnerable as the rest. Choosing the third also left the punishment wholly to divine justice—a justice that David trusted more than the justice of other men. There was a greater possibility that the Lord would be merciful.

The Lord sent an angel to exact the punishment and 70,000 men died in Israel; however, the Lord stopped the angel before he moved over Jerusalem, and the angel was stopped at the threshing floor of Aruanah (2 Sam. 24:15-16; 1 Chron. 21:14-15). At the Lord's relent, David cried out for mercy: "Surely I have sinned, and I have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand, I pray, be against me and my father's house" (2 Sam. 24:17). David ached as the shepherd of his people. His sin had already caused the death of his sons and had now caused the death of the very men he was supposed to protect and lead to holiness. Divine justice was harsh because David had greater responsibility in that role and had violated that position.

David again asked that the curse be limited to himself or his house and, yet again, the Lord did not answer David directly, but sent Gad to deliver His answer—that David was to build an altar on the threshing floor. The altar would serve as a

[11] Guzik, *Verse by Verse Commentary: 2 Samuel.*

permanent reminder of the Lord's mercy but in response to David's sin. On the altar David "offered peace offerings and burnt offerings"—peace offerings to enjoy communion with the Lord and burnt offerings to atone for his sin (Lev. 3:1; 1:4). Again, as the creator, David knew that he was setting the tone for that place, and he set the altar up as a site of worship and in doing so, David planted the seeds for the work of the temple to grow. A place that was founded out of suffering could be a place of joy, for David knew the two often worked in tandem on that journey towards holiness.

Even though David was able to plant seeds for the great work of the Temple, and even though the Lord had been merciful, "David could not go before it to inquire of God, for he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord" (2 Chron. 21:30). A sense of fear reigned in David's heart—fear of divine justice. David had always believed that he knew what justice for the nation was, but how could divine justice necessitate the killing of thousands of Israelites, the death of princes and famine across the land? Though he had always been confident that he was securely in the Lord's purposes, David lost that confidence little by little from the time of Bathsheba, and was now without the connection to the Lord that was his lifeline for so long. His pride and sin had severed that holy connection. And despite his fear, his psalms sing the praises of the goodness of the Lord (Ps. 33; 30). In the Lord's mercy David could still find beauty; in his old age, even after being ruined, David never lost sight of the Lord's goodness—the mark of his greatness.

Adonijah and Solomon
1 Kings 1

"Now King David was old, advanced in years"—nearly 70 years old—and seemingly sick, for "he could not get warm" (1 Kings 1:1). Even on his deathbed and only a year after the census, David still had to deal with unruly, ambitious sons whom, the 1 Kings account says, he would not discipline or rebuke (1 Kings 1:6). Adonijah, the younger brother of Absalom, raised an army for himself, an army that included David's great military commander, Joab. He, along with Abiathar, were the only men that followed Adonijah out of David's faithful; Nathan, Zadok, Benaiah, and even Shimei remained with the ailing King (1 Kings 1:8).

Joab's switch of allegiances is not surprising when his goals are considered. It was a just move because justice had to do with security through friends and enemies, and David had potentially moved to the 'enemies' camp. First, Joab was angry with David—they had not agreed on much possibly since the incident with Bathsheba. Secondly, his move was one of fortifying his own power and security. Ensuring the success of David's reign had always also ensured his own security; as David's strength increased, so did Joab's. Now David was old in age and his reign was reaching its twilight season. Joab's best option for ensured continued power was to catch the next rising son.

Through acts of persuasion, Nathan and Bathsheba were able to convince David to make Solomon king immediately. They reminded him that he had meant for Solomon to be king even though he was not, by age, the next in line. David took an oath to make Solomon the king because he had made an oath to the Lord earlier in his life (1 Kings 1:11-30). By giving the people a new

King to follow, David had begun the work of quelling Adonijah's rebellion.

> Then Zadok the priest took a horn of oil from the tabernacle and anointed Solomon. And they blew the horn, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him; and the people played the flutes and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth seemed to split with their sound. (1 Kings 1:39-40)

David knew that his heir would have to govern in a different season. The kingdom was secure and strong, its enemies mostly taken care of or able to be conquered if necessary, and the general structure of the nation was generally in place. The man who followed David would have to be a maintainer with a willingness to create because this was to be the builder of the Temple. His heir would be, in effect, the inverse of his own reign, as David was nearly solely the creator and very seldom the maintainer (and when he was he found trouble). The next King would have to be more concerned with judicial matters than executive ones—Solomon's strong suit, as is seen later in his life. Justice for the nation was not to follow form and allow the eldest son to be King; justice was served to the nation only if its best interests were protected through a handpicked prince a heart for the nation.

While David made his choice for the third King of Israel, Adonijah's men were supping outside the city when Joab heard the loud noises of the people celebrating Solomon's coronation. As Abiathar's son recounted the anointing of Solomon, the elation of the people and David's abdication of the throne, all of Adonijah's supporters "were afraid, and arose, and each one went on his way" (1 Kings 1:49).

End of David's Reign
1 Chronicles 22-28, 2 Samuel 23, 1 Kings 2

When David had erected the altar at the threshing floor, it was as close as he could come to building the Temple. Per the word of Moses in Exodus 30, David believed that that was the place for the location of the Temple and he not only set the location for the Temple, but also gathered all the materials and set all the guidelines for its creation. David justified his preparations by suggesting that "Solomon…[was] young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord must be exceedingly magnificent, famous and glorious throughout all countries. I will now make preparation for it" (1 Chron. 22:5). Perhaps Solomon would not have been on the throne as early as he was if David did not have to deal with Adonjiah. In that case, David's move was political enough that it left Israel with a 'green' King; perhaps David did not trust his ability to make the Temple great. On the other hand, David may have made full peace with the idea that he could not build the Temple and had settled with the fact that his involvement was only to go so far as to prepare the way for Solomon. In doing so, David set up roles, positions, schedules and duties for the Temple before handing the plans to his son (1 Chron. 23:2-6, 24-31; 24-26; 28:11-21).

David gathered all the great men of Israel—all the leaders of the tribes, the elders, the military leaders and the people, to declare that Solomon was the anointed one and the man to complete what David could not.

> "His name shall be Solomon, for I will give peace and quietness to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for My name, and he shall be My son, and I will be his Father; and

> I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever." Now, my son, may the Lord be with you; and may you prosper, and build the house of the Lord your God, as He has said to you. Only may the Lord give you wisdom and understanding, and give you charge concerning Israel, that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. Then you will prosper, if you take care to fulfill the statutes and judgments with which the Lord charged Moses concerning Israel. Be strong and of good courage; do not fear nor be dismayed. (22:9-13)

David knew that, above all, the Law would have to be the compass for Solomon's life, and that the Law would play a different role in Solomon's kingdom than it had for David.

David swelled with pride and joy as the people willingly joined in the work of the Temple and accepted Solomon as their King (29:9-19). Unity had not been lost in the transition, a sign that this was the correct decision. David's last psalm, recorded in 2 Samuel 23, spoke of justice and the fear of God as a necessary cornerstone for Solomon's reign. But the last Davidic psalm also included a peculiar statement concerning David's family: "Although my house is not so with God, yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure" (2 Sam. 23:5). There is much scholarly debate over that statement, as some believe that the translation is "Truly my house is right with God"[12] or even a rhetorical "For does not my house stand so with God?"[13] The differences in translation would suggest a difference in David's perspective of his house, but they all suggest that David knew the Lord would preserve his line per the covenant given to him, even if he was unsure of the position that his leadership had left it in.

Before he died David gave one last set of instructions to Solomon to help him navigate through the perils and possibilities of the kingship:

> And keep the charge of the LORD your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn… (1 Kings 2:3)

The old King's very last words were not of encouragement concerning the Lord's ways. David had to keep a promise and rid Solomon of two great problems. The promise was kept to Barzillai, a man who had shown David great generosity after he reentered Jerusalem (2 Sam. 19:31-39). In his old age David was finally able to voice some of his greatest offenses. Initially after David had come back into Jerusalem, he granted Shimei pardon because he could not bear to shed any more Israelite blood. But now the old King was desirous of squaring away that old offense.

For the first time David ordered the execution of two Israelites for offenses of the past or the threat of their character in the future. His sense of justice was again harsher, harkening back to his decisions when he was in the wilderness and disconnected from the Lord. His decisions then were aimed at making his reign more possible as he defeated enemies of Israel and concerned himself with his own survival. In these decisions, he may have believed them to be just because he believed he was preserving Solomon, the next anointed ruler,

[12] Anderson, Arnold Albert. *World Biblical Commentary: 2 Samuel*. Dallas: World Books, 1989.
[13] *The Holy Bible*. English Standard Version.

in some way. With an eye always to the greater goal, David was concerned for Solomon's ability to reign. Solomon may have been wise but he did not know war, which gave David reasons to be a bit fearful that he was wise but not strong. This was a perception that could have been shared by others in the kingdom that may have Solomon as weak and impressionable, and, thus, executing these two men was also a power play to show that Solomon was also a strong leader. This is the first purpose of the executions.

But why did David choose to execute Joab and Shimei? With Shimei, the answer seems to be twofold. First, David's sense of justice when disconnected from the Lord always left room for his pride. The situation with Shimei can be paralleled with one that happened much earlier in David's life—Nabal. David nearly killed Nabal's entire camp because Nabal had insulted him and his pride. It was not wholly outside of David's character to believe that this was justice, but it does seem like a departure. At this point in David's life following the census and the aftermath of the rebellions, David was no longer as connected to the Lord and thus, the beauty that operationalized his magnanimous justice was lost, uncertain or intermittent. This gave justice more leeway to be based on a more ordinary political view of friends and enemies. Shimei's death could be advantageous for Solomon's perceived strength and could be the fulfillment of personal justice for David.

Joab, on the other hand, was a case much closer to David's heart. He was the man that had helped build the city, the man who defended David against his greatest enemies, the man who had slain David's son, and the man who had defected to Adonijah's cause when it seemed to be advantageous. David's great problem with Joab was that his justice was determined by war because Joab did not know how to not be at war. Solomon could not "let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace" because Joab had killed Abner and Amasa "and… shed the blood of war in peacetime" (1 Kings 2:5-6). In addition, Joab was a soul unwilling to change, hardened to the ways of the Lord and consistently willing to forgo instruction and teaching. Doubting that Solomon was strong enough to withstand such a character, there was also a certain responsibility that David felt in ridding Solomon of a problem that he had created. David knew that Solomon's reign was to be a reign of peace and Joab was simply too great a liability—he would not know how to function in a time of peace because his worldview demanded that he was constantly at war. In this way, Joab would be an enemy of the cause of Israel and therefore an enemy to the purposes of the Lord.

Having given Solomon those last instructions—to uphold the Law and take care of those problematic men—King David's reign in Israel was complete. The great king of Israel, the creator of the kingdom, "died in a good old age, full of days and riches and honor" (1 Chron. 29:1).

Conclusion

Why was David so great? Was it because he loved extravagantly or because he sinned and was not ruined? Was it because he could balance politics and piety? David knew that the Law, justice and the mercy that flowed from practicing them were not just rituals but means to come into something greater. David had a great vision of the purpose of his nation and, free of worry about self-preservation for security's sake, he was able to give of himself to move his nation closer to that greater end. Justice was not simply a means of making pragmatic decisions but a means of teaching men

to see the common good that they shared as Israelites.

What seems to be the most fundamental foundation stone for that magnanimity, that great sense of justice was David's ability to see that common good and the constant promise of some good thing. Without that understanding, Saul saw more enemies than friends and scrambled to retain his authority, tyrannized by his fear. Without that understanding, Joab built walls around his heart and soul in order to make his existence safer and more secure. These two men missed out on the greater things that life had to offer them—love, redemption, mercy, holiness—for the sake of staking their lives in the realm of supposed safety. That sort of living kept them focused on their own world, though. They would never change anyone else for the better because they had to be focused on making their existence safe. But David knew better. He knew that his life was part of a bigger picture and that he could move the nation towards something much greater than what they had imagined for themselves. He could not stand the injustice of Israel living in such a meager, miserable way, content to look like all other nations and concern themselves only with the tangible, temporary things in life in lieu of achieving the greatness, the holiness, the distinguished greatness that they were built for.

The greatness of David was that he knew that justice actually often demanded an extension of mercy and redemption; it necessitated a willingness to be firm while remaining true to his understanding of their covenant and anointing; it required suffering and a willingness to sacrifice his own political career if it meant that the Law or the glory of the Lord was upheld; and it imposed protection of the weak and the righteous. Seeking that justice was always greater than seeking personal advantage, even if meant taking great risk. After all, David knew that if he never risked anything, he would never know or help realize the potential greatness lying dormant in the great nation of Israel, and that was the premise for some of his final words in his final psalm, spoken to him by the Lord: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God" (2 Sam. 23:3).