

# The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 4

## Monday, April 4th: 2 Samuel 7

1 After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, 2 he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.”

3 Nathan replied to the king, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you.”

4 But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

5 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? 6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. 7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’”

8 “Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. 9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. 10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning 11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

“The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: 12 When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by human beings, with floggings inflicted by human hands. 15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”

17 Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

18 Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said:

“Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? 19 And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign LORD, is for a human being!

20 “What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, Sovereign LORD. 21 For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant.

22 “How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. 23 And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? 24 You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.

25 “And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, 26 so that your name will be great forever. Then people will say, ‘The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established in your sight.

27 “LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. 28 Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. 29 Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever.”

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## Points of Interest

- ‘Nathan the prophet’--it seems we finally have a replacement for Samuel as official court prophet.
- ‘while the ark of God remains in a tent’--it’s not necessarily a shameful thing that the ark is in a tent. As I mentioned yesterday, it’s always been that way. During the time of Moses, God custom-ordered a tent, called the tabernacle or the tent of meeting, from the Israelites; and the ark had been kept in that tabernacle ever since. No one had ever even thought of doing it differently. But as David reflects, he realizes that for the first time ever the Israelites are peacefully settled in the land, and the ark is safe and secure; and now he himself has a beautiful new home. Isn’t it now a little unseemly for God to live in a tent, while the rest of Israel, David very much included, have their own nice houses? Maybe it’s time for God to settle down.
- ‘Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it’--at first, Nathan gives God’s endorsement of this idea. As it turns out, though, God’s not entirely keen on the idea. Does God change his mind? Does Nathan hear wrong? Does Nathan simply assume at first that God would like the idea--why wouldn’t he?--without even asking?
- ‘Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?’--David’s instinct reminds me of when someone wins the lottery or gets their first big contract as a professional athlete and decides to build their mom--who sacrificed all of those years, working two jobs to make ends meet--a dream house. It’s a really nice thought, and I’m sure quite a few of those mothers really appreciate both the new house and the thought behind it. I bet there are others that, in the end, prefer the old family home. God is in the second camp. God hasn’t been sitting around wondering, ‘When is someone going to build me a house?’ God likes the tent.
- ‘I have been moving from place to place’--one of the reasons God likes the tent is the impression it gives of constant movement. God doesn’t, of course, actually live in the tent; nor would God actually live in the temple David wants to build. But to whatever extent these dwellings represent the idea of God being present among us, God prefers the dynamic picture of the tent to the static temple. God doesn’t want to be pinned down to one particular place.
- ‘I took you from the pasture’--God reminds David of their relative importance. Without God, David would just be Jesse’s youngest boy, the butt of his brothers’ jokes, taking care of his father’s sheep. Without David, God would pretty much still be God.
- ‘the LORD himself will establish a house for you’--God is playing on multiple meanings of ‘house’ here. David is offering to give God a house, a temple. If David really understood how their relationship worked, he would instead be asking God for a house, a royal dynasty.
- ‘He is the one who will build a house for my Name’--someday, a descendant of David will indeed build a house for God, but now is not the time and David is not the person.
- ‘When he does wrong, I will punish him’--this can sound like something of a downer. But if you think about it, it’s probably a necessary safety check. God has just promised David and his descendants unconditional backing forever. This might be too much power for a person to handle responsibly, unless they know that there would indeed be consequences if that power were misused.

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- ‘Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation’--having spoken prematurely the day before, Nathan is now conscientious to pass along to David only what he has heard from God, and all of what he has heard.
- ‘the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem’--like David, the entire nation of Israel was basically plucked from out of nowhere, with nothing very obvious to recommend them, and chosen as an object of special attention from God. The idea is that they serve as a sort of pilot project. God would practice with and demonstrate with Israel the kind of relationship God eventually wants with every nation. It’s not as if Israel is the only nation God really cares about; but they do have the honor of being picked first.
- ‘Your covenant is trustworthy’--a covenant is a strong and enduring alliance. I liken it to a blood brotherhood; David and God are bound together for the long haul.
- ‘who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family’--David sees that God is, of course, right. David is not the big shot, giving God that big, new house God has always wanted. Rather, David is the humbly grateful recipient of overwhelming benefits from a powerful and good God.

### Taking it home

- For you: In this story, we get the picture of David being a little overeager to help and almost over-responsible, as if it’s up to David for good things to happen in the world. We live in a city full of very well-intentioned, successful, driven people; and it’s easy to follow suit without the slightest blink of an eye. What are the ways in which you feel driven? In what areas do you feel a lot of pressure and responsibility? Consider that if there are situations where you feel guilty, worried, and burdened that you’re carrying pressure God might not want you to have. Spend some time thinking about the important plans you have. Ask God to show you what, if anything, you should be doing about them. Maybe his response will be similar to the one he gave David, “Great idea, but not now.” Ask God to make it clear what you are responsible for and what you are not.
- For your six: Pick a few of your six and spend time trying to listen to God on their behalf. What Nathan heard from God for David was quite powerful and also quite different from what he came up with on his own. Like Nathan, if you think you hear something from God, find a way to run it by your six.
- For our church: David finally taking the throne as king brings about a season of rest, stability, and prosperity for the entire country. Ask God for our church to play a part in bringing rest to our city. Pray that our presence would help make our city a place of stability and prosperity for everyone in it.
- For families: Have you ever sensed that God thinks something is a good idea, but doesn’t want you to do it yet? Talk about some of these things with your family, find out what things they have heard are good ideas, but aren’t yet ready to do. These could be big dreams from God or things related to growing up that you might do when you’re older. Discuss how God is preparing you all to take the next step, and pray that each of you could wait well in the meantime.

### Tuesday, April 5th: 2 Samuel 11

1 In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in

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Jerusalem.

2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, 3 and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” 4 Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. 5 The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

6 So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David. 7 When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. 8 Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. 9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.

10 David was told, “Uriah did not go home.” So he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just come from a military campaign? Why didn’t you go home?”

11 Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”

12 Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. 13 At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. 15 In it he wrote, “Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”

16 So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. 17 When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

18 Joab sent David a full account of the battle. 19 He instructed the messenger: “When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, 20 the king’s anger may flare up, and he may ask you, ‘Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn’t you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn’t a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?’ If he asks you this, then say to him, ‘Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.’”

22 The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. 23 The messenger said to David, “The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. 24 Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king’s men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.”

25 David told the messenger, “Say this to Joab: ‘Don’t let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.’ Say this to encourage Joab.”

26 When Uriah’s wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. 27 After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

## Points of Interest

- ‘when kings go off to war, David sent Joab’--we skipped a few chapters in which David himself leads the army in a stunning series of victories over pretty much all of the surrounding nations. It’s getting to the point where other armies are wondering why they should even bother trying to resist David, since he’ll clearly come out on top anyway. Constant success is becoming

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humdrum for David as well. While all of the other kings go off to war as usual, David plays hooky, sending Joab in his place.

- ‘walked around on the roof of the palace’--in a warm climate, at the top of a hill where there might be a nice breeze, the roof would be a good place to get some fresh air.
- ‘From the roof he saw a woman bathing’--like not pulling down the shades in an apartment, Bathsheba bathing in full view of David could be a purposely seductive act, or it could just as likely be simple absent-mindedness. She might not be aware that anyone else is around or can see her or is even awake. Then again, if it’s an accident, they do end up sleeping together rather quickly.
- ‘the wife of Uriah the Hittite’--Uriah is another of David’s famous Thirty. He’s not just a soldier in David’s army, but part of David’s elite unit, and most likely someone who lived in close quarters with David during the difficult times when they were on the run from Saul. I don’t know whether or not it’s at all relevant, but Uriah is one of David’s non-Israelite men.
- ‘She came to him, and he slept with her’--it’s hard to believe David would do such a thing. The same man who twice refused to save his own life, saying, ‘Far be it from me to touch the LORD’s anointed,’ without giving it a second thought sleeps with the wife of another man--and not just any other man, but an old army buddy. David reminds me of rock stars who, upon finally hitting the big time, go into a self-indulgent phase. They suddenly think it’s their right to trash hotel room after hotel room, abandon their wives and children, drive their fancy cars through other peoples’ backyards, stage Bed-Ins, and release drivel like *Revolution 9* and *Zooropa*. Not only can they afford it; they think they deserve it. Even more, they often think they deserve people applauding them for it. David seems to have that same sense of entitlement here: ‘I’ve worked hard and been good my entire life. Why shouldn’t I enjoy just one night with this beautiful woman?’
- ‘Go down to your house’--they have a bit of a timing problem. Uriah has been away at war long enough that the baby could not be his. So, David, hoping to cover his tracks, finds an excuse to bring Uriah home, hoping to get Uriah and Bathsheba in bed together.
- ‘Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants’--even drunk, Uriah is an honorable man. As a soldier on duty, he sleeps in the barracks with the rest of the men, instead of taking advantage of his privileges by spending a night at home.
- ‘Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down’--David out-Sauls Saul. Saul tried to kill David, and now David is trying to kill Uriah, for being too good a soldier. Even worse, David is punishing Uriah for David’s own mistake. And, chillingly, he’s making Uriah carry his own death warrant; he knows that Uriah is too reliable and honorable to fail to deliver it or to read it himself.
- ‘Why did you get so close to the wall?’--David’s order to get Uriah killed in battle necessitates what would usually be bad strategy on Joab’s part. He has to put the whole battle and many other men at risk in order to make sure Uriah dies. This is, to say the least, a significant breach of military ethics. Joab is reminding David that he’s following David’s own direct orders. It’s David’s fault that the battle went badly.
- ‘But the thing David had done displeased the LORD’--Only David, Bathsheba, and Joab know what has happened. A scandal has been averted. Everything looks okay on the outside, but that most definitely does not mean that everything is okay.

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## Taking It Home

- For you: So maybe it goes without saying that impregnating your friend's wife probably isn't the best idea; and in case you were thinking of also killing your friend, that mostly likely will only complicate matters and not get you what you're looking for. While David's outer indulgent, adulterous, murderous act is terrible in its own right, it even more makes me wonder what's going on in his heart that could lead to such things. If only he could have been aware of and do something to address his heart's state before joining the list of baby daddies and murderers! Take some time today examining your heart. What might your actions and behavior lately be telling you about your internal state? Have you been indulging yourself, like David did? Are you saying and thinking and doing things that just don't seem like you, in a bad way? Spend some time focusing not on the acts themselves, but on what's happening for you beneath the surface. Pray some of David's prayer:

### **Psalm 139: 23-24**

*Search me, God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.  
See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting*

### **Psalm 51: 10-12; 17**

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you...  
The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.  
You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*

- For your six: A few weeks ago, when David was helplessly fleeing through the hill country of Judea it was hard to picture him ever doing anything half as bad as what Saul was doing, and yet here we see him committing even worse versions of the very sins that were done to him. Ask God to protect your six from following David's pattern of repeating sins that were done to them. It seems to be a pattern to which we are all so easily susceptible. Ask God to break in and transform any pain inflicted on them, and pray that they wouldn't unconsciously transmit the pain they experienced to others.
- For our church: Ask God to protect us from the complacency that got David into such trouble. Ask God to increase our focus, passion and commitment to follow God.
- For families: Discuss any situation in which you've tried to cover up something that you weren't particularly proud of. What happened as a result of trying to cover it up? Often, situations like these can result in more and more covering up, trapping us in layers of lies. Discuss the benefits of being honest about a situation up front, instead of hiding it or letting it get out of control. Pray that God would point out to you when you are trying to cover something up and give you courage to tell the truth.

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## Wednesday, April 6th: 2 Samuel 12:1-14

1 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. 2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

4 “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! 6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

7 Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. 8 I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. 9 Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. 10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’

11 “This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. 12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

13 Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. 14 But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die.”

### Points of Interest

- ‘The LORD sent Nathan to David’--David has gone to truly terrible lengths to keep his affair hidden, but he can’t hide it from God. And God is unwilling to simply let it pass.
- ‘There were two men in a certain town’--rather than directly accuse David, Nathan uses a metaphorical story. It’s probably safer this way for Nathan. In David’s current mood, who knows how he would respond to a direct accusation? Using a metaphor also gives David a better chance of getting to the truth of the matter; even a moment’s freedom from thinking of the immediate personal implications might help. The implied question at the end, ‘What would you do with a situation like this?’ gives David that space to think, and it forces him to give an answer.
- ‘David burned with anger against the man’--David doesn’t immediately piece together that they’re speaking metaphorically, and he is genuinely shocked by the situation: ‘Could someone really do such a thing?’ he wonders. He, of course, has just done much worse himself. I don’t think David is being hypocritical here. His reaction comes from a genuine, strong concern for justice. He simply hasn’t noticed how very far he has currently fallen from his own principles. He is not living up to being the kind of man he wants to be, and the kind of man that he’s shown in the past, with God’s help, he is actually pretty capable of being.
- ‘the man who did this must die! He must pay for that lamb four times over’--David is so outraged upon hearing of this situation that he needs to talk himself down a little: ‘Okay, okay, the death penalty may be a little extreme here. How about quadruple damages?’ Ironically, in

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the actual situation, death might indeed be the fairest punishment for David. Far more than a lamb, David owes Uriah a life. In fact, by David's own reckoning, he owes Uriah four lives. He has taken far more from Uriah than he could ever pay back.

- 'your master's wives into your arms'--apparently, some of those many wives he has accumulated used to be Saul's. And that would make sense in light of these political marriages being like the signature to a treaty. Other nations would simply re-establish the same treaty with David they used to have with Saul, and they'd seal the deal with the very same wife. It would at the very least keep the moving costs down.
- 'I would have given you even more'--not only has David been wicked toward Uriah, but he's also been ungrateful toward God. God has given him everything he could ever possibly want and more. As David was strolling on his roof, practically everything he could see whichever direction he turned was his, given as a gift from God--everything except Bathsheba, that is. During the hard times, David trusted God to provide everything he needed; and God came through. Perversely, now that times are good, he doesn't have that same reliance on God's goodness.
- 'Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house'--David resorted to violence to take care of his problem. As they say, though, a sword has two edges. Now that he has taken the sword out of its sheath, he'll feel its bite as well.
- 'I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you'--what goes around comes around. David will experience the same pain, betrayal, and indignity to which he subjected Uriah.
- 'The LORD has taken away your sin'--this reminds me of what God says about the covenant with David's descendants:

When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by human beings, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him.

God still loves David, forgives him, and lets him keep his kingdom. But God does not wink away the consequences of the serious wrong David has done. And apparently it's a good thing. Imagine what trouble David and his children could get into if their actions were completely unchecked.

- 'the son born to you will die'--it makes sense to me that David and Bathsheba would be punished for what they've done. But their child is just an innocent bystander, another victim even. When it is David who might very well deserve death, why is it his baby who actually dies? We'll talk more about this one tomorrow.

### Taking it home

- For you: Part of what gets David into trouble is losing his sense of gratitude toward God. Thanking and admiring God, even in the hard times, used to be a hallmark of David's songs to God. What's your relationship with praising God like? Does it come naturally? Or does it feel challenging? How has it been lately: better, the same, or harder than usual? Today do whatever you can to thank God, as often as possible. If praising God feels really difficult here are some ways you could start:
  - Thank God for all the people and things in your life for which you are grateful.
  - Thank God for the good things that have happened this past week or month.

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- Praise God for the qualities he has that you really like.

In the midst of all that thanking and praising, if you do feel like God is somehow holding back on you, ask for the thing that you want. God seems to remind David that he is generous, and willing to give even more if asked.

- For your six: While it's a little hard to understand exactly how and why it works, David needs God to take away his sins. It seems that without that forgiveness, David would get stuck in this moment in his life. God is incredibly quick and willing to remove David's sin once David confesses it. Ask God that your six would turn to God to take away their sin. Pray that that offer would make sense and be compelling, and that your six would find incredible benefits in taking God up on this offer.
- For our church: Nathan uses a story to get David's attention. Ask God to make us good storytellers. Pray that God would give us wisdom, creativity and understanding, so that we could communicate God's promises in captivating stories that make sense to people.
- For families: Have you ever felt like God or someone else truly forgave you for something? What was that like? Is there any area of your life where you could ask God or another person for forgiveness? Is there any area where you could extend forgiveness to someone else? Try it and share how it goes. Forgiveness is like dropping the charges against someone, letting God be the one to deal with the person, and giving up the right to do that yourself.

### Thursday, April 7th: 2 Samuel 12:15-31

15 After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill. 16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. 17 The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

18 On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

19 David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

20 Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.

21 His attendants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"

22 He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' 23 But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; 25 and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

26 Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel. 27 Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, "I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply. 28 Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me."

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29 So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. 30 David took the crown from their king's head, and it was placed on his own head. It weighed a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones. David took a great quantity of plunder from the city 31 and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking. David did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then he and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.

### Points of Interest

- the LORD struck the child'--here we go with God striking people again, and this one bothers me even more than the others. With Saul and his evil spirit (1 Samuel 16:1-13, Monday, March 14th), there was some ambiguity as to whether God was actively harming Saul. With Uzzah (2 Samuel 6, last Sunday's passage), the punishment was swifter and more severe than I'm completely comfortable with, but at least I could see what Uzzah had done to provoke God's reaction. This time around, a baby gets struck. I can understand that God would not want to allow David and Bathsheba to murder Bathsheba's husband and then just form a nice little family and move on as if nothing had happened. But I have a problem with the fact that the baby, obviously a victim and not a perpetrator in the whole affair, bears the brunt of the punishment. I have to confess that I wonder if the narrator is mistaken here, wrongly interpreting the child's death as the action of God; but I have no basis for that hypothesis beyond my own discomfort with the story. I keep coming around to the thought that God and I seem to place different values on matters of life and death. To my mind, there's nothing worse than death. But God seems to consistently employ death as the better option in certain situations. That could be because God rates the alternatives more unacceptable than I do, or it could be because God knows death isn't as bad as I think it is. Apparently, God considers it so important that this particular child never be king that God is willing to kill him--either because God knows how awful it would be were this child to become king, or because God knows that death isn't a terribly awful fate for this child. I'm still not able to say, 'Oh, now I see how striking this child was really a great idea.' But at least it gives me a possibly fruitful way to talk with God about it: God, how do you and I see death differently, and what can I learn from it?
- 'The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground'--apparently, as when he danced in his skimpy ephod a bit too vigorously for Michal's taste (again 2 Samuel 6, last Sunday's passage), David is behaving less dignified than a king--even a king with a dying child--is expected to act. I take this as a good sign that David is recovering from his self-indulgent phase and returning to what we always liked about him. He's back to his theme: 'I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.' David is, once again, willing to look like a fool, banking everything on his passion for God.
- 'The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live'--it's worth noting, for all of my angst about the God striking the child, that the child's own father puts his hope in God's goodness. David considers himself to blame for what has happened, and he turns to God as the one who may just be able to bail him out.
- 'I will go to him, but he will not return to me'--I find this a poignant way of putting it, both sad and hopeful. They will meet again, but only by David following his son into death.
- 'The LORD loved him'--this is a surprise turn of events. David and Bathsheba have another son, and this one--for unexplained reasons--is a particular favorite of God. I wonder if God simply wants to honor the change of heart God sees in David and Bathsheba. The first child was conceived in an atmosphere of selfishness, greed, lust, lies, betrayal, murder, and neglect of

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duty. This one comes to life in the midst of humility, quiet sadness, and tender care. This is a child God wouldn't mind seeing as king.

- 'sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah'--God has his own nickname for Solomon. It means, 'God-loved' (Baldwin).
- 'Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah'--all of this time, Joab has continued the campaign against the Ammonites.
- 'Otherwise I will take the city'--this is both wise and kind on Joab's part. He's seen, with David under Saul and with Abner under Ish-Bosheth, how things get hairy when a general becomes more successful and popular than the king he serves. He'd rather avoid a song like, 'Joab Defeated the Ammonites, While David Stayed Home,' making it to the top of the charts. Plus, he's giving the newly revived David the chance to get back in the game.
- 'So David mustered the entire army'--this whole, sad debacle started when David decided not to show up for work. Now, we're back on track.

### Taking it Home

- For you: David fasts as a way to turn his heart and attention back toward God. Have you been fasting from something during this season? How is your fast going? Is there something specific you are fasting for? What have you been learning, and what has God been teaching you? If you aren't fasting from anything specific, pick something today that will help you direct your attention to God.
- For your six: God's willingness in this passage to let the child die is, at best, unsettling. God can do things that are pretty hard to understand. How do your six view God? If you don't know, consider asking them. Do they see God as loving and kind? Distant and aloof? Angry and ready to strike down babies, the elderly, and anyone in between? Pray that God would give your six an understanding of who God actually is. Ask God to take away any views they have of God that might misrepresent him and get in the way of them turning to him.
- For our church: Instead of ignoring, repressing or excusing it, David lets the weight of what has happened hit him. He lets himself be troubled by this horrible situation, and rightly so: it is troubling. Pray that our church wouldn't shy away from troubling situations, but would wrestle through and come before God with them. Pick a recent troubling issue in the news, any one that struck you as less than ideal. Don't worry; I'm sure there are lots to choose from. Pray about that troubling issue today, asking God to show his power and redemption in that situation.
- For families: Talk together about fasting. The thing I find most important about fasting is what I am fasting for, not what I am giving up. Talk together about something that would be worth fasting for--maybe some of your Leap of Faith prayers from your poster. Consider fasting from something together as a family as a way of saying, "God, we are really serious about these things." Talk about the choices you might face to do something or not while fasting. Check in, support each other, and see how God responds in your faith experiment.

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## Friday, April 8th: 2 Samuel 13:1-22

1 In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.

2 Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

3 Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. 4 He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?"

Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

5 "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand."

7 David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." 8 So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. 9 Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat.

"Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. 11 But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister."

12 "No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. 13 What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." 14 But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

15 Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

16 "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me."

But he refused to listen to her. 17 He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her." 18 So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. 19 Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

20 Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.

21 When King David heard all this, he was furious. 22 And Absalom never spoke to Amnon again; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

## Points of Interest

- 'Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar'--Amnon is David's oldest son, and Absalom is also among the older siblings; both of them were born during the time when David was king of Judah in Hebron. I gather that Tamar is a full sister to Absalom and a half sister to Amnon. I imagine

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that it could have been confusing to live among a large gaggle of siblings, half-siblings, stepmothers, and step-siblings constantly moving into and out of the royal court. However, Amnon, Absalom, and Tamar all seem to be fairly close in age, raised together as brothers and sisters at a time when the court was much smaller and less sophisticated. The fact that Amnon would develop this obsession with his sister seems highly unnatural. I wonder if this is an advanced version of David's own illicit obsession. David fell in love with the wife of a brother-in-arms, someone who should be like a sister to him, not a lover. Amnon falls in love with an actual sister. David was raised as a simple shepherd and had to work his way over time to being an egocentric star. Amnon was born a prince; self-indulgence comes naturally to him.

- 'Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother'--Amnon's cousin Jonadab is maybe a lifelong friend, maybe a social climber, maybe both. In any case, unlike David's counselors like Nathan the prophet and even Joab, Jonadab makes no effort to help Amnon actually figure out what is best here. He simply helps Amnon get what he wants.
- 'Let her prepare the food in my sight'--Amnon deftly plays on the sympathy we tend to have toward loved ones who are sick. Everyone will be extraordinarily attentive to his comfort and deferential to his whims.
- 'Bring the food here into my bedroom'--he continues to play the role of sick child well. Claiming that having so many people around is tiring him out, he asks that everyone else be sent away and that Tamar serve him in bed: 'I just need a little peace and quiet.' Not suspecting he has lustful feelings toward his own sister, everyone thinks of this as a benign and relatively normal request. At worst, they think, Amnon is something of a high maintenance patient.
- 'Come to bed with me, my sister'--Amnon seems to be under the delusion that Tamar shares his feelings: 'Finally, we're alone together.' But she's shocked and horrified--and she realizes too late the vulnerable position she is in.
- 'he will not keep me from being married to you'--I think Tamar is just trying to buy time here, by pretending to be in favor of the relationship as long as it's handled properly. She hopes that cooler heads would prevail if she can just get out of that room. It's unlikely that, upon consideration, Amnon would even have the boldness to ask David for such a thing; and there's absolutely no chance David would grant it.
- 'Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred'--predictably, the satisfaction of his obsession doesn't match his expectations. How could it? Still captive to his narcissism, rather than repent as David eventually did, he blames the whole thing on Tamar.
- 'Get this woman out of my sight'--as so often in the case of rape, there are no witnesses. So, it becomes a he said-she said scenario. As the more powerful one, Amnon is able to control the situation in his favor.
- 'the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore'--through no fault of her own, Tamar is no longer qualified to wear her clothes. She tears them off in grief and protest.
- 'Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you?'--Absalom seems to have had his suspicions of Amnon, perhaps lurking in the back of his mind for a while. Absalom probably just didn't think that Amnon would ever have the right combination of audacity and opportunity to do anything.
- 'Don't take this thing to heart'--at first blush, this sounds heartless. As it turns out, Absalom himself very much does take it to heart. I wonder if he's not so much saying here, 'It's no big deal,' as he's saying, 'It's not your fault, and don't worry; I'll take care of you.'

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- ‘Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house’--she would need to marry beneath her station to find someone willing to take someone who is not a virgin. Instead of debasing herself in that way, she becomes a spinster aunt in her brother’s household.
- ‘When King David heard all this, he was furious’--this is a strangely impotent fury. I recognize that parents try to avoid taking sides or picking favorites among their children; but when one child accuses another of rape, isn’t some sort of action called for? This is the second instance in a disturbing trend. Just like when Joab murdered Abner, in the face of unjustified violence by a powerful close relative, David does nothing.

### Taking it home:

- For you: Does reading about what happened to Tamar make you angry? It’s just so unfair. It doesn’t make sense why such a bad thing needed to happen. Has something terrible and inexplicable ever happened to you? Maybe it’s not as extreme as what happened to Tamar, or maybe it is. Talk to God about this issue. Tell God the pain and frustration it’s caused you. Ask God to stand with you in the midst of the questions and pain. I think he’d be up for the conversation.
- For your six: Pray today for your six’s romantic relationships. Are they married, dating, single? How is it going for them? I doubt that their relationship situations are quite as complex as Amnon and Tamar’s--let’s hope not--but they probably have their own set of challenges, drama, and heartbreak which relationships inevitably bring. Pray that your six would find God helpful in their relationships and that God would resource your six with everything they need to thrive relationally.
- For our church: Ask God to make our church a place of refuge and advocacy for the innocent and vulnerable. Pick a group in society today which seems particularly vulnerable (homeless, battered women, human traffic victims, refugees) to pray for. Ask God to use people in our church to bring God’s hope and restoration to this particular group.
- For families: Think about all the different relationships between individuals in your family. How do you each relate to the other members? It’s interesting how each of our personalities sometimes brings out different aspects of others’ personalities. Give each person an opportunity to share honestly about a part of themselves that others might not think of at first glance. Thank God for the ways God has made all of you unique and ask God to show all of you new ways of respecting and loving one another.

### Saturday, April 9th: 2 Sam 13: 23-39

23 Two years later, when Absalom’s sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king’s sons to come there. 24 Absalom went to the king and said, “Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his attendants please join me?”

25 “No, my son,” the king replied. “All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you.” Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go but gave him his blessing.

26 Then Absalom said, “If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us.”

The king asked him, “Why should he go with you?” 27 But Absalom urged him, so he sent with him Amnon and the rest of the king’s sons.

28 Absalom ordered his men, “Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, ‘Strike Amnon down,’ then kill him. Don’t be afraid. Haven’t I given you this order? Be strong and

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brave.” 29 So Absalom’s men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king’s sons got up, mounted their mules and fled.

30 While they were on their way, the report came to David: “Absalom has struck down all the king’s sons; not one of them is left.” 31 The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his attendants stood by with their clothes torn.

32 But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David’s brother, said, “My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom’s express intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar.” 33 My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king’s sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead.”

34 Meanwhile, Absalom had fled.

Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, “I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill.”

35 Jonadab said to the king, “See, the king’s sons have come; it has happened just as your servant said.”

36 As he finished speaking, the king’s sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his attendants wept very bitterly.

37 Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned many days for his son.

38 After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years. 39 And King David longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon’s death.

### Points of Interest

- ‘Two years later’--I guess Absalom is a ‘Revenge is a dish best served cold’ kind of guy.
- ‘when Absalom’s sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor’—this would be like the Thanksgiving holiday. It’s a chance to rest after a hard season’s labor, to celebrate a job well done, and to thank God for another abundant year.
- ‘All of us should not go’--after inviting all of his brothers, Absalom goes on to invite the king, anticipating that David would decline. Rather like never having the President and Vice-President in the same airplane, David is avoiding having the entire royal family in one place, lest the nation be left leaderless in the case of some tragedy. He offers a more gracious excuse for declining, though, basically saying, ‘No, you and your brothers go on ahead and have your fun without me.’
- ‘we would only be a burden to you’--when I was in high school, the President (it was Reagan) spoke at our school on a campaign stop. Not only on the day, but for a couple of weeks before, there was total chaos. The place was crawling with secret service agents, advance campaign staff, political advisors, White House staff, and reporters. A helipad was installed in our football practice field, and all of our landscaping was redone. It’s quite an undertaking to host a head of state.
- ‘please let my brother Amnon come’--as the oldest son and therefore probably the Crown Prince, Amnon would be a part of the king’s retinue. Absalom is asking David to send Amnon as his representative.
- ‘Why should he go with you?’--David seems a bit suspicious, but Absalom outlasts him in the ‘Why?/Why not?’ game.
- ‘When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine’--Absalom wants them to strike when Amnon and those loyal to him would most have their guard down. This plan has the added benefit of

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being embarrassing. The last picture of Amnon would be as a drunken fool. Absalom wants Amnon not just to die, but to experience at least some of the shame he inflicted on Tamar.

- ‘strong and brave’--I wouldn’t exactly call it an act of heroism to strike down a drunk man. Then again, they are about to kill a prince. Maybe it’s not so much the actual ‘fight’ as the aftermath they’re afraid of.
- ‘all the king’s sons got up, mounted their mules and fled’--the rest of the princes, perhaps not aware of the private feud between Amnon and Absalom, think that Absalom is executing a palace coup. Step one would be eliminating all competition.
- ‘not one of them is left’--while the princes scatter in a panic, rumors of this supposed coup make it to the palace.
- ‘Jonadab son of Shimeah, David’s brother, said ... “Only Amnon is dead”’-- Jonadab certainly has a way of inserting himself into the middle of palace intrigue, doesn’t he? A confidant of Amnon in the last passage, he also seems to be well-informed about Absalom’s plans.
- ‘ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar’--note that he doesn’t say, alleged rape,’ or, ‘that thing between Amnon and Tamar.’ Regardless of what he’s said before, at least now Jonadab is calling it what it was.
- ‘Meanwhile, Absalom had fled’--Amnon may very well have deserved to die. That doesn’t mean Absalom had the right to kill him. He has just assassinated the Crown Prince. This could spark wider feuding among the various parties and sub-families in the royal family, or even a civil war.
- ‘Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur’--this is Absalom’s maternal grandfather. Like when David’s father Jesse went into exile in Moab, Absalom is seeking family protection outside of Israel.
- ‘for he was consoled concerning Amnon’s death’--David’s judgment of Absalom is softened by the fact that it was not, in the end, a coup, and by the fact that Amnon’s death wasn’t exactly unjustified. Plus, as time goes by, he simply misses Absalom. However, the fact remains that Absalom is a murderer and traitor. So, David can’t easily welcome him back.

### Taking it Home

- For you: David and his family perform a poor life decision hat trick: it’s not often you get murder, incest, and fratricide within one week’s Bible Guide passages. It seems like Absalom had a fairly sizeable number of friends, family members, and neighbors who would join him for his dinner party. Nothing ruins a good party, though, like murdering your brother in the middle of it. Absalom could have been enjoying a pretty rich relational world if only he weren’t so obsessed by Amnon. Who are the people you spend your time with? Are they at work? at church? in your neighborhood? in a sports league? Ask God to help you pay attention to them. Are there ways that you are distracted by one person or dynamic, such that you neglect all the others in your midst? Ask God to place you in a community of people who will uplift you, encourage you, and help you follow after him.
- For your six: Since Jonadab knew about it, apparently Absalom had expressed his intention to kill Amnon. Maybe he said it sarcastically, or under his breath, or at an inappropriate time; somehow no one seemed to follow up. What are things your six often talk about? What are the comments they make repeatedly or topics they seem to bring up again and again? Ask God to

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help you pay attention to the things your six say--both the words they say and the meaning beneath those words.

- For our church: Who knows what reconciliation between Absalom and Amnon would have looked like, or even if it were possible at all? These two feuding brothers paint yet another picture of the incredible mess of grief, misery and despair that results when two parties are at odds. Pray for God to bless our church with peace and reconciliation so that we could then actively play a part in creating peace and reconciliation in our cities, countries and the world. Forgive the Miss American pageant cliché, but ask God even for world peace--or, at least, that God would help us learn how to get along ourselves.
- For families: Is there a time in your family when you purposefully connect and have time together? In today's society, it's easy to get distracted or try to multitask to get everything done, inadvertently not listening fully to others. Ask God for some time today to listen to each other--and to God--without distractions. Is there anything someone in your family has said recently that you have not followed up on? Consider finding time to do that today.

### **Sunday, April 10th: 2 Samuel 15**

1 In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. 2 He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." 3 Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." 4 And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice."

5 Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. 6 Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

7 At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, "Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. 8 While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: 'If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.'"

9 The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he went to Hebron.

10 Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'" 11 Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. 12 While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing.

13 A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom."

14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword."

15 The king's officials answered him, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses."

16 The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. 17 So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at the edge of the

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city. 18 All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king.

19 The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. 20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your people with you. May the LORD show you kindness and faithfulness.”

21 But Ittai replied to the king, “As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.”

22 David said to Ittai, “Go ahead, march on.” So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him.

23 The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

24 Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

25 Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. 26 But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”

27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Do you understand? Go back to the city with my blessing. Take your son Ahimaaz with you, and also Abiathar’s son Jonathan. You and Abiathar return with your two sons. 28 I will wait at the fords in the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” 29 So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

30 But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. 31 Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” So David prayed, “LORD, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.”

32 When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. 33 David said to him, “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me. 34 But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘Your Majesty, I will be your servant; I was your father’s servant in the past, but now I will be your servant,’ then you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel’s advice. 35 Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king’s palace. 36 Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear.”

37 So Hushai, David’s confidant, arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.

### Points of Interest

- ‘In the course of time’--we skipped a chapter, in which Joab brokers peace between David and Absalom. David allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem, and offers him protection from revenge on the part of Amnon’s people. But Absalom is now kept out of any government affairs.
- ‘Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men’--Absalom is apparently next in line for the kingship. He is the third oldest son. He himself eliminated Amnon, the oldest. We never hear anything about Kileab, the second; whether he died early, is unfit somehow to rule, or is simply uninterested is unknown. So, Absalom has the right combination of seniority and fame to make a claim. But, because of his assassination of Amnon, he’s being frozen out. He’s tired of waiting to be let back into David’s good graces and decides he’ll make something happen himself. The first step is to get himself on the front page of the news. He does the Iron Age equivalent of Dukakis’ publicity stunt driving the tank, with the difference that

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it actually works for Absalom. By the time he's done, the word around town is, 'He may have murdered his brother, but you have to hand it to the guy: he looks great on a chariot.' If you're tracking with our story, however, you'll recognize that the author is signaling that there's a problem with Absalom. It's not necessarily a good thing that Absalom has that natural leader look. It puts him in company with Saul and with David's oldest brother Eliab, both of whom looked very kingly but were rejected by God for being substandard king-making material.

Meanwhile, the very fact that David is again and again willing to make the unkingly choice—use a sling instead of a sword, dance with his ephod showing, wear sackcloth—gains him the long-lasting respect of God and the people.

- 'If only I were appointed judge in the land'—step two in Absalom's campaign is to position himself as the 'Washington outsider.' If he were in charge, he'd eliminate all of that government red tape and get rid of the politics as usual atmosphere of the capital.
- 'would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him'—step three is a straight-out charm offensive.
- 'Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD'—apparently, David has been keeping a close eye on Absalom. He needs an excuse to get out of Jerusalem and away from all of the prying eyes at court. Hebron is his birthplace. So, he's asking David to let him go home, get back in touch with his roots, and spend some time with God in the more comfortable and low-stress atmosphere away from Jerusalem. Hebron would be to Absalom as Kennebunkport is to the Bushs, or Hyannis is to the Kennedys. Or, at least, that's how he's presenting it to David.
- 'Absalom is king in Hebron'—Hebron is also the place from which David made his bid for the crown, and that's really what Absalom has in mind.
- 'We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom'—it's unclear to me whether David is panicking or being prudent here. On the one hand, Absalom has taken David by surprise, has some well-placed allies, is well-organized, and executes his plan well. So, maybe it's wise of David to step back to regroup. On the other hand, Absalom's rebellion is more a matter of theater than of actual power; in the end, it consists of little more than some horns, some shouting, and two hundred influential people who are being presented as his supporters when they're actually unwitting dinner guests.
- 'he left ten concubines to take care of the palace'—I suppose someone needs to be left behind to feed the cats and water the plants, but I don't think I'd want to be these women. The fact that David is leaving them at the palace suggests that he's making a tactical withdrawal, rather than retreating outright. David fully expects to return. In the meanwhile, though, they're entirely defenseless.
- 'All his men'—that would be the king's bodyguard company, like we discussed David being for Achish on March 26th (1 Samuel 28:2).
- 'all the Kerethites and Pelethites'—the Kerithites and Pelethites are two crack units, probably of foreign mercenaries. The best guess is that the Kerithites are from Crete and the Pelethites are Philistines; thus, both companies are what we might loosely call 'Greeks.' ('Cherethites and Pelethites.' *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980). The Kerithites and Pelethites fit the profile of a typical foreign-born king's company—and they're referred to as his bodyguard in 2 Samuel 20:23—but they're listed here separately from 'David's men' referenced in the note above. Even if distinct from the king's company, they're particularly closely attached to the king; they're commanded by one of his highest-ranking

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Mighty Men (not quite one of the Three, but greater than the Thirty). Besides his bodyguard and the Kerithites and Pelethites, David has with him his original 600 from the outlaw days, here called 'the Gittites.' So, all in all, while it's a little unclear at this point who controls the national army, we do know that David has maintained the loyalty of four elite units: not a bad core.

- 'As surely as the LORD lives'—Ittai is apparently a Philistine, newly arrived from Gath. David gives him the chance to break contract, letting him know that he might be safer or get paid better with Absalom. As a hired gun with nothing invested in this fight, why should Ittai make life difficult for himself? Ittai swears by God--David's God, the LORD--that he will stick with David. While David's own son uses a fake religious ceremony as cover for rebellion, this stranger genuinely calls upon God as witness to his loyalty.
- 'Take the ark of God back into the city'--David doesn't consider himself to have a monopoly on God. Whether he wins this contest or not, whether Absalom ends up king or he does, he wants the ark, the symbol of God's presence, to be in Jerusalem.
- 'LORD, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness'--Ahithophel may be Bathsheba's grandfather (Baldwin). If so, it's curious that he would side with Absalom, as one would expect that his own grandchildren would lose out if Absalom succeeds. Whatever his relationship to the royal family, he is definitely a wise and respected counselor. Knowing the good advice Ahithophel has given him over the years, David is afraid of what might happen with that brilliant mind turned against him.
- 'you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel's advice'--apparently, Hushai is another of David's counselors. David sends him to Absalom as a spy and fifth columnist. I think the idea is that it will be harder for Absalom to make a good decision if he is getting contrary advice from two people with such reputations for wisdom.

### Taking it Home

- For you: Absalom seems pretty convinced that his father would never give him what he wants (He clearly never read the tip from last Friday, April 1st, about Baanah and Rekab and how taking things into your own hands often doesn't go the best). I wonder though what it would have been like if Absalom had explicitly asked David for what he wanted. How do you feel about asking God for things? You probably can relate to how good it feels when someone takes the time to ask you something; more times than not it feels good to be asked for your thoughts, opinions, and help--even if it's help you can't even quite pull off. I wonder if God is the same. Practice today asking God for the things you need and want. And like any good asking goes, wait and expect that God will respond to your request.
- For your six: Whether he is panicked or prudent in his fleeing of Jerusalem, having to gather his entire staff and march to a place of refuge all because of a rebellious child has to be a pretty humbling experience for David; it probably puts into question his ability to be father, let alone a king. Are there ways that deciding to follow God would be particularly humbling and therefore challenging to your six? Ask God to give your six the joy and courage to follow after him. Pray God would remove any ways that pursuing him threatens them and call their sense of identity into question.
- For our church: David wants people to worship God, regardless of whether or not he is still around or personally involved. Ask God to give our church the same stance; pray that we would

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care more than anything else about people being able to connect with God, and that we would feel excited for any of the ways that that might happen, even if we're not directly involved.

- For families: Thinking back to Monday's 'Taking It Home For Families' tip about good ideas from God that God doesn't want us to act on quite yet. Spend time praying together and asking God for these things. If it feels unfair to you or you worry you might never get what God promised, tell God that and ask God to provide for what you need. Encourage each person in your family not to give up on things but to continue to ask for the things they want even if the answer is 'not yet.'