

# The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 3

## Monday, March 28th: 2 Samuel 1

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Saul, David returned from striking down the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days. <sup>2</sup> On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor.

<sup>3</sup> "Where have you come from?" David asked him.

He answered, "I have escaped from the Israelite camp."

<sup>4</sup> "What happened?" David asked. "Tell me."

"The men fled from the battle," he replied. "Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

<sup>5</sup> Then David said to the young man who brought him the report, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

<sup>6</sup> "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit. <sup>7</sup> When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?'

<sup>8</sup> "He asked me, 'Who are you?'

"An Amalekite," I answered.

<sup>9</sup> "Then he said to me, 'Stand here by me and kill me! I'm in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'

<sup>10</sup> "So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord."

<sup>11</sup> Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. <sup>12</sup> They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

<sup>13</sup> David said to the young man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite," he answered.

<sup>14</sup> David asked him, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?"

<sup>15</sup> Then David called one of his men and said, "Go, strike him down!" So he struck him down, and he died. <sup>16</sup> For David had said to him, "Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the LORD's anointed.'"

<sup>17</sup> David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, <sup>18</sup> and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

<sup>19</sup> "A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel.

How the mighty have fallen!

<sup>20</sup> "Tell it not in Gath,

proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,

lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad,

lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.

<sup>21</sup> "Mountains of Gilboa,

may you have neither dew nor rain,

may no showers fall on your terraced fields.

For there the shield of the mighty was despised,

the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil.

<sup>22</sup> "From the blood of the slain,

from the flesh of the mighty,

the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,

the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

<sup>23</sup> Saul and Jonathan—

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in life they were loved and admired,  
and in death they were not parted.  
They were swifter than eagles,  
they were stronger than lions.  
<sup>24</sup> “Daughters of Israel,  
weep for Saul,  
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,  
who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.  
<sup>25</sup> “How the mighty have fallen in battle!  
Jonathan lies slain on your heights.  
<sup>26</sup> I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;  
you were very dear to me.  
Your love for me was wonderful,  
more wonderful than that of women.  
<sup>27</sup> “How the mighty have fallen!  
The weapons of war have perished!”

## Points of Interest:

- ‘David returned from striking down the Amalekites’--as you may remember, the Philistine kings, uncertain of David’s loyalties, send David home to Ziklag from their war with Saul. When David gets there, he discovers that the Amalekites have taken advantage of the fact that the Philistines and the Israelites are focused on one another by raiding both Israel and Philistia, including David’s own town Ziklag. David, of course, sets off in hot pursuit.
- ‘he fell to the ground to pay him honor’--the man is saluting David as his new king.
- ‘I stood beside him and killed him’--this is the very kind of thing Saul was hoping to avoid by falling on his own sword: some no-name soldier being able to claim that he was the one to kill Saul. As it turns out, it still happens; and it’s one of his own soldiers, not a Philistine, who does it. The man simply lies, and since most everyone actually around Saul at the time died in battle, it would be difficult to find anyone to contradict him.
- ‘I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm’--he must have come across Saul’s body on the battlefield before the Philistines get to it. He figures that Saul is already dead-- there’s nothing he can do about that--but he can use the situation to gain favor with his likely successor. He’s a mercenary after all, suddenly now unemployed. Here’s a good chance to keep his job and maybe even get a promotion in the new regime.
- ‘Why weren’t you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?’--things don’t work out quite like this Amalekite imagines. David has twice passed up the opportunity to kill Saul himself, despite the fact that David’s very life was at stake. He doesn’t take kindly to this man proudly claiming to have killed his own king in the middle of battle.
- ‘Your own mouth testified against you’--this man has condemned himself as a murderer, by confessing to a murder he didn’t even commit. His greed and opportunism end up getting him executed.
- ‘he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament’--all the trouble between Saul and David began when a song starring David hit the top of the charts. David’s parting gift to Saul is

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to write Saul his own song. It becomes a sort of national anthem, and Saul becomes the hero in death that he so desperately wanted to be in life.

- ‘and in death they were not parted’—Saul and Jonathan didn’t have the easiest relationship, sharply divided as they were over how to treat David. But they die side by side, fellow warriors, father and son.
- ‘Your love for me was wonderful’—while so many people, Saul most particularly, were wrapped up in the controversy over which one of them would succeed Saul, Jonathan and David never concerned themselves with that question. You get the feeling that either one of them would have happily deferred to the other. They simply wanted the best for one another, and for Israel. It’s a pity that Saul’s animosity got in the way of such a strong partnership ever reaching its full potential.

## Taking it home

- For you: David and his men take time to mourn the death of Saul, even creating a song as a way to pay tribute to the former king. Taking time to grieve doesn’t often make it to the top of our to-do list. It takes time we don’t ever quite seem to have; and it forces us to face the pain in our life, which few of us really likes doing. What is something in your life that you need to take time to mourn? It might be the loss of a family member or friend, the loss of a job, the ending of a relationship, or the dashing of a hope or dream. Take time to do that today, maybe even doing something special like David did to pay tribute to the one you’ve lost. Ask God to be close to you during the process of grieving, comforting you in feelings of sadness and pain.
- For your six: The poor Amalekite doesn’t seem to know what he’s getting himself into when he takes Saul’s crown. Finding himself in a crisis situation, he makes a decision quickly that, at least in his mind, seems like it could work; it spectacularly doesn’t. Ask God to protect your six in their decision-making. Pray that God would protect them from making rash decisions that might appear logical but in the end will cause them harm.
- For our church: Pray that our church could somehow play a part in inspiring the songs that captivate our country. People all over the world listen to the tunes produced by Katy Perry, Eminem, and the Black-Eyed Peas—and good for them. But sometimes a different sort of song is necessary; it’s hard to imagine Katy coming up with something like David’s song, which so powerfully set the tone for responding to Saul’s death and so helpfully interpreted the circumstances in which the nation found itself. Ask God to influence and inspire songs in our time and culture that would similarly infuse people with deep hope and a sense of purpose.
- For families: Talk about people, things, or relationships you have lost. Sometimes crying or being sad seems like a hard thing to do, but the Bible says that we are blessed when we mourn for things we have lost, and that God himself is with us while we are sad. Have you done anything special to mourn the loss of someone or something? How did that go? If you have not, spend some time today talking about what you could do to grieve.

## Tuesday, March 29th: 2 Samuel 2

<sup>1</sup> In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked.

The LORD said, “Go up.”

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David asked, “Where shall I go?”

“To Hebron,” the LORD answered.

<sup>2</sup> So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. <sup>3</sup> David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. <sup>4</sup> Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When David was told that it was the men from Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, <sup>5</sup> he sent messengers to them to say to them, “The LORD bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. <sup>6</sup> May the LORD now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. <sup>7</sup> Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”

<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. <sup>9</sup> He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel.

<sup>10</sup> Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The house of Judah, however, remained loyal to David. <sup>11</sup> The length of time David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

<sup>12</sup> Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. <sup>13</sup> Joab son of Zeruiah and David’s men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side.

<sup>14</sup> Then Abner said to Joab, “Let’s have some of the soldiers get up and fight hand to hand in front of us.” “All right, let them do it,” Joab said.

<sup>15</sup> So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. <sup>16</sup> Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent’s side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim.

<sup>17</sup> The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the Israelites were defeated by David’s men.

<sup>18</sup> The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. <sup>19</sup> He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. <sup>20</sup> Abner looked behind him and asked, “Is that you, Asahel?”

“It is,” he answered.

<sup>21</sup> Then Abner said to him, “Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the soldiers and strip him of his weapons.” But Asahel would not stop chasing him.

<sup>22</sup> Again Abner warned Asahel, “Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?”

<sup>23</sup> But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel’s stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

<sup>24</sup> But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon. <sup>25</sup> Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill.

<sup>26</sup> Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their fellow Israelites?”

<sup>27</sup> Joab answered, “As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued pursuing them until morning.”

<sup>28</sup> So Joab blew the trumpet, and everyone came to a halt; they no longer pursued Israel, nor did they fight anymore.

<sup>29</sup> All that night Abner and his men marched through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, continued through the morning hours and came to Mahanaim.

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<sup>30</sup> Then Joab stopped pursuing Abner and assembled the whole army. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were found missing. <sup>31</sup> But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner. <sup>32</sup> They took Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.

## Points of Interest

- ‘In the course of time’—David is observing a proper mourning period for Saul and Jonathan before taking his next step.
- ‘Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?’—he’s been staying in Ziklag, his Philistine town. Even with Saul’s death, David’s situation is uncertain. To return to Israelite territory would be read--perhaps rightly--as an implicit claim on the throne. It could be dangerous for him, and it would certainly provoke a political crisis; there are still many people around loyal to Saul. The Israelites are still pretty new to this idea of monarchy; Saul was, after all, their first king. So, his death creates something of a constitutional crisis; there are no clear rules for succession. Does David, as God’s anointed and the most able general, become king? Does one of Saul’s remaining sons? Is succession automatic, or do the tribes vote? They haven’t had to face any of these questions before. A prophet might be able to help navigate the crisis; it was a prophet who anointed both Saul and David after all. But apparently no prophet who could operate on a national level has risen to fill the recently deceased Samuel’s place. So, David is moving cautiously. He certainly wants to return home, and he also seems to at the very least want to put himself under strong consideration to take over the kingship. But he doesn’t want to act rashly, harming either himself or the country.
- ‘To Hebron’—Hebron is a city in Judah. So, David is testing the waters. He returns to Judah, his home territory, and waits to see what happens.
- ‘they anointed David king over the house of Judah’—before Saul, each tribe managed their own affairs. In the vacuum created by Saul’s death, the tribes once again assert some of their independent authority. David’s own tribe, the tribe of Judah, decides that whatever else happens, David is their king. Judah is only one of twelve tribes, but it’s a strong and influential one; so this is a fairly substantial victory for David. It’s sort of like winning California’s electoral votes in a presidential race, except that in this case ‘California’ is saying that their guy will be president one way or another: either by winning the whole thing or by them breaking off and forming their own nation.
- ‘I too will show you the same favor’—David wants them to know that he would not consider their loyalty to Saul to be disloyalty to him. He appreciates their brave act to honor Saul.
- ‘Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army’—besides being Saul’s top general, he is Saul’s cousin. So, he’s probably doubly motivated to continue Saul’s dynasty: it’s his duty to work for the good of his family; and his prospects might not be all that great under a new regime.
- ‘had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul’—when I first read of Ish-Bosheth being ‘taken’ by Abner and made king, I pictured him as a child, too young to assert his own claim, with Abner serving as a regent for him. It turns out Ish-Bosheth is forty years old. Apparently, he’s not the most dynamic person; it’s even unclear as to whether he wants to be king. I guess with his three brothers killed in the war (and where was Ish-Bosheth, by the way?), Ish-Bosheth is the best Abner can muster as a credible Saulite king.

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- ‘over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel’—Gilead, Ashuri, and Jezreel are places; Ephraim and Benjamin are tribes. I think the author is trying here to give us a sense of the difference between the authority claimed by Ish-Bosheth and his area of effective control. Ish-Bosheth calls himself king of all Israel, but he can only exercise his authority among a couple of tribes in a few areas of the country. We have a split monarchy, with Judah going with David, Ephraim and Benjamin siding with Ish-Bosheth, and everyone else stuck between the two.
- ‘seven years and six months’—David’s patience continues to be tested. When Saul died, David might have thought that his troubles were finally over. It turns out that things are just getting started.
- ‘Joab son of Zeruiah and David’s men’—Joab is David’s nephew, and the commander of David’s troops. So, we have Saul’s cousin commanding the one army and David’s nephew the other.
- ‘twelve men for Benjamin and twelve for David’—twelve is the number of tribes in Israel. They’re symbolically fighting for preeminence among the twelve tribes. It’s a standoff, though, with all twenty-four champions falling, amazingly, simultaneously.
- ‘The battle that day was very fierce’—the idea with a contest of champions is that it lets the armies vent some of their hostilities, while containing the fighting to a small number of people. It doesn’t quite work out here, though. The contest seems to provoke, rather than forestall, a bigger battle.
- ‘Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle’—Asahel, another of David’s nephews, is one of David’s famous Thirty.
- ‘Turn aside to the right or to the left’—Abner is trying to avoid a face-to-face confrontation between Asahel and him. If a close relative of Saul were to kill a close relative of David, or vice versa, it would add a family blood feud to the already tense political situation. Abner can’t shake the speedy Asahel, though.
- ‘the spear came out through his back’—Asahel has tragically misinterpreted Abner’s reluctance to fight as cowardice. Asahel may be faster, but Abner proves stronger.
- ‘stop pursuing their fellow Israelites’—things have gotten out of hand: rivalry and mistrust have led to a spitting contest, which has broken out into a brawl, which has led to many deaths including that of one of the key players, which has led to a bitter and angry battle, which could break out into all-out war. Abner is saying that they’ve had enough for one day, and they should let things cool down. For the time being, Joab agrees.

## Taking it home

- For you: A lot of time has passed since Samuel promised what the future would hold for David, and that future is still pretty far from actually becoming a reality. David is stuck waiting to see how and when that future will play out. What is something that you are waiting for God to do? How is the waiting going? Talk to God about the things you are waiting for, and ask him to give you the diligence to be patient. How would the waiting be different if you felt entirely confident that God would, in fact, fulfill his promises and was truly going to work out all the details?
- For your six: The match between Team Abner and Team Joab reminds me of the werewolf-vampire feud raging in the adolescent female box office nowadays. It becomes less about what they are fighting for, and more about just coming out on top. Not only can it be a pretty grim

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way to live, but, as in the case of Asahel, it often terribly backfires. Pray for the ways that your six feel wound up in proving themselves to others. Ask God to replace any ways in which they are grimly driven to earn their worth through accomplishments over others.

- For our church: Pray that our church would always be asking, like David, ‘Where shall we go?’ David knew that God had a road map, and trusted God to very tangibly guide him to wherever he was supposed to be. Pray that our church would place the same trust in God’s ability to lead us.
- For families: Do you feel like God has promised to do something for you, but it’s taking a long time for that thing to happen? Spend some time talking together about things you are waiting for and things you really want to see happen but need God to pull off. What is it like to wait? What are ways we could turn to God while we are waiting? Are there any things God might want us to learn or do while we wait?

## Wednesday, March 30th: 2 Samuel 3:1-21

<sup>1</sup> The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

<sup>2</sup> Sons were born to David in Hebron:

His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel;

<sup>3</sup> his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel;

the third, Absalom the son of Maakah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;

<sup>4</sup> the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith;

the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;

<sup>5</sup> and the sixth, Ithream the son of David’s wife Eglah.

These were born to David in Hebron.

<sup>6</sup> During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. <sup>7</sup> Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, “Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?”

<sup>8</sup> Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said. So he answered, “Am I a dog’s head—on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! <sup>9</sup> May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath <sup>10</sup> and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David’s throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” <sup>11</sup> Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

<sup>12</sup> Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, “Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.”

<sup>13</sup> “Good,” said David. “I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me.” <sup>14</sup> Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, “Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins.”

<sup>15</sup> So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. <sup>16</sup> Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, “Go back home!” So he went back.

<sup>17</sup> Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, “For some time you have wanted to make David your king. <sup>18</sup> Now do it! For the LORD promised David, ‘By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel

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from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.””

<sup>19</sup> Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin wanted to do. <sup>20</sup> When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men. <sup>21</sup> Then Abner said to David, “Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires.” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

## Points of Interest

- ‘The war between the house of Saul and the house of David’--they may have avoided a battle to the bitter end in yesterday’s passage, but they never restore peace.
- ‘Sons were born to David in Hebron’--once again, we learn in retrospect of several marriages. David has six sons with six different wives.
- ‘Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?’--a concubine is basically a second-class wife. To replace a king in bed is seen as a move toward replacing him on the throne as well. The author leaves it ambiguous whether or not the accusation is true. On the one hand, we are told that Abner is indeed strengthening his own position. On the other hand, he is indignant at Ish-Bosheth’s accusation. One possible interpretation of the events is that Abner has been consolidating his position relative to Ish-Bosheth’s other counselors, but not relative to Ish-Bosheth himself. He remains loyal to Ish-Bosheth, but is competing for influence in a divided court.
- ‘This very day I am loyal to the house of your father’--one way or the other, Ish-Bosheth badly misplays here. If Abner has been plotting against him, his accusation gives Abner the perfect excuse to execute his scheme. If Abner is innocent, Ish-Bosheth’s false accusation ends up provoking the very abandonment he fears. I personally tend to believe Abner’s protestations of loyalty to Ish-Bosheth. If he were indeed plotting against Ish-Bosheth and sleeping with Saul’s concubine, I would expect Abner to claim the throne himself; but instead he switches to David’s side. I see Abner’s change of loyalties as one part peevishness and one part self-preservation. On the peevish end of things, Abner is basically saying, ‘If, after all I’ve done for you, all I get is accusations of treachery, I may as well get something for that alleged treachery.’ On the self-preservation side, now that Ish-Bosheth suspects him, he can never feel safe in the Saulite court. He’s a prime candidate for assassination or arrest and execution. He is basically in the same position David was in with Saul; and Abner is less tolerant of having spears thrown at him.
- ‘Whose land is it?’--I think Abner is saying here that he has the real power in Ish-Bosheth’s regime. If he decides to give it all to David, no one can stop him.
- ‘Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her’--I wish we knew more about Michal. All we have are tantalizing glimpses of someone who must have been quite a fascinating woman. David and she clearly have a strong, genuine attachment to one another: she puts her own life in peril to help David escape; and now, despite the fact that he has at least six other wives, David’s only condition in his negotiations with Abner is that Michal be returned to him. And now, in an age when marriages tended to be business relationships more than anything else and when the men clearly have the upper hand, we have Michal’s distraught second husband pitifully pursuing her, unable to let her go.

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- ‘For some time you have wanted to make David your king’—opinion has been swinging in David’s direction for a while now. Maybe Abner himself has been the one holding them back from changing sides, until now.

## Taking it home

- For you: It’s not entirely clear if the accusations made against Abner are true or not, but it seems that the power is in the fact that an accusation has been made at all. As we see in this scenario, accusations can provoke some pretty drastic decisions. Are there any situations where you feel accused or have a fear of being accused of something? It might not even be someone else doing the accusing; often, we’re really good at accusing ourselves, or reacting as if someone has accused us. Consider that any feelings of accusation you are feeling aren’t from God. Ask God for the truth that he is saying. Ask God to set you free from situations in which you might be reacting to accusations, whether real or supposed.
- For your six: It’s striking how deep the need is to have a secure sense of belonging. Abner, Ish-Bosheth, and Michal all strongly react to situations that would in any way confirm or threaten their sense of belonging. The need to belong is just as strong now as ever; Lady Gaga’s odd, meteoric rise to fame, for instance, can at least in part be explained by her ability to create a sense of belonging for those who don’t feel like they have one. Pray that God would be the one to give your six a sense of belonging. Ask that God would fulfill all of their needs to feel close and connected to a community of people.
- For our church: Just like David remained faithful while the war ‘lasted a long time,’ ask God to give our church the stamina to last a long time—to endure through changing seasons and cultural and economic realities. Pray that through it all we would constantly be a vibrant place of spiritual connection for Greater Boston.
- For families: Talk together about a time when you felt like someone said something about you that was not true. How did you feel? Are there any situations in your life in which you are feeling like that now? Often, God has something different to say to us than what others might be saying. Together, pray for God to speak truth and encouragement into the situation. Also, pray for forgiveness where it’s needed.

## Thursday, March 31st: 2 Samuel 3:22-39

<sup>22</sup> Just then David’s men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. <sup>23</sup> When Joab and all the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace.

<sup>24</sup> So Joab went to the king and said, “What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! <sup>25</sup> You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing.”

<sup>26</sup> Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern at Sirah. But David did not know it. <sup>27</sup> Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.

<sup>28</sup> Later, when David heard about this, he said, “I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD

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concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner.<sup>29</sup> May his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food."

<sup>30</sup> (Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)

<sup>31</sup> Then David said to Joab and all of Joab's men, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner." King David himself walked behind the bier.<sup>32</sup> They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All of Joab's men wept also.

<sup>33</sup> The king sang this lament for Abner:

"Should Abner have died as the lawless die?

<sup>34</sup> Your hands were not bound,  
your feet were not fettered.

You fell as one falls before the wicked."

And all of Joab's men wept over him again.

<sup>35</sup> Then they all came and urged David to eat something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets!"

<sup>36</sup> All of Joab's men took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them.<sup>37</sup> So on that day all of Joab's men and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.

<sup>38</sup> Then the king said to his men, "Don't you realize that a great commander has fallen in Israel this day?<sup>39</sup> And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!"

## Points of Interest

- 'he came to deceive you'—it's no surprise that Joab would have a hard time trusting Abner. They've been fighting one another for years.
- 'May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore'—David is fuming because Joab, in order to avenge his brother and maybe even to save his own job, puts in jeopardy the treaty that will finally bring peace and unity to the nation, under David's rule—not to mention the fact that Joab has just murdered someone, someone with diplomatic immunity no less, in cold blood. I'm not certain how seriously we are to take David's curses here. He may just be venting, the equivalent of yelling a few profanities, angrily swiping everything off the desk, and slamming the door.
- 'The king sang this lament for Abner'—all told, Abner was a decent, honorable man. He was the enemy general, but he can hardly be blamed for siding with his family and the current dynasty. He was true to his word. He did his best, as a man of war, to keep the peace. And he even worked very hard to avoid killing Joab's brother Asahel. Even Joab's men grieve Abner's death.
- 'all of Joab's men took note and were pleased'—it's interesting that Joab's men, not Abner's, are carefully watching David here. Joab's action has put David in danger of losing the trust of his entire army—not just the new, formerly Saulite forces, but even Joab's own men. His soldiers want to know that David is honorable, and that his word and his commitment to his men can be trusted.
- 'these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me'—David feels like he ended up with the wrong general out of the deal. Joab may be his man, but Abner was the better man. Unfortunately, he

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can't figure out how to rid himself of Joab and Abishai. They're too powerful, and he depends on them too much.

- ‘May the LORD repay the evildoer’--this must have been a humbling beginning to David’s reign. He now, finally, has authority over the whole country, but he can’t even control his own closest friends, associates, and relatives. He’s a king, but at the mercy of his own nephew. It’s a good thing he learned how to trust God to protect him and provide for him all of those years when he was on the run, because he needs to depend on God just as much--maybe even more--now that he is king.

## Taking it home

- For you: David’s world keeps getting more complex in his ascent to the kingship: the political realities, interpersonal relationships, and job responsibilities only increase both in quantity and intricacy. What’s a complex and overwhelming situation in your life right now? Pray some of David’s prayers during this time in which he asserts God’s power and knowledge above whatever stressful situations he faces.

### Psalm 103: 13-20

*13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;  
14 for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.  
15 The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;  
16 the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.  
17 But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD’s love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children’s children—  
18 with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.  
19 The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.*

### Psalm 104

*1 Praise the LORD, my soul.  
LORD my God, you are very great;  
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.  
2 The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment;  
he stretches out the heavens like a tent  
3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.  
He makes the clouds his chariot  
and rides on the wings of the wind.  
4 He makes winds his messengers,  
flames of fire his servants.  
5 He set the earth on its foundations;  
it can never be moved.*

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- For your six: David looks powerful and in control; he's the king after all. But it turns out that the title of king doesn't protect him from powerlessness in the middle of a sticky situation. Are any of your six in situations which it looks like they ought to have firmly under control, but they just don't? Pray that God would give them peace in the middle of their powerlessness, and that he would give them the authority to match their responsibilities.
- For our church: David hits the nail on the head in how best to respond to Abner's death. David's wise decision gains the trust and respect of an unlikely group of people. Ask God to make our church one that would gain trust and respect, even from those who are suspiciously watching our every move.
- For families: Is there anyone in your life you want to trust or be friends with, but something keeps getting in the way and it is hard to trust them? Do you know what's making you feel that way? Could it be that you only know part of that person? Pray together for God to show you more about this person and how God sees them. Ask God what you should do.

## Friday, April 1st: 2 Samuel 4

<sup>1</sup> When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became alarmed. <sup>2</sup> Now Saul's son had two leaders of raiding bands. One was named Baanah and the other Rekab; they were sons of Rimmon the Beerothite from the tribe of Benjamin—Beeroth is considered part of Benjamin,<sup>3</sup> because the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim and have resided there as foreigners to this day.

<sup>4</sup> (Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth.)

<sup>5</sup> Now Rekab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth, and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest. <sup>6</sup> They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rekab and his brother Baanah slipped away.

<sup>7</sup> They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. Taking it with them, they traveled all night by way of the Arabah. <sup>8</sup> They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to take your life. This day the LORD has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring."

<sup>9</sup> David answered Rekab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble,<sup>10</sup> when someone told me, 'Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news!<sup>11</sup> How much more—when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!"

<sup>12</sup> So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron.

## Points of Interest

- 'When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died'--interestingly, it's Abner's death, far more than his defection, that alarms Ish-Bosheth. Maybe Ish-Bosheth doesn't care so much

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about being king, but he does still care very much about staying alive. And, despite his accusations of Abner, Ish-bosheth trusted Abner to get him a good deal in the transition of authority. Now, all bets are off.

- ‘the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim’—apparently Beeroth isn’t technically within Benjaminite territory, but having been abandoned by its original population, it was re-settled by the tribe of Benjamin (Walton et al). I don’t know why the author finds it necessary to explain these intricacies to us.
- ‘Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet’—I think the author is letting us know, just before telling us what is sure to be a tragic story about Ish-Bosheth, that there is still a remnant of Saul’s family. It’s a sad remnant, though: one young man, disabled when he was dropped as his family fled from Saul’s final defeat.
- ‘they stabbed him in the stomach’—Ish-Bosheth’s court is a sinking ship. With Abner and the leaders of the tribes already having defected to David, these two raiding captains are about all who remain with Ish-Bosheth. And they, his soldiers and members of his own tribe, turn on him most treacherously of all.
- ‘They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David’—once again, as with the unknown Amalekite bringing him Saul’s crown, someone is trying to gain favor with David by bringing him proof of the death of his enemy. David wonders, ‘Didn’t you hear what happened last time?’ And this time, it’s even worse: first of all, Ish-Bosheth was harmless, already completely de-fanged by Abner’s change of loyalty; and secondly, rather than dying in battle, Ish-Bosheth is assassinated while asleep in his own bed.
- they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner’s tomb’—it’s perhaps not the most dignified of burials to have one’s head stuck into someone else’s tomb, but David is doing what he can to show Ish-Bosheth proper respect. I suppose there’s something fitting about Ish-Bosheth and Abner finding their final rest together.

## Taking it home

- For you: Families and their legacies seem to be pretty important. And, as Saul’s family dramatically shows, it seems like there’s often so much working against families staying together and fulfilling their destinies. Pray today that your family would endure and prosper, asking God to help your family leave its legacy.
- For your six: The key contrast between David and the raiding band leaders Baanah and Rekab is that David had learned not to take matters into his own hands, even when it seemed like something was right there for the taking. That distinction makes all the difference in the world. When Baanah and Rekab grab for something, instead of waiting for it to be given to them, they end up getting themselves killed. Ask God to give your six a propensity to turn towards God in their state of need, as we read of David doing below, instead of taking things into their own hands.

## Psalm 88: 1-13 excerpts

*LORD, you are the God who saves me;  
day and night I cry out to you.  
May my prayer come before you;*

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*turn your ear to my cry.  
I am overwhelmed with troubles  
and my life draws near to death. ...  
I call to you, LORD, every day;  
I spread out my hands to you....  
In the morning my prayer comes before you.*

- For our church: Things weren't easy between David and Saul, Abner, and Ish-Bosheth. Each of them caused David much trouble in one way or another. And he had sharp disagreements with all of them. Yet, David possessed a remarkable ability to show them all respect all along the way. Pray that our church as a whole and each member of it would have a similar ability to honor any detractors or opponents we might have.
- For families: Are there any situations in your family that feel really hard right now? Talk together about these situations. Listen to how they affect each person in your family. Pray that God would be with you as a family as you work through hard things, and that God would help you grow closer together. Pray that God would help you love and honor your family members even when it is hard.

## Saturday, April 2nd: 2 Samuel 5

<sup>1</sup> All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your own flesh and blood. <sup>2</sup> In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’”

<sup>3</sup> When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

<sup>4</sup> David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. <sup>5</sup> In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

<sup>6</sup> The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.” They thought, “David cannot get in here.” <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.

<sup>8</sup> On that day David had said, “Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those ‘lame and blind’ who are David’s enemies.” That is why they say, “The ‘blind and lame’ will not enter the palace.”

<sup>9</sup> David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward. <sup>10</sup> And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

<sup>11</sup> Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. <sup>12</sup> And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

<sup>13</sup> After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. <sup>14</sup> These are the names of the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, <sup>15</sup>Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, <sup>16</sup>Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

<sup>17</sup> When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. <sup>18</sup> Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; <sup>19</sup> so David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?”

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The LORD answered him, “Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands.”

<sup>20</sup> So David went to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, “As waters break out, the LORD has broken out against my enemies before me.” So that place was called Baal Perazim. <sup>21</sup> The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.

<sup>22</sup> Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; <sup>23</sup> so David inquired of the LORD, and he answered, “Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. <sup>24</sup> As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the LORD has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.” <sup>25</sup> So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

## Points of Interest

- ‘you were the one who led Israel’--it’s a little hard for me to tell whether this admission is freely given or forced upon them by circumstances. Are they finally able to tell the truth now that they’re no longer afraid of Saul and his family, or are they flattering David since he now holds all the power? Regardless, it’s the truth, and it’s been a long time coming. Ever since he defeated Goliath, many years ago now, David has done most of the work of defending the country; he’s finally getting the recognition to match his work.
- ‘The king and his men marched to Jerusalem’--I think this would again be the king’s company, which in David’s case would be his 600 companions from the desert, the Mighty Men. David doesn’t draft the whole national army for this one, but just uses his own personal forces. Because of this, the city belongs to him personally, and is often called City of David. This, by the way, is the first time David is referred to simply as ‘the king.’ Finally, Samuel’s anointing takes full effect.
- ‘You will not get in here’--Jerusalem is a hilltop fortress, famously difficult to attack for any army; and David has brought a relatively small number of men, too few to attack the walls or effectively besiege the city.
- ‘the fortress of Zion’--Jerusalem is the name of the city; Zion is the name of the mountain on which it is located.
- ‘use the water shaft’--David apparently figures out that the weak point in Jerusalem’s defenses is the water main, bringing fresh water up from the valley below. David and his men climb through the water shaft to get around the defenses and attack the Jebusites by surprise from inside the city.
- ‘David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David’--David is interested in Jerusalem as a new capital, for several reasons.
  - First of all, it’s fairly well-protected (though he himself has just proven that it is not completely impregnable).
  - Secondly, it’s fresh. Not having been in Israelite hands before, it has no associations with either Ish-Bosheth’s kingdom or David’s Judean kingdom; it’s a capital that belongs to everyone, rather like Washington, D.C., which was built on previously uninhabited land so that no state could claim the capital as its own.
  - Thirdly, it’s central. It’s located on the border of Benjamin (Saul’s tribal land) and Judah (David’s tribal land).

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- Fourthly, it's at the intersection of two major highways (Walton et al). This makes its placement ideal both for trade and for efficient movement of armies.
- 'from the terraces inward'—there not being much available land on mountaintops, the area of Jerusalem was expanded by a system of artificial terraces (Walton et al).
- 'Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David'—Tyre is one of the major cities of the Phoenicians, a coastal civilization in what is now Lebanon. The Phoenicians are today most famous as the inventors of the first alphabet. They're also the founders of Carthage, Rome's main rival for dominance of the Mediterranean later on in history. At the time of David, they are already a powerful maritime merchant nation. They specialize in trading hardwood and purple dye.
- 'cedar logs and carpenters'—it being a very dry climate, what we might call full-sized trees were quite rare in the entire region in which our story is set. Pretty much the only source of wood were the cedars of Lebanon, which Hiram controls. Having a monopoly is usually advantage enough; but it just so happens that as well as being the only wood around, cedar—as anyone with a cedar chest or a bureau with cedar drawers can attest—makes a very attractive, high quality wood. So, the cedars were in spectacularly high demand. In fact, they were so highly coveted over such a large area, for temples and palaces particularly, that already by David's time the forests were quite depleted (Walton et al). So, this is quite a lavish gift from Hiram. It's an offer of strong friendship between their two nations.
- 'David took more concubines and wives'—the establishment of David's rule over the entire nation would provoke a whole new round of diplomacy, probably on a larger stage and scale than ever before. All of these treaties would be sealed with yet more marriages between David's house and the royal houses of the other parties. It makes political sense; but it sure does seem like David's new palace is getting filled with new wives more quickly than it can be built.
- 'When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel'—for many years now, the Philistines have been able to maintain the upper hand because of the division between Saul and David. If David is able to completely consolidate his power, he would be an uncomfortably formidable opponent. So, the Philistines try to attack him and destabilize him before he has the chance to really establish himself.
- 'went down to the stronghold'—I think 'down' here simply means down the mountain from the site of the palace complex and main fortress. David uses an outlying, smaller fortress as a staging area. Rather than waiting to be besieged by the Philistines, he takes the fight down to them.
- 'The Philistines abandoned their idols there'—rather like David would take the ephod with him (see March 23rd, 1 Samuel 23) for good luck and guidance, other armies would bring the images of their gods with them. The Philistines are in such headlong retreat that they can't even stop to grab their gods before they run.
- 'Do not go straight up, but circle'—this is much more sophisticated advice than the yes or no answers David has gotten in the past (like in the above-referenced 1 Samuel 23). Is God saying more to David, or has David somehow gotten better at hearing what God has to say?
- 'the LORD has gone out in front of you'—it's not just that David and his men are that good. David has supernatural help, the anointing—the favor of and power of God—we talked about in our first passage.

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- ‘struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer’—this is a complete rout. The Philistines hoped to nip David’s power in the bud. It turns out rather the opposite. The Philistines never quite recover from this defeat, and we don’t hear from them again for quite a while.

## Taking it home

- For you: At one point David was shepherding herds of sheep in the hill country of Judea and leading smaller bands of men into random battles. Now he is shepherding an entire nation and leading battles to capture treasured cities. God doesn’t seem to let anything go to waste, but instead uses every aspect of David’s life to prepare for this next leg of the journey. In what ways has God been using your past circumstances to prepare you for what you are facing today? How does knowing that God is going to use everything you are experiencing now as a way to prepare you for what’s next change how you view your current circumstances? Are there particular seasons of your life over which you feel a lot of regret? Ask God to redeem these experiences.
- For your six: Ask God to send his favor out in front of your six. Pray that God would go before your six this week, giving them supernatural help along the way.
- For our church: David captures a city that was deemed impossible to overcome. Pray that God would give our church the same boldness to go after things that most would consider impossible.
- For families: Talk about ways that God has grown each of you throughout your life. Particularly take time to look at your family’s Leap of Faith poster, and praise God for all of the ways that He’s been answering your family’s prayers in the past few weeks. Ask God to help you grow in hearing his voice and following his direction for your life. Take time now to practice hearing God’s voice; it might be through journaling, sitting quietly, going for a prayer walk, or talking though your dreams.

## Sunday, April 3rd: 2 Samuel 6

<sup>1</sup> David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup> He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. <sup>3</sup> They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart<sup>4</sup> with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. <sup>5</sup> David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistruums and cymbals.

<sup>6</sup> When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. <sup>7</sup> The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God.

<sup>8</sup> Then David was angry because the LORD’s wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

<sup>9</sup> David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, “How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?” <sup>10</sup> He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. <sup>11</sup> The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

<sup>12</sup> Now King David was told, “The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he

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has, because of the ark of God.” So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.<sup>13</sup> When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.<sup>14</sup> Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might,<sup>15</sup> while he and the entire house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

<sup>16</sup> As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

<sup>17</sup> They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD.<sup>18</sup> After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty.<sup>19</sup> Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

<sup>20</sup> When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”

<sup>21</sup> David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD.<sup>22</sup> I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.”

<sup>23</sup> And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

## Points of Interest

- ‘to bring up from there the ark of God’—having won peace like they haven’t had for a while, David musters the troops for a completely different reason: to worship God together. The ‘ark’ is basically a very ancient, very holy souvenir chest. The Israelites built it during Moses’ time, according to God’s specifications, and filled it with remembrances of the ways God rescued them and provided for them in their desert wanderings.
- ‘enthroned between the cherubim on the ark’—as we’ve mentioned a couple of times over the course of this guide, the surrounding nations made physical representations of their gods, called ‘idols.’ These idols weren’t thought of as mere pictures of the gods, but as local manifestations of the gods. The LORD God prohibited the Israelites from making this sort of physical representation, certainly of other gods, but even of the LORD himself. God wanted the Israelites to think of God being right in the midst of them, directly, without any physical proxy necessary. So, the ark, instead of being a representation of God, was fashioned to look like God’s throne, as if God was sitting right in the midst of them.
- ‘between the cherubim’—cherubim are angelic attendants. There were sculptures of cherubim on either side of the ark.
- ‘brought it from the house of Abinadab’—just like the Philistines would carry their idols into battle, the Israelites would bring the ark. About twenty years ago, just before Saul became king, the Philistines captured the ark from the Israelites, more or less in the same way as David just captured the Philistine idols in yesterday’s passage. But the temple and town in which the Philistines held the ark started to experience all sorts of misfortune; so they put it on a cart and sent it back to the Israelites. None of the Israelites who found it quite knew what to do with it; so Abinadab has been keeping it safe. David now wants to return it to its proper place in the worship life of the Israelites.

## The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 3

- ‘celebrating with all their might before the LORD’--they put as much effort into praising God as into battle.
- ‘The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act’--this is meant to be a royal parade, a triumphal procession of God on his throne, celebrating his victory and entering in glory into his people’s new capital. The pageantry is ruined by the way in which they carry the ark, hauling it on the back of a bumpy oxcart. It’s like throwing Santa into the back of a U-Haul for the finale of the Macy’s Thanksgiving parade, but much, much worse. God didn’t ask for this parade, but he seems to think that if they’re going to do it, they should do it well. Uzzah is acting lazy, and casually disrespectful; the ark is a sacred item, meant to be touched only by the high priest, but Uzzah is treating it like so much luggage. Still, it’s a bit shocking that God strikes him dead for it.
- ‘Then David was angry because the LORD’s wrath had broken out’--now everyone is in a bad mood. God is angry that his throne is being mistreated. David is angry--whether at God or Uzzah or both is unclear--because his parade is ruined by someone being struck dead. And the big day quickly unravels.
- ‘ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite’--having only made it partway from Abinadab’s house to Jerusalem, the ark once again ends up in temporary storage in a random, nearby house. A *Gittite* is someone from Gath, the Philistine city in which David once sought refuge from Saul. Obed-Edom is a Philistine expatriot living in Israel.
- ‘the LORD blessed him and his entire household’--God suddenly and mercilessly cuts Uzzah down for throwing out a hand to steady the ark. Now, God casually brings a steady flow of goodness in Obed-Edom’s direction, apparently in gratitude for Obed-Edom’s hospitality. The overall impression I get from this set of interactions is that God wants the ark to be a source of blessing to people, but that doesn’t mean that God or the ark can be taken for granted. I’m still in awe that God would be willing to kill someone to make his point; but I can understand that God would want to make the point that God’s goodness toward us should not be taken as license for complacency. In any case, seeing the positive effect on Obed-Edom’s family encourages David to try again to bring the ark to Jerusalem.
- ‘those who were carrying the ark of the LORD’--this time around, they carry the ark by hand, by its carrying poles, as would be appropriate for a throne, and for the ark; and it works like a charm. God doesn’t actually seem to be asking all that much here. The consequences for not doing that little bit do still seem to be dismally severe, though.
- ‘Wearing a linen ephod’--David is dressed like a simple priest instead of like a king.
- ‘she despised him in her heart’--apparently, particularly when someone is dancing energetically, ephods can be a little revealing. Michal finds David’s actions and clothing to be embarrassingly uncouth.
- ‘inside the tent that David had pitched for it’--throughout the wandering in the desert, both the ark and the people stayed in tents. When they finally arrived in the promised land, the people, naturally, built more permanent homes. The ark, however, remained in a tent throughout the past 400 years, except, of course, for the past 20 years, when it was kept in Abinadab’s and Obed-Edom’s homes; but that was during a time when it was out of service, as it were. David now restores it to its proper setting.

# The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 3

- ‘he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins’—this is a big, fun, abundant feast. There’s plenty of meat for everyone to eat, with a new sacrifice being offered every six steps; and everyone gets their own little gift of more party food.
- ‘returned home to bless his household’—after the big, public ceremony, David returns home, hoping to continue the celebration with his family.
- ‘I will become even more undignified than this’—it’s not okay for the ark to be treated unceremoniously, but David has no scruples about looking foolish himself. This reminds me of our very first passage, when God tells Samuel, ‘People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’ It’s David’s very willingness to not behave like a king that makes him a good king, in God’s eyes, at least.
- ‘And Michal daughter of Saul had no children’—this is a sad end to David and Michal’s relationship. After all of this time, they finally realize that Michal doesn’t want David to be different from her father; she wants David to be a new and improved version of her father. So, they quietly part ways. David has plenty of other wives to spend time with and have children with. It would be easy enough for David and Michal to simply avoid one another. Politically speaking, this means the end of the House of Saul. If David were to have a son with Michal, that son, being descended from both Saul and David, would have the inside track on inheriting the crown. But it’s not to be.

## Taking it home

- For you: David doesn’t let much, if anything, get in his way of following God. He portrays an attitude of being willing to do absolutely anything for God. Do you feel just as sure? Or do you feel some interest in God but have some hang-ups along the way? Tell God that you want him to be your number one priority, and that you are willing to do anything for him. If that seems like a stretch, say it out loud as if just to try it on for size, paying attention to ways you feel resistant; then talk with God about those areas of resistance.
- For your six: Michal drastically misunderstands and resents David’s decisions in following God. Are there ways you feel misunderstood or resented by your six for your decision to follow Jesus? Do you feel too weary to even talk about it? Ask God for help in communicating. Next time the opportunity presents itself, talk to your six about what God has recently been doing in your life.
- For our church: While God, being God, is supernatural, powerful, and bigger than we can quite comprehend, I wonder if there are ways in which God is somewhat like us, simply wanting to be appreciated and recognized. We all know how terrible it feels to do a lot of work, give a nice gift, or go out of the way to show someone love only to find that no one even notices or cares. Ask God to fill our church with a spirit of incredible gratitude. Ask God to give us a special awareness of the ways God has been working. Pray that our response would be to thank him.
- For families: Talk about what it means to you to worship God. What are ways you like to worship God? Do you like to dance, sing, raise your hands, sit quietly, or something else altogether? Put on one of your family’s favorite worship songs and worship in the best way you know how. Have fun!