



We can easily see that the books of Samuel are very different from the so-called books of Moses that are found at the beginning of the Bible and different from the books of Joshua and of Judges that precede the books of Samuel. Those books were dealing with ancient events that were known only through oral traditions for the purpose of justifying the laws and worship. God was always speaking in an authoritarian manner and acting in a fantastic way, as if God intervened in a world completely different from ours. It was definitely a literature far removed from our historiography.

Here, on the other hand, the authors are relating more recent events for which they have witnesses. The kingdom of David took place from 1050-1010 and the author must have been a contemporary of his son Solomon. Here people of flesh and blood are involved in complex events. Through them, the history of Israel is taking shape as Israel faces its close neighbors and a bit later, the great empires of the Near East. A different image of God is revealed in the biblical account. God is no longer presented as an omnipotent God but instead, as Samuel, David and their contemporaries knew and experienced God and these books candidly relate the events through which these people have known the will of God.

The book of Samuel, divided into two parts, relates the beginning of the monarchy. The first book focuses on three persons. First, we have Samuel, an old-fashioned leader, in addition to his being a prophet. Then we have Saul, the first king, whose life ends up in failure and finally, we have David with the account of his ascension to the throne. At the beginning of the book, Israel is not yet in charge of the country, although the tribes have already become accustomed to sedentary life. Threatened by the Philistines who occupy the coastal plains, the tribes are experiencing the need to have a unified and strong power. They will become a nation and that will be the kingdom of David. The second book of Samuel deals with the kingdom of David, his successes, victories and his trials. At the heart of the book, we have the exceptional promise that David received from God: his descendants will reign forever on the throne of Israel.

An Interpretation of History

This is the time to recall what was said at the beginning of the book of Joshua. The book of Samuel is one of the writings that the Bible calls Early Prophets, meaning by this title that these historical books were conceived and written in prophetic circles. The entire series

that goes from Joshua to the books of Kings forms a unit with a reflection on Deuteronomy, a book that also came from prophetic circles. Today we usually speak of Deuteronomic History to refer to this whole series.

The conviction that inspires the interpretation of this history is often summarized in a few words: if the people and their king are faithful to the covenant with God, they will experience peace and success but if they sin against the covenant, they will be heading straight for failure.

However, we would be overly simplifying prophetic thinking if we were to limit it to this transaction with God: I obey your law and you protect me. The covenant between God and Israel and then, in this book, the covenant of God with David and his descendants, are teaching us many things about who God is and the way God looks upon those who love him. In the first place, we have the repeated affirmation of a God who only wants the good of Israel. However, Israel is unfaithful and it continually lets itself be seduced by the gods of others, the idols. Israel will be forgiven and it will prosper if it acknowledges its errors and if it accepts to reject its idols but, in fact, Israel will only be able to come to such a conversion after suffering. Here we have a feeling that can extend to the failures of every sort that any people may encounter on their path. This intuition awaits and prepares the revelation of the Gospel and it was not by accident that holy, sinful and beseeching king David was considered the author of the Psalms.

If this is the spirit of all the history that is called prophetic, there is still something that characterizes the book of Samuel in a more special way and that is the promise made to David through the prophet Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:14. Even after David's death, the promise will remain and it will open up an unlimited horizon: the descendant of David will inaugurate the last days and the Kingdom of God.

David: the Central Figure

The book of Samuel was written and revised by writers (prophets or priests) who have left their mark on it. We should read the text just as it appears, without prejudices, but with a critical approach at the same time. Thus, we will see, for example, that the book reports testimonies that are opposed at times. Some are for the institution of the monarchy while others are against it. Some are in favor of David while others focus only on his negative aspects. At times, the author appears to be neutral, leaving us with our questions. God acts in the same manner: God does not say much but God is leaving some signs, inviting readers of the book to search and to discern.

The books of Samuel

1. Samuel and the House of Eli: 1 S 1–3
2. The Ark of the Covenant: 1 S 4–7
3. Saul, the first king: 1 S 8–15
Saul, chosen by God (8:1–13:2)
Saul, rejected by God (13:2–15:34)
4. Saul and David: 1 S 16–31
David, designated by God (16:1–17:58)
David, Saul's adversary (18:1–26:25)
David, among the Philistines
(27:1–31:13)
5. The fight for the kingdom: 2 S 1–7
David over all of Israel (1:1–4:12)
Jerusalem, the Ark and the promise
(5:1–7:29)
6. David as King: 2 S 8–20
The Kingdom of David (8:1–12:31)
David and his sons (13:1–19:44)
The end of the kingdom (20:1–24)
7. Appendixes: 2 S 21–24

The story of Hannah

9:1;
Jdg 13:2

1 • ¹There was a man from Ramathaim, in the hills of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah. He was son of Tohu, son of Jeroham, of the clan of Zuph. ²He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children but Hannah had none.

Dt 12:18

³Every year Elkanah went to worship and to sacrifice to Yahweh of hosts at Shiloh. The priests there were the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas. ⁴Whenever Elkanah offered sacrifice, he gave portions to his wife, Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵To Hannah, however, he gave the more delightful portion because he loved her more, although she had no child. ⁶Yet Hannah's rival used to tease her for being barren.

Ru 4:15

⁷So it happened every year when they went to Yahweh's house. Peninnah irritated Hannah and she would weep and refuse to eat. ⁸Once Elkanah, her husband, asked her, "Hannah, why do you weep instead of eating? Why are you sad? Are you not better off with me than with many sons?"

Lk 1:48

⁹After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah stood up not far from Eli, the priest: his seat was beside the doorpost of Yahweh's house. ¹⁰Deeply distressed she wept and prayed to Yahweh ¹¹and made this vow, "O Yahweh of hosts, if only you

will have compassion on your maidservant and give me a son, I will put him in your service for as long as he lives and no razor shall touch his head."

¹²As she prayed before Yahweh, Eli observed the movement of her lips. ¹³Hannah was praying silently; she moved her lips but uttered no sound and Eli thought Hannah was drunk. ¹⁴He, therefore, said to her: "For how long will you be drunk? Let your drunkenness pass." ¹⁵But Hannah answered: "No, my lord, I am a woman in great distress, not drunk. I have not drunk wine or strong drink, but I am pouring out my soul before Yahweh. ¹⁶Do not take me for a bad woman. I was so afflicted that my prayer flowed continuously." ¹⁷Then Eli said, "Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you asked for." ¹⁸Hannah answered, "Let your maidservant deserve your kindness." Then she left the temple and when she was at table, she seemed a different woman.

¹⁹Elkanah rose early in the morning and worshiped before Yahweh with his wives. Then they went back home to Ramah. When Elkanah slept with his wife, Hannah, Yahweh took compassion on her, ²⁰and she became pregnant. She gave birth to a son and called him Samuel because she said: "I have asked Yahweh to give him to me."

• **1.1** It all starts with an ordinary couple living a familiar drama in a hill town.

The woman, in an inferior situation, as it will always be in Israel, is only worth the children she bears. A man has as many wives as he is able to maintain. Elkanah loves Hannah. Yahweh listens and not only gives a son to Hannah, but also a prophet for his people.

God likes to choose his servants precisely from those families who have no hope of having children. It is God who gives life to the dead and hope to those who have none. The same happens with the birth of Isaac and John

the Baptist (Lk 1:5). In the book of Isaiah is a poem which starts with these words: "Rejoice, O barren woman who has not given birth!" (Is 54:1).

These pages depict for us the religious life of those days. The campaign tent which shelters the ark is at Shiloh. There is no temple yet in Israel, so pilgrims bring their animals; and the father as head of the family and priest of his household sacrifices the victims. Only after David's time will the priests of Levi's tribe be the exclusive intermediaries between Yahweh and his people.

²¹ Once more Elkanah went to the temple with his family to offer his yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow to Yahweh. ²² Hannah would not go along but she said to her husband, "I will bring the child there as soon as he is weaned. He shall be presented to Yahweh and stay there forever." ²³ Her husband answered, "Do what seems best to you. Stay here until you have weaned the child and may Yahweh confirm your vow." So Hannah stayed behind and continued to nurse her son until he was weaned.

Num 15:8

²⁴ When the child was weaned,

Hannah took him with her along with a three-year-old bull, a measure of flour and a flask of wine, and she brought him to Yahweh's house at Shiloh. The child was still young.

²⁵ After they had slain the bull, they brought the child to Eli. ²⁶ Hannah exclaimed: "Oh, my lord, look! I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to Yahweh. ²⁷ I asked for this child and Yahweh granted me the favor I begged of him. ²⁸ Now, I think, Yahweh is asking for this child. As long as he lives, he belongs to Yahweh."

And they worshiped Yahweh there.

Hannah's Prayer

Is 61:10;
Lk 1:
46-55

2 ¹ And this is the song of Hannah,

"My heart exults in Yahweh,
I feel strong in my God.

I rejoice and laugh at my enemies
for you came with power to save me.

15:11;
Is 64:3

² Yahweh alone is holy, no one is like you;
there is no Rock like our God.

³ Speak proudly no more;
no more arrogance on your lips,
for Yahweh is an all-knowing God,
he it is who weighs the deeds of all.

Ps 113:9

⁴ The bow of the mighty is broken
but the weak are girded with strength.

⁵ The well-fed must labor for bread
but the hungry need work no more.

The childless wife has borne seven children,
but the proud mother is left alone.

Dt 32:39;
Hos 6:1;
Ps 30:4

⁶ Yahweh is Lord of life and death;
he brings down to the grave and raises up.

• **2.1** In her thanksgiving song, Hannah makes herself the spokesperson of all the despised people of the world.

Yahweh is the God who saves the abandoned. He rejects those who put their trust *in their arm and in their bow*, in the food assured for their household, i.e., in themselves and their possessions. He manifests his glory in shifting the differences existing between people (as in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Lk 16:25). *Yahweh brings down to*

the grave and raises up. The song of Hannah has a prophetic vision. Like Hannah, we ought to be proud of our God, even more than in the material progress of our society which blesses the rich and the powerful.

This text condemns those who seek to advance in society and promote their own welfare with the sole purpose of ensuring their family's future. One who sides with the weak will be saved. Whereas others feel ashamed of their poor background, as laborers or farmers

⁷Yahweh makes poor and makes rich,
 he brings low and he exalts.
⁸He lifts up the lowly from the dust,
 and raises the poor from the ash heap;
 they will be called to the company of princes,
 and inherit a seat of honor.
 The earth to its pillars belongs to Yahweh
 and on them he has set the world.
⁹He guards the steps of his faithful ones,
 but the wicked perish in darkness,
 for no one succeeds by his own strength.
¹⁰The enemies of Yahweh are shattered,
 against them he thunders in heaven.
 Yahweh rules over the whole world,
 he will raise his own king.
 His anointed feels strong in Him.”

Ps 75:4;
 Job 38:6;
 Pro 8:29

¹¹After that Elkanah went home to Ramah while the boy served Yahweh in the presence of Eli, the priest.

The story of Eli

¹²The sons of Eli were worthless men who had no regard for Yahweh. ¹³This is how they acted with the people. When someone offered sacrifice, the servant of the priest would come while the meat was still boiling. ¹⁴With a fork, he would reach into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot, and all that the fork brought up would be for the priests. This is how these priests treated the Israelites who went to Shiloh. ¹⁵Sometimes the priest's servant would come before the fat was burned and would say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give meat for the priest to roast, for he will not accept boiled meat from you, only raw." ¹⁶And if the man answered, "Let the fat be burned first and then take as much as you wish," he would say, "No, give it to me now or else I will take it by force." ¹⁷The

sin of these young priests was very great in the sight of Yahweh because they defiled the offering of Yahweh.

¹⁸Meanwhile Samuel, now a boy wearing a priest's garment, was ministering before Yahweh. ¹⁹From time to time his mother made him a little robe which she handed to him when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. ²⁰Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife with these words, "May Yahweh give you more children by this woman for the sake of the boy she asked for and then gave to Yahweh."

22:18;
 2S 6:14

²¹After the man had gone back home, Yahweh blessed Hannah with more children. She had three sons and two daughters while the boy Samuel grew in the presence of Yahweh.

²²Eli was now very old. He heard how his sons dealt with the Israelites and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ²³So he told them, "How can you do the things I hear

38:8

or of the undeveloped condition of their country, the believer knows that the poor and the hungry contribute to the salvation of the world. Where everything is wanting, it is easier to dis-

cover the value of human persons, and to understand that no world is worthy of humankind except one where food and dignity are given to all.

about you from everyone? ²⁴No, my sons, what I hear from the pilgrims of Yahweh's people is really bad news for me. ²⁵When anyone sins against another person, God will mediate for him. But if he sins against Yahweh, who can intercede for him?" Yet the two would not listen to their father for Yahweh had already decided that they should die.

²⁶The boy Samuel, in the meantime, was growing in stature and worth before Yahweh and the people.

²⁷One day, a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is Yahweh's word: I revealed myself to your ancestors when they were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. ²⁸I chose them out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priests, to go up to my altar, to burn incense and to wear a priest's robe in my presence, and I gave them all the burnt offerings of Israel. ²⁹Why do you now despise my sacrifice and the offerings that I myself ordered? Why do you give more importance to your sons than to me and fatten yourselves on the choicest parts of every offering made by my people Israel? ³⁰Therefore, Yahweh, the God of Israel declares: I promised that your family and that of your father should go on ministering before me forever; but now, far be it from me! Those who honor me I shall honor, those who despise me will be despised. ³¹The days are coming when I will break your strength and the strength of all your relatives. ³²No one will live to a ripe old age. ³³Those of your

household that I do not reject from my service will be spared only to weep bitterly and live in grief; but the rest shall die by the sword. ³⁴What will happen to your sons Hophni and Phinehas shall be a sign to you: both of them shall die on the same day. ³⁵I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who shall act according to my heart and mind. I will give him a lasting succession that will serve me and my anointed one forever. ³⁶And everyone that is left of your family shall ask him for some money or a loaf of bread, saying: Appoint me, I beg you, for a priestly function so that I may have something to eat."

God calls Samuel

3 • ¹The boy Samuel ministered to Yahweh under Eli's care in a time in which the word of Yahweh was rarely heard; visions were not seen.

²One night Eli was lying down in his room, half blind as he was. ³The lamp of God was still lighted and Samuel also lay in the house of Yahweh near the Ark of God. ⁴Then Yahweh called, "Samuel! Samuel!" Samuel answered, "I am here!" ⁵and ran to Eli saying, "I am here, did you not call me?" But Eli said, "I did not call, go back to sleep." So he went and lay down.

⁶Then Yahweh called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel stood up and

Lk 2:52

Ps 18:26

Lev 26:16

Gen 22:1

• **3.1** God's call to Samuel is personal and direct. The answer of the child Samuel prepares him for greater things.

How seriously Eli, in spite of his age and function, regards Samuel! He knows that spiritual maturity has nothing to do with physical age and he accepts God's reproaches relayed through this boy.

The Bible also underlines the responsibility of those who do not discipline their children. The father's duty to educate and correct his children, even by punishing them, instead of leaving them to do what they want, was taught in Israel. As the conscience of the child is not yet fully awake, the future liberty of the young person as a mature adult has to be ensured

through the discipline of a "Law." (See Sir 30; Gal 4 and commentary on Jdg 8:22.)

The call of Samuel reminds us that every person has a vocation, i.e., that God calls individuals and destines them to accomplish their own irreplaceable tasks. In our society many are looked upon merely as work force and receive little appreciation. Since they have no duty or responsibility of which they can be proud, they rightly feel frustrated. They do not feel themselves "called" or needed for something big. So they lack one of the more important drives to build their future. In directing one's life, each one has to ask: "What does God want of me?"

went to Eli saying, “You called me; I am here.” But Eli answered, “I did not call you, my son. Go back to sleep.”

⁷Samuel did not yet know Yahweh and the word of Yahweh had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸But Yahweh called Samuel for the third time and, as he went again to Eli saying, “I am here for you have called me,” Eli realized that it was Yahweh calling the boy. ⁹So he said to Samuel, “Go, lie down, and if he calls you again, answer: “Speak, Yahweh, your servant listens.”

¹⁰Then Yahweh came and stood there calling as he did before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for your servant listens.”

¹¹Then Yahweh spoke to Samuel, “Look, I am about to do something in Israel which will scare everyone who hears about it. ¹²On that day I will carry out what I told Eli regarding his family. All will be fulfilled from beginning to end. ¹³For I told him that I was about to sentence his family forever. He himself knew that his sons were blaspheming God, but he did not stop them. ¹⁴This is why I have cursed the family of Eli. Their sin shall never be atoned for by sacrifice or by any offering.”

¹⁵Samuel lay down until morning and rose up early. Then he opened the doors of Yahweh’s house. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli, ¹⁶but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.” Samuel answered, “I am here.” ¹⁷Eli asked, “What did Yahweh tell you? Do not hide it from me. Fear the punishment of God if you hide from me even one thing he

told you.” ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything to the end and Eli said, “He is Yahweh. Let him do what seems good to him.”

¹⁹Samuel grew; Yahweh was with him and made all his words become true. ²⁰All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was really Yahweh’s prophet. ²¹Yahweh would appear at Shiloh; there he revealed himself to Samuel by giving him his word.

The Philistines capture the ark

4 • ¹At that time Samuel was a prophet of Israel. The Israelites went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, while the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ²The Philistines then drew up in battle formation. They attacked Israel and after a fierce struggle, Israel was defeated, leaving about four thousand men dead on the battlefield. ³When the troops retreated to their camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why has Yahweh allowed us to be defeated by the Philistines? Let us take the Ark of God from Shiloh and bring it here so that Yahweh may be with us and save us from our enemies.” ⁴So the people sent messengers to Shiloh to take the Ark of Yahweh who is seated on the cherubim. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, accompanied the Ark.

⁵As soon as the Ark of Yahweh entered the camp, the Israelites began to cheer so loudly that the earth resounded. ⁶The Philistines heard the shouting and asked, “What does this loud shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And they were told

• **4.1** In their war against the Philistines, the Israelites seek the protection of Yahweh. They look for the Ark, thinking that, when it is with them, Yahweh will be obliged to grant them victory. And since the human being often doubts his God, he relies on his lucky charms.

God is not concerned with the sacred Ark, nor is he at the service of an irresponsible people. Instead, he wants to educate them by making them pay the price for their unfaithfulness. For this reason, God does not respond to them and the sacred Ark is lost.

that the Ark of Yahweh had been brought to the camp.

⁷The Philistines were overcome with fear. They exclaimed, "A god has come into the camp. ⁸Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can save us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all sorts of plagues—and in the desert. ⁹Take courage and conduct yourselves like men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews the way they have been slaves to you. Be manly and fight."

¹⁰So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated. Everyone fled to his home. It was a disastrous defeat; thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel were killed. ¹¹The Ark of God was captured and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

¹²A man from the tribe of Benjamin fled from the battle line and arrived that same day in Shiloh. His clothes were torn and his head was covered with dust. ¹³When this man arrived, Eli was on his seat by the road, watching, for his heart trembled for what might happen to the Ark of God. When the people heard the news the man brought, all the city cried out. ¹⁴Eli heard their outcry and asked, "What is all this noise?" The man came to Eli at once and told him what happened. ¹⁵Eli was by then ninety-eight years old and was already blind. ¹⁶The man said to him, "I came from the battle, for I was able to flee from it." Then Eli asked him, "How did the battle go, my son?" ¹⁷The newsbearer answered, "Israel fled before the Philistines. There has been a disaster for our men; your sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are among the dead and the Ark of God has been taken." ¹⁸As soon as the man mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate. He broke his neck and died for he was an old and heavy man. Eli judged Israel for forty years.

¹⁹Eli's daughter-in-law, wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and was about to give birth. When she heard that the Ark of God was taken and that both her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she gave birth prematurely. ²⁰As she lay dying, the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid for you have given birth to a son." But she neither answered nor listened. ²¹She then named the child Ichabod, saying: "The glory has departed from Israel!" ²²And she said "the glory," meaning the Ark of God that had been captured.

5 ¹After they had taken the Ark of God, the Philistines carried it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²There they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it up beside him. ³Rising up early the following day, the people saw that Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the Ark of Yahweh. So they picked up Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴But when they rose the following morning, the people saw Dagon on the ground again, face downward before the Ark of Yahweh. His head and hands were broken off and lay at the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left where he fell. ⁵This is why the priests of Dagon and his worshipers do not tread on the threshold of his temple in Ashdod up to this day.

Zep 1:9

⁶The hand of Yahweh was heavy upon the people of Ashdod. Yahweh afflicted the people of Ashdod and its vicinity with hemorrhoids. ⁷Seeing this, the people of Ashdod said, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel not remain with us. His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon, our god." ⁸So they had all the chiefs of the Philistine cities gathered together to ask them, "What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?" They answered, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel be brought to Gath." So they brought the Ark of the God of Israel there. ⁹But as soon as they had brought it to Gath, Yahweh raised his hand against the city, causing a very great panic. He afflicted the people there, both young and old, with hemorrhoids. ¹⁰So they moved the Ark of God to Ekron. But when the Ark entered Ekron, the people there cried out, "They have brought us the Ark of the God of Israel to slay us all." ¹¹So they gathered the chiefs of the Philistine cities together to tell

them, "Send away the Ark of the God of Israel. Let it return to its own place lest we all die." For there was deadly panic throughout the city because of God's heavy hand. ¹²Those who did not die were stricken with hemorrhoids and the cry of the city reached to heaven.

6¹ The Ark of Yahweh was in the country of the Philistines for seven months. ²The Philistines called their priests and diviners and asked them, "What shall we do with the Ark of Yahweh? Tell us how we shall send it back to its place." ³The priests and diviners answered, "If you send away the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it away empty. Instead, provide him with a guilt offering. Then you may be healed and you will know why God dealt with you so severely." ⁴The chiefs then asked, "What guilt offering shall we provide him with?" The priests and diviners answered, "Make five golden figures of hemorrhoids and five golden figures of mice corresponding to the number of Philistine cities, for the same plague was on all of you and on your chiefs. ⁵So you must make images of your hemorrhoids and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will remove his hand from you, your gods and your land. ⁶But do not harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did. After Yahweh had afflicted them, did they not have to let the people go?"

7:1

⁷Now, then, prepare a new cart and take two milking cows which have never carried a yoke. Yoke the cows to the cart but take their calves away from them. ⁸Then, take the Ark of Yahweh and place it on the cart. Put in a box beside it the golden figures which you are giving him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way. ⁹Then, watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, through Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm. If not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us, that all these things happened to us by chance."

¹⁰The people carried out these instructions. They took two milking cows and yoked them to the cart and shut their calves in their shed. ¹¹They then put the Ark of Yahweh on the cart, along with the

box with the golden mice and the images of their hemorrhoids. ¹²The cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along the way; they went mooing and they turned neither to the right nor to the left. Meanwhile, the chiefs of the Philistine cities followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

¹³The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley when they saw the Ark drawing near, and they rejoiced greatly. ¹⁴The cart arrived in Beth-shemesh in Joshua's field and stopped there. A big stone lay nearby, so the people split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows over the stone as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹⁵Meanwhile, the Levites took down the Ark of Yahweh and the box containing the golden figures, and they set these up on the big stone.

That day the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrifices to Yahweh. The five chiefs of the Philistine cities, however, ¹⁶upon seeing what happened, immediately returned to Ekron.

¹⁷These are the Philistine cities which gave golden figures of hemorrhoids as a guilt offering to Yahweh: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Akron. ¹⁸Similarly, there were golden figures of mice corresponding in number to all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five leaders, counting fortified cities and unwalled villages. The big stone beside which the people set down the Ark of Yahweh in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh, is a witness to this day.

¹⁹Yahweh caused the death of seventy men of Beth-shemesh who had looked at the Ark of Yahweh. On seeing this, the people mourned greatly. ²⁰The people of Beth-shemesh then said, "Who can stand before Yahweh, this holy God? And where can we send the Ark away from us?" ²¹So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim with this word, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of Yahweh. Come down and take it up with you."

2S 24:22;
1K 19:21

Mal 3:2

7¹ The people of Kiriath-jearim came for the Ark of Yahweh. They brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to take charge of it.

Samuel awakens Israel

Jdg 6:6;
10:10

• ²A very long time passed from the day the Ark was lodged at Ki-riath-jearim. For some twenty years, all Israel mourned and longed for Yahweh.

Gen 35:2;
Jos
24:14;
Jdg 6:10

³Then Samuel told the Israelites, "If you turn back to Yahweh in all sincerity, get rid of the foreign gods and your Ashteroth. When you have set your heart on Yahweh and serve no one but him, he will deliver you from the Philistines." ⁴So the Israelites got rid of the Baals and the Ashteroth and began serving no one but Yahweh.

Jdg
20:26

⁵Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel in Mizpah and I will pray to Yahweh on your behalf." ⁶And so they gathered at Mizpah. They drew water and poured it out before Yahweh. They fasted on that day and said, "We have sinned against Yahweh." It was Samuel who led this assembly of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷When the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the chiefs of the Philistine cities went up to Israel's land. The Israelites became afraid when they learned this ⁸and they said to Samuel, "Pray without ceasing to Yahweh our God on our behalf so that he may save us from the Philistines." ⁹Samuel then took a suckling lamb and offered it to Yahweh as a whole burnt offering, appealing to him on behalf of the people. And Yahweh answered him.

¹⁰At the very time Samuel was

offering the sacrifice, the Philistines launched an attack against Israel. But Yahweh's voice thundered loudly in the midst of the Philistines; they were suddenly confused and defeated by Israel. ¹¹The Israelites left Mizpah, pursuing and slaying the Philistines to a point beyond Bethcar.

¹²Samuel, then, took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and named it Ebenezer, for he said, "Unto this place Yahweh has helped us." ¹³After this defeat, the Philistines did not dare enter the territory of Israel and Yahweh held them in check for as long as Samuel lived. ¹⁴The Israelites recovered the towns from Ekron to Gath which the Philistines had seized from Israel. Israel rescued their territories. And there was peace, even between the Israelites and the Amorites.

¹⁵Samuel was judge in Israel for the rest of his life. ¹⁶Every year he went around to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷After that he returned to Ramah for his home was there. There he judged Israel and there he built an altar to Yahweh.

The people ask for a king

8 • ¹When Samuel grew old, he made his sons judges over Israel. ²His elder son was Joel and the second was Abijah, and both of them were judges in Beersheba. ³But they were not like their father; they had their vested interests, taking bribes and perverting justice.

⁴Because of this, all the chiefs of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel in Ramah. ⁵They said to

2:12;
23:8;
Dt 16:19

Acts
13:21;

• **7.2** The same experience recorded in Judges is repeated here. Samuel convinces Israel to return to Yahweh. Yahweh, in turn, faithful to his Covenant, grants them victory.

• **8.1** A deep transformation took place in the way of life of the ancient nomads now living in villages and towns like the rest of the population. Former social structures adapted to life in the desert were no longer suitable,

something that is often seen in the history of nations, as well as in the Church. Humankind is constantly changing, led on by events and technical evolution; differences in mentalities appear, revealing how ill-adapted are ancient structures to new situations. Because of this there is a permanent tension between life and institutions.

On the other hand, institutions indispensable to the life of communities have as their es-

Ezk
20:32;
Es 3:8

him, "You are already old and your sons are not following your ways. Give us a king to rule over us as in all the other nations."

⁶Samuel was very displeased with what they said, "Give us a king to rule us," and he prayed to Yahweh. ⁷And Yahweh told him, "Give to this people all that they ask for. ⁸They are not rejecting you but they have rejected me as their king. They are now doing to you what they did to me from the day I brought them out of Egypt until now, forsaking me and serving other gods. ⁹Nevertheless, listen to them, and give them a serious warning. Tell them how they will be treated by their king."

2S 15:1;
1K 1:5

¹⁰So Samuel answered those who were asking him for a king, ¹¹and he told them all that Yahweh said to him, "Look, these will be the demands of your king: he will take your sons and assign them to his chariot and his horses and have them run before his chariot. ¹²Some he will assign as commanders over a thousand men and commanders over fifty. Others will till his ground and reap his harvest, make his implements of war and the equipment for

his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters as well to prepare perfumes, to cook and to bake for him. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards and your olive orchards and give them to his officials. ¹⁵He will take a tenth portion of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. ¹⁶He will take your menservants and maidservants, the best of your cattle and your asses for his own work. ¹⁷He will take the tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When these things happen, you will cry out because of the king whom you have chosen for yourselves. But by then, Yahweh will not answer you."

Mic 3:4

¹⁹The people paid no attention to all that Samuel said. They insisted, "No! We want a king to govern us as in all the other nations. ²⁰Our king shall govern us, lead us and go ahead of us in our battles." ²¹Upon hearing all that his people said, Samuel repeated it to Yahweh. ²²But Yahweh said to him, "Listen to them and give them a king." Samuel then said to the Israelites, "Go back, all of you, to your own cities."

sential purpose to channel, order and organize this ever turbulent life; without creativity people are dead in life; without permanent institution a society turns towards anarchy. If the tension between life and institution is permanent, it becomes manifest when society is in crisis. While conservative elements think of reestablishing order as a return to the past, the innovators, looking for fresh structures in order to respond to present reality, forget too quickly what past experience has taught.

Chapters 8–12 of 1st Samuel present us such a crisis and the conflicts arising from it. The people realize their weakness as coming from division and anarchy. The temporary authority of the "Judges" is outdated; the twelve tribes must unite around a king.

Samuel is a defender of the past, and his warnings are inspired by personal distrust. He does not recognize the advantage of a stronger

and more centralized government. Instead he is in touch with reality and denounces absolute power.

Samuel reproaches the people for their lack of trust in Yahweh. Now as they face the Philistine peril, they believe they will have security in handing over to someone else, a strong leader, the responsibility of thinking and deciding for them: they are fearful of taking initiatives. When one expects everything from civil or religious authorities it means either sinking or suffering political tyranny.

According to Samuel, theoretically the king will be God's representative and his people's servant. In reality, he will serve his own ambitions and be the nation's oppressor. Already in that ancient time, dictators had enough knowledge of propaganda to convince people that they were indispensable (Lk 22:25).

The story of Saul

9¹ There was a man from the tribe of Benjamin whose name was Kish. He was the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a valiant Benjaminite. ²Kish had a son named Saul, a handsome young man who had no equal among the Israelites, for he was a head taller than any of them.

Jdg 10:4 ³It happened that the asses of Kish were lost. So he said to his son Saul, "Take one of the boys with you and go look for the asses." ⁴They went all over the hill country of Ephraim and the land of Shalishah but did not find them. They passed through the land of Shaalim and the land of Benjamin, but the asses were nowhere to be found.

Jdg 18:5 ⁵When they reached the land of Zuph, Saul said to his boy, "Let us go back, lest my father be more worried about us than about the asses." ⁶But his servant said to him, "Look, there is a man of God in this city. He is a highly respected man. All that he says comes true. Let us see him for he may be able to help us find what we are looking for." ⁷Saul replied, "But if we go, what can we bring him? We have no more bread in our sacks and we have no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" ⁸The servant answered, "I still have with me a quarter silver coin. I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way."

1K 14:3

¹⁰And Saul said to his boy, "Well said! Come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

Samuel anoints Saul

• ¹¹As they went up the hill to the city, they met young girls coming out to draw water and asked them, "Is the seer here?" ⁹(Formerly, people in Israel who went to consult God, would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," for they did not speak of prophets, but of seers.) ¹²The maidens answered, "The seer is straight ahead. He has just arrived because they have a sacrifice today on the high place. ¹³As soon as you enter the city, you shall find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not eat until he comes because he must first bless the sacrifice, and then those who are invited may eat. Now go up; you will meet him immediately."

¹⁴So they went up to the city and entered it, and saw Samuel coming out towards them on his way up to the high place.

¹⁵The day before Saul came, Yahweh had already disclosed this to Samuel, ¹⁶"Tomorrow, about this time, I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin and you shall anoint him to rule over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines for I have seen the affliction of my people and their cry has come to me."

Acts 9:10

• **9.1** The continuation of chapter 8 is in 10:17. Here instead the story of Saul's vocation begins. Saul sets out to look for his father's mules and, on the way, encounters something he did not expect.

• **11.** The young Saul, just like many other Israelites, goes to Samuel. For them the prophet is a *seer*, a diviner, and they go to him for a solution to their economic problems. We should not find this strange. For centuries,

those who were addicted to the science of the stars also attended consultations concerning the future. Reading horoscopes was their way of earning a living. Science later departed from those practices.

In the same way in the early history of Israel, the prophet hardly seems different from a soothsayer, an astrologist and others who claim to know what ordinary folk cannot know; people come to consult them as does Saul for any trouble they have. But soon

¹⁷So, when Samuel saw Saul, Yahweh told him, "Here is the man I spoke to you about! He shall rule over my people."

¹⁸Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and said, "Tell me, where is the house of the seer?" ¹⁹Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer. Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me. In the morning, before you leave, I will tell you all that is in your heart." ²⁰As for your asses that were lost three days ago, do not worry about them for they have been found."

Samuel added, "For whom is the first place in Israel? Isn't it for you and for all your father's kin?" ²¹Saul answered, "I am a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel, and my family is the lowliest of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin. Why do you speak to me in this way?"

²²Samuel took Saul and his boy, brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of the table, before some thirty guests. ²³Then Samuel told the cook, "Bring in the portion which I asked you to put aside." ²⁴The cook brought in the leg with the tail portion and set it before Saul, saying to him, "This has been set aside for you. Please eat." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

²⁵Then they went down from the high place and entered the city. On the terrace they prepared a bed for Saul where he lay down to sleep.

²⁶Early the next morning, Samuel called to Saul, "Get up, for I must send you on your way." Saul got up and began to walk down the street with Samuel.

²⁷As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell your servant to walk ahead. You stay here for a while and I shall give you a message from God."

10 ¹Then Samuel took a vial of oil and poured it on Saul's head. And kissing Saul, Samuel said, "Yahweh has anointed you to rule over and to lead his people Israel. And this will be Yahweh's sign to you that he has anointed you. ²After we part today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb at Zelzah, in the territory of Benjamin. They will say to you: 'The asses you were looking for have been found. But your father is now worried about you, and what may have happened to you.' ³When you go on to the oak of Tabor, you will meet three men going up to see God at Bethel. One will be carrying three kids; another, three loaves of bread; and another, a skin of wine. ⁴They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you are to accept from them. ⁵After that, you will come to Gibeath-elohim where the garrison of the Philistines is. At the entrance of the city, you will meet a band of prophets coming down from the high place, and a choir with harp, tambourine, flute and lyre going before them. They will be in a trance as the prophets used to be. ⁶Then the Spirit of Yahweh will seize you. You shall prophesy with them and become another man.

⁷Now when these signs are fulfilled, do whatever seems good to you for God is with you. ⁸You shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me, and I shall join you there to offer burnt of-

prophetism in Israel will find its own way: the prophet will be the one who calls people to conversion. When this chapter was written, the passage was already made and v. 9 makes it

clear that if before, people spoke of "seer," they now speak of "prophet."

Samuel anoints Saul with anointing oil (see commentary on Lev 8).

ferings and peace offerings. Wait there seven days until I come and tell you what you have to do.”

⁹As soon as Saul parted from Samuel, God transformed him into a different person and all the signs Samuel mentioned to Saul were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰Upon entering Gibeah, a band of prophets met Saul; then the Spirit of God seized him and he began to prophesy with them.

¹¹Those who knew him and saw him prophesying with the prophets asked one another, “What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also one of the prophets?” ¹²One of them exclaimed, “And who is his father!” This, therefore, became a saying, “Is Saul also one of the prophets?” ¹³When Saul finished prophesying, he arrived with them at the sanctuary.

¹⁴Saul’s uncle asked him and his boy, “Where did you go?” Saul answered, “To look for the asses. When we could not find them, we went to Samuel.” ¹⁵His uncle said, “Please, tell me what Samuel told you.” ¹⁶Saul replied, “He merely told us that the asses had been found.” But Saul did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

Saul is elected king

• ¹⁷After that, Samuel called the people together before Yahweh at Mizpah. ¹⁸He then spoke to the Israelites, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: I brought Israel out of Egypt and I delivered you

from the hands of the Egyptians and from all the kingdoms oppressing you. ¹⁹But you have this day rejected your God who saves you from all your calamities and your distress. You have said, ‘No! Give us a king to rule over us.’ So now present yourselves before Yahweh, grouping yourselves into tribes and clans.”

²⁰Then Samuel made all the tribes of Israel come near him and when they cast lots, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.

²¹He made the families of the tribe of Benjamin come near him, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. He made the members of the family of Matrites come near him, and the lot fell to Saul, son of Kish. They looked for him but could not find him. ²²So they asked Yahweh again, “Did the man come here?” Yahweh answered, “He has hidden himself among the baggage.” ²³So they found him and brought him out and when Saul stood among the people, they saw that he was a head taller than the others. ²⁴Samuel spoke and said, “Do you see the one Yahweh has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.” And all the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

²⁵Samuel then told the people the rights and duties of the king. He wrote all these in a book and presented it before Yahweh. Then Samuel sent all the people home. ²⁶Saul himself went home to Gibeah with these valiant men whose hearts God had touched. ²⁷Some evil people, however, remarked; “How can this man save us?” And they ignored Saul and brought him no gift.

• **10.17** Here is the logical continuation of chapter 8; it is another account of Saul’s election which does not openly contradict the one related in the previous chapter, since Samuel consecrated Saul secretly.

It is interesting that here the same event is narrated in the Bible by two men of contrary opinions. The first saw the institution of kings as a good thing and in accordance with God’s plan (chapters 9–10); the second (1 S 8 and 10:17–19) saw it as a dangerous innovation which God merely tolerated.

He has hidden himself among the baggage. Here begins the tragedy of Saul, king in spite of himself. The Israelites asked for a king because of external threat (the Philistines), but

in their innermost self they rejected all authority. Saul himself did not feel cut out for governing. In spite of his courage, as seen in chapter 11, he was not one to take risks. He was an obstinate man; attached to the ideas of his time (see chap. 25). Saul, a modest man, did not have the humility that God seeks, which consists in undertaking new and great things without being afraid of possible failure.

All the people shouted: Long live the King! We have witnessed several enthusiastic meetings such as this, which led to no positive result. As happens to many leaders, the next day Saul finds himself alone in the midst of a people who think that they have solved every-

JOS 7:16

2K 11:12

Dt 17:14-20

Saul rescues the city of Jabesh

11 ¹One month later, Nahash the Ammonite went to Jabesh-gilead and surrounded the city. The people of Jabesh told Nahash, “Make an agreement with us and we will serve you.” ²Nahash answered, “I will make an agreement with you on this condition: I will pluck out the right eye of all of you, so that Israel will be left disgraced.” ³The elders of Jabesh then told him, “Give us seven days so we may send messengers through all the territories of Israel. If none of them comes to save us, we will surrender to you.”

⁴So the messengers went to Gibeath Saul’s hometown, breaking the news to the people. And all the people wept aloud.

⁵Just then Saul came from the field with his oxen. He asked, “What has happened to make the people weep?” And they told him what the men of Jabesh had said. ⁶At once, the spirit of God seized Saul and he was greatly angered. ⁷He took a yoke of oxen, cut them into pieces and gave them to the messengers to be taken through all the territories of Israel with this warning, “I will do the same with the oxen of anyone who does not come out after Saul and Samuel.”

Then a holy fear came upon the people and they set out as one man.

⁸When Saul inspected them at Bezek, the men of Israel were three hundred thousand; those of Judah, thirty thousand. ⁹And they sent the messengers with this answer to the people of Jabesh, “Tomorrow, by noontime, we shall come to you.” When the messengers returned, the people of Jabesh were very comforted ¹⁰and they told Nahash, “Tomorrow we will surrender and you may do to us whatever you please.”

¹¹The following morning, Saul divided the people into three groups. They broke into the enemy camp early in the morning and slew the Ammonites until noontime. Those who could escape were scattered, each one running his own way.

¹²Then the people asked Samuel, “Who are these who said: Saul will never reign over us? Bring the men and we shall put them to death.” ¹³But Saul said, “No man shall be put to death today, for this day Yahweh has saved Israel.”

¹⁴Samuel told the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and officially proclaim the kingdom.” ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal and there they proclaimed Saul king before Yahweh. They sacrificed peace offerings and Saul and all Israel celebrated.

Jdg 7:16

14:45;
2S 19:23

10:6

thing because an election has been carried out.

• **11.1** The account which was interrupted in 10:16 is resumed here. The people of Jabesh are disposed to accept peace. Israel weeps and shouts, but Saul decides that this situation is unbearable. His courage obliges God to act.

Who are these who said: Saul will never reign over us? There is no political life without parties. From the beginning, Saul had his allies and his foes. But he must heed even more the “tribalism” of the Israelites, especially

the rivalry between the northern tribes of Ephraim and Benjamin, and the tribe of Judah, in the south. As for the people of Jabesh, they will remain grateful to their savior and will be faithful to him until after his death. (See 1 S 31:11.)

Saul is a good and generous man who does not take revenge on his enemies. Yet when one is the highest authority, one easily isolates self from others and becomes arrogant or pessimistic. Saul will refuse to listen to God and to his relatives, and his jealousy will blind him, as it did in regard to David.

Samuel gives way to Saul

12 • ¹Samuel spoke to the Israelites, “Listen, I have paid attention to all that you have told me and have given you a king. ²From now on, the king is here to lead you. As for me, I am old and my hair gray. My sons are with you. I have led you from my youth, and I have done so until this day. ³Now, I am here. Answer me before Yahweh and his anointed: Whose ox have I taken? Whose ass have I stolen? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? Have I taken a bribe from anyone? If so, tell me, and I will restore it to you.” ⁴But they said, “You have not cheated or oppressed us; you have not stolen anything from anyone.”

⁵Then Samuel said, “Yahweh is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.” And they answered, “He is witness.”

⁶Samuel then said to the people, “Yahweh is witness, he who sent Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt. ⁷Now, stand still, that I may confront you with all the deeds of Yahweh who saved you and your ancestors. ⁸Jacob went to Egypt and the Egyptians oppressed your ancestors. Then they cried to Yahweh and he sent Moses and Aaron. They brought your ancestors out of Egypt and brought them to

this land. ⁹But they forgot Yahweh, their God, and he delivered them into the hands of Sisera, commander of the army of Jabin, king of Hazor, into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the king of Moab who fought against them. ¹⁰Then your ancestors cried to Yahweh and said: ‘We have sinned, forsaking Yahweh and serving the Baals and the Ashteroth. But now, deliver us out of the hands of our enemies and we will serve you.’ ¹¹And Yahweh sent Jerubbaal and Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hands of your enemies from all sides, so that you lived in safety in your land.

¹²Now, when you saw that Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, attacked you, you said to me: ‘No! Let a king rule over us,’ although Yahweh your God was your king. ¹³Yet Yahweh has given you the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for. ¹⁴May you fear Yahweh and serve him! May you listen to him and not go against his commandments! May both you and the king who reigns over you follow Yahweh, your God! ¹⁵But if you will not listen to Yahweh and if you break his commandments, his hand will be against you and your king.

¹⁶Now wait awhile that you may see the wonder which Yahweh will do before you. ¹⁷Is it not wheat harvest today? I will call on Yahweh that he may send thunder and rain. So you shall know and see that you have gone very wrong in asking for another king.”

¹⁸So Samuel called on Yahweh who sent thunder and rain on that day. Then all the people greatly feared Yahweh and Samuel.

Jdg
4—5;
13—16

Jdg 6—8

Di 13:5

Jdg 6:36

14:31

Num
16:15;
Acts
20:33

• **12.1** It was hard for Samuel to step aside to make place for Saul, as is the case for many founders or responsible persons who are unable to cede to others who are younger or more competent the care of continuing and developing the work they created.

In this opportunity Samuel reminds the Israelites that no authority can be exempted from the law of God, especially when its duty is to maintain the law. “If you yourselves and the king who rules you follow Yahweh...” For Samuel, the king, like his subjects, must faithfully observe the terms of the Covenant; unfortunately very soon the kings of Israel would consider themselves dispensed from this fi-

delity. No sooner is Solomon enthroned than he leaves the palace that David his father built in the lower city in the midst of the people’s houses to go and install himself beside the Temple of Yahweh. Henceforth the ordinary people would be below and God and the king, on the holy mountain, Quite symbolic! When Jesus comes, he will take up the teaching of Samuel and the prophets: “The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve and give his life...” Even in the Church, the new Israel, some who carry responsibility will be seen acting like churchlords confusing responsibility with abuse of authority.

¹⁹The people said to Samuel, “Pray to Yahweh, your God, for your servants so we may not die. For we have added to our sins this evil of asking for a king.”

²⁰Samuel told the people, “Fear not! You have done evil, but now you must not turn away from Yahweh. Serve him, instead, with all your heart. ²¹Do not go after these useless and vain idols that are unable to save. ²²Yahweh will not cast away his people because of his great Name, since he has been pleased to make you his people. ²³As for me, how can I commit the sin of ceasing to pray for you? I will continue to instruct you in the good and right way. ²⁴Only fear Yahweh and serve him faithfully with all your heart, for you have seen the wonderful things he has done for you. ²⁵But if you still persist in wickedness, both you and your king shall be swept away.”

Jl 2:20

13 ¹Saul became king and he ruled over Israel. ²Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with him in Michmash and in the hills of Bethel, and a thousand with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. Saul sent the rest of the people away, every man to his home. ³Jonathan killed the Philistine governor in Geba and the Philistines

heard of this. Saul then blew the trumpet throughout the land, saying, “Let the Hebrews hear!” ⁴And the news spread throughout Israel, “Saul has killed the Philistine governor and now Israel is at war with them.” And they called everyone out to join Saul at Gilgal.

The “sin” of Saul

• ⁵The Philistines gathered to fight with Israel—three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and troops as many as the sand on the seashore. They went up and encamped in Michmash, east of Bethaven. ⁶When the people of Israel saw that they were in trouble, they hid themselves in caves, in holes, in rocks, in tombs and in cisterns, ⁷or crossed the fords of the Jordan River to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Jdg 6:2

⁸Saul was still at Gilgal and all the people with him were afraid. He waited seven days—the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not arrive at Gilgal and the people were beginning to disperse. ⁹So Saul said, “Bring me the burnt offering

• **13.1** Saul did not think of leaving his town of Gibeah to construct a capital for the new state of Israel. But, gradually, he created a permanent army, instead of merely depending on volunteers who came forward whenever the people were in danger (see 14:52). For years, he fought unceasingly to repel incursions of the Philistines.

• 5. Not once, but on several occasions, Saul vacillates between obedience to God and Samuel, and doing what appears to him more reasonable (see also chap. 15). Finally, he prefers to act according to his own judgment.

Yahweh would have established your rule for ever. Yahweh demands more from him who is the first king of his people, and with whom he wants to establish a lasting covenant. To receive from Yahweh promises which go beyond ordinary destiny, Saul has to show complete loyalty, even when it seems that God delays or is mistaken. In this type of trial, Abraham was victorious.

In recounting the story of the kings and leaders of Israel, the Bible makes us understand

that power is too heavy a burden for humans. To rule over others and, even more, to direct the destiny of a nation is somehow to partake in God’s authority. No one can measure up to such responsibilities if he or she cannot obey more than others and listen to God.

However we should note that the verses 8-15 are a later addition to the primitive text. These are most probably the work of priests who at the return from captivity edited the older texts. They make Samuel appear as the reasonable one, the spokesperson for God. We may read this event as proposed, but we can also wonder about the way Samuel attributes to himself the rights of God. What right has he not to keep his word and come within the promised delay? And how can he condemn Saul if Saul has acted according to his conscience? Christian tradition holds that we should always follow our conscience provided we have done all that is possible to have an enlightened conscience, even if in so doing we disobey high authority or very sacred laws. Without denying Samuel’s great merits we can say it was he who destroyed Saul.

and the peace offerings as well.” Saul then offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰He had just finished offering it when Samuel arrived. Saul went out to greet Samuel ¹¹who threw him this question, “What have you done?” Saul answered him, “When I saw the people beginning to disperse because of your failure to arrive on time, and considering that the Philistines have mustered their forces at Michmash, ¹²I said to myself, ‘The Philistines will launch their attack against me before I get Yahweh’s blessings and so I decided to offer the burnt offerings.’” ¹³Samuel told Saul, “You have done a foolish thing by not obeying the command of Yahweh your God who would have established your rule forever. ¹⁴But now your kingship will not last, for Yahweh has chosen someone else more pleasing to him, whom he has appointed to be commander over his people because you have not done what Yahweh commanded you.” ¹⁵Samuel then left Gilgal and went on his way. Meanwhile the people went up from Gilgal with Saul to join the warriors at Gibeah of Benjamin.

Acts
13:32

Saul reviewed his men numbering some six hundred. ¹⁶While Saul and his son Jonathan stayed in Gebah of Benjamin with the men, the Philistines pitched camp in Michmash. ¹⁷Raiders came out of the Philistine camp in three companies—one company turned to Ophrah, to the land of Shual; ¹⁸the other, to Bethoron; and the third, to the border overlooking the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness.

¹⁹The Israelites had no smith anywhere in their land, for the Philistines did not want the Hebrews to make swords or spears. ²⁰To have their plowshare, mattock, axe or sickle sharpened, the Israelites had to go down to the Philistines ²¹who would charge them two-thirds of a shekel for plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening axes and setting goads. ²²And so, on the day of battle, the Israelites had neither sword nor spear. Only Saul and Jonathan had them.

Jdg 5:8

²³Yet the Philistine raiders had moved on toward the pass of Michmash.

14 • ¹The same day, Jonathan, son of Saul, said to his armor-bearer, “Let us go over to the Philistine garrison on the other side.” Jonathan did not inform his father about this. ²Saul was at that time on the outskirts of Gibeah, at Migron, under the pomegranate tree with about six hundred men. ³Also with Saul was Ahijah, son of Ahitub, brother of Ichabod, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, priest of Yahweh in Shiloh, and he was wearing the ephod to consult Yahweh. Not even the soldiers knew that Jonathan had left them.

4:21

⁴The pass through which Jonathan planned to go to reach the Philistine garrison was flanked on each side by a rocky crag: one called Bozez, the other, Seneh. ⁵One of the crags was to the north in the direction of Michmash; the other to the south, in the direction of Giba.

⁶Jonathan said to his shield-bearer, “Let us go over to the garrison of those uncircumcised fellows. It may be that Yahweh will help us, for it is as easy for Yahweh to give victory with a few men as with many.” ⁷His armor-bearer replied,

1Mac
3:18;
4:31

• **14.1** Chapter 14 helps us understand the Israelites’ situation. They occupy the mountain, but the Philistines who are better organized and better armed, lord it over the plains.

The incident of Saul’s oath shows the very primitive level of religious knowledge at that time, as in the case of Jephthah (Jdg 11:30):

- an oath with a death-threat,
- the importance given to the crime of one who eats where blood has been shed (see verse 33; perhaps it was not the same as to “eat meat with blood” as in Lev 17:8),
- the practice of casting lots to get Yahweh’s response.

“Do whatever you think best. As for me, I follow and obey you.”⁸ Jonathan said, “Look, we will draw near and show ourselves to those men.⁹ When they see us, if they cry out: ‘Stay there and we shall go over to you,’ we shall stay quiet and go no further.¹⁰ But if they say: ‘Come up to us,’ we shall go up because that will be a sign that Yahweh has delivered them into our hands.”

¹¹ When the two were seen by the Philistines, the latter exclaimed, “Look! Hebrews coming out of their hiding places!”¹² And they challenged Jonathan and his shield-bearer, “Come over here and we will teach you a lesson!” Jonathan then told his armor-bearer, “Follow me, for Yahweh has delivered them into the hands of Israel.”¹³ Then Jonathan crawled up on his hands and feet, his armor-bearer following him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer finished them off.¹⁴ In that first slaying by Jonathan and his armor-bearer, about twenty men lost their lives within half a furlong.¹⁵ Panic struck in the camp and in the countryside, sowing terror in the garrison. Even the band of raiders was disturbed. It was like an earthquake and they were filled with a holy terror.

¹⁶ Saul’s watchmen in Gibeah of Benjamin saw the commotion in the camp: the Philistines were running and scattering in all directions.¹⁷ Saul then told those who were around him, “Count our men and see who is missing.” And they discovered that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not with them.¹⁸ Saul ordered Ahijah: “Bring the ephod,” because Ahijah had taken it with him.¹⁹ But while Saul was talking to the priest, the confusion in the Philistine camp increased. Saul then told the priest, “Withdraw your hand,”²⁰ and after consulting his men, he went with them to the camp. They saw that there was complete confusion and the soldiers were striking each other with their swords.²¹ Moreover, the Hebrews who had joined the Philistines turned around and sided with the Israelites under Saul and Jonathan.²² When the Israelites who were hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they came out from hiding and pursued them.²³ And so Yahweh delivered Israel that day in a battle that extended beyond Beth-horon.

²⁴ On that day, however, as the Israelites became weary, Saul took an oath putting the people under the ban, “Cursed be the man who takes food before evening, before I have avenged myself on my enemies.” Because of this oath, no one dared touch any food.²⁵ As the men wandered into the forest, they saw honey on the ground and²⁶ although it was freely dripping from the honeycomb, no one tasted it for fear of the oath.²⁷ But Jonathan, who had not heard of this oath, dipped the tip of the rod he was holding in the honeycomb and put it to his lips. And he felt fortified.²⁸ At this, someone said, “Though the people were tired, your father bound them with this oath: cursed be the man who takes food today.”²⁹ Then Jonathan said, “My father did you wrong. See how I have been fortified by tasting a little of this honey.³⁰ If only our men had freely eaten today of the spoil of their enemies, the Philistines would have suffered an even greater defeat.”

³¹ Nevertheless they pursued the Philistines all the way from Michmash to Ajalon. Then the people, extremely worn out,³² rushed to the spoils and took sheep, oxen, and calves and, after they had slaughtered them on the ground, they ate over the blood.³³ Saul was told that the people were sinning against Yahweh by eating over the blood. He said, “You have acted like pagan people! Roll a large stone here in front of me.”³⁴ Then he added, “Go around and tell the people to bring their oxen or their sheep to me. Slaughter them here and eat, but do not offend Yahweh by eating over the blood.” So that night, everyone brought what he had of the spoils and slaughtered it there.³⁵ Then Saul built an altar to Yahweh—the first he ever built to Him.

³⁶ Then Saul said, “Let us pursue and spoil the Philistines by night and finish them off by morning without leaving a single man alive.” To this the people replied, “Do what you think is best.” But the priest said, “We must consult Yahweh.”³⁷ So Saul asked, “Shall I attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into the hands of Israel?” But God did not answer him that day.³⁸ Saul said, “Call all the army officers here. We must find out who is responsible for the sin that has been committed today.³⁹ I swear before Yahweh, who has just saved Israel, that he

shall surely die even if it happens to be my son Jonathan.” No one answered Saul. ⁴⁰He told the people, “Go, stand on one side while I and my son Jonathan, stand on the other.” The people answered, “Do what you think is good.” ⁴¹Then Saul said, “O Yahweh, God of Israel, why did you not answer your servant this time? If it is my son Jonathan or I who have sinned, O Yahweh, God of Israel, let the casting of lots show Ürim; if it is your people Israel who have sinned, let it show Thummin.” The lot cast pointed to Jonathan and Saul, not to the people. ⁴²Saul then said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” The lot singled out Jonathan. ⁴³Saul then said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan replied, “All I did was to taste a little honey from the tip of the rod that I dipped in the honeycomb! Am I to die for this?” ⁴⁴Saul said, “May God strike me down if you are not put to death, Jonathan.” ⁴⁵But the people protested, “By no means shall Jonathan die, he who has brought this resounding victory to Israel! Not at all! By Yahweh’s life not one hair of his head will fall, for he has acted today with God’s assistance.” So the people rescued Jonathan from certain death. ⁴⁶After that, Saul ceased to pursue the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own country.

⁴⁷When Saul felt secure as king of Israel, he began to fight against all his surrounding enemies: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines, routing his enemies wherever he went. ⁴⁸He crushed the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who were plundering them.

⁴⁹The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malchishua; his two daughters were Merab, his first-born, and Michal. ⁵⁰His wife was Ahinoam, daughter of Ahimaaz. The general of his army was Abner, son of Ner who was Saul’s uncle. ⁵¹Kish was the father of Saul and Ner, the father of Abner, was the son of Abiel.

⁵²Saul struggled fiercely against the Philistines all the days of his life, so whenever he discovered a strong and brave man, he recruited him into his service.

Saul is rejected as king

15 ¹Samuel told Saul, “Yahweh sent me to anoint you king over his

people Israel. So now listen to what he has to say to you: ²I will punish Amalek for having stood in the way of the Israelites when they were leaving Egypt. ³Now attack Amalek and destroy completely all that he has. Do not spare them—man, woman, infant or suckling, ox or sheep, camel or ass.”

⁴Saul called his men to Telaim and reviewed two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men from Judah. ⁵He went to the city of Amalek, set an ambush in the valley and ⁶proceeded to warn the Kenites, “Leave the Amalekites! I do not want to punish you with them since you showed kindness to the people of Israel when they left Egypt.” After the Kenites had left, ⁷Saul defeated the Amalekites, from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt. ⁸He took Agag, king of the Amalekites alive, but put the rest of the people to the sword. ⁹Saul and his men spared Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fatlings and lambs and everything that was good, but destroyed all that was worthless.

¹⁰Then Yahweh spoke to Samuel: ¹¹“I feel sorry that I made Saul king because he has turned his back on me and has not kept my command.” Samuel was troubled and cried to Yahweh all night. ¹²Early next morning, he went looking for Saul, but was told that Saul had set off for Carmel to erect a monument to himself and then had gone on his way to Gilgal. ¹³When finally they met, Saul greeted Samuel, “May Yahweh bless you,” and added, “I have done what Yahweh told me to do.” ¹⁴Samuel then asked him, “Why do I still hear the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen?” ¹⁵Saul replied, “We have brought them from the Amalekites, because the people spared the best sheep and oxen to sacrifice to Yahweh, your God. But the rest have been destroyed.” ¹⁶Samuel then told Saul, “Enough! Let me tell you what Yahweh said to me last night.” Saul replied, “Please tell me.” ¹⁷So Samuel went on and said, “Though you had no confidence in yourself, you became chief of the tribes of Israel, for Yahweh wanted to anoint you king over Israel. ¹⁸Then he sent you with this command, ‘Go. Completely crush the Amalekite offenders, engaging them in battle until they are destroyed.’ ¹⁹Why then did you not obey

2S 4:11;
1K 1:52;
Mt 10:30

Es 3:1;
Jos
10:39

Gen 6:6

17:14

the voice of Yahweh but instead swooped down on the spoil, doing what was evil in his sight?"²⁰ To this, Saul replied, "I have obeyed the voice of Yahweh and have carried out the mission for which he sent me. I have captured Agag, king of Amalek and completely destroyed the Amalekites."²¹ If my men spared the best sheep and oxen from among those to be destroyed, it was in order to sacrifice them to Yahweh, your God, in Gilgal."²² Samuel then said,

"Does Yahweh take as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to his command? Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission better than the fat of rams."²³ Rebellion is like the sin of divination, and stubbornness like holding onto idols. Since you have rejected the word of Yahweh, he too has rejected you as king."

²⁴Saul then told Samuel, "I have sinned in disobeying Yahweh's command and your instructions. I feared my own men and obeyed them instead."²⁵ Please forgive my sin and return with me so I may worship Yahweh."

²⁶Samuel refused and said, "I will not return with you because you have rejected the word of Yahweh and he has rejected you as king of Israel."²⁷ As Samuel turned to leave, Saul held onto the end of his robe, which tore.²⁸ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Yahweh has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to someone better than you."²⁹ The Glory of Israel does not change or repent as man does."

³⁰Saul then said, "I have sinned. But please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel. Return with

me so that I may worship Yahweh, your God."³¹ And Samuel returned with Saul who went to worship Yahweh.

³²Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites." Agag stood before him with a cheerful face, thinking that he was now out of danger.³³ But Samuel told him, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." Then Samuel dealt a mortal blow to Agag before Yahweh in Gilgal.

³⁴Samuel left for Ramah while Saul went home to Gibeath, Saul's hometown.³⁵ From that day Samuel did not see Saul again until he died, but he was grieving over Saul because Yahweh regretted having made him king over Israel.

Samuel anoints David

16 • ¹Yahweh asked Samuel, "How long will you be grieving over Saul whom I have rejected as king of Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way to Jesse the Bethlehemite for I have chosen my king from among his sons."

²Samuel asked, "How can I go? If Saul hears of this, he will kill me!" Yahweh replied, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to Yahweh.'" ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice and I will let you know what to do next. You shall anoint for me the one I point out to you."

⁴Samuel did what Yahweh commanded and left for Bethlehem. When he appeared, the elders of the

2K 9:1;
Is 11:1;
Mic 5:1;
Ru 4:17

Dt 17:15

• **16.1** *How long will you be grieving over Saul?* Sometimes, we remain grounded, immobile, longing for the past, when events in life are pushing us forward to change plans and directions.

Samuel goes to Bethlehem to meet the one whom God has chosen. Bethlehem is the city of David's family. There, Jesus will be born ten centuries later.

David, Jesse's son, is tending the flock when they send for him. He is a shepherd before he becomes king. In the Bible, the shepherd is the image of the perfect king who, rather than acting like an important man, attends to persons and serves them as the shepherd does his

sheep. Jesus, King and Savior, will introduce himself as the good Shepherd whom the prophets were dreaming of (see Ezk 34 and Jn 10).

Humans see with the eyes; Yahweh sees the heart. In the adolescent David, there is yet no evidence of the moral qualities, intelligence and courage which he will display as military chief and politician. Still, God knows whom he chooses. In order to bring his work to completion, God does not choose those who pretend to be greater than they are (See 1 Cor 1:28).

In any human group, it is necessary to discover the values of each person and not allow oneself to be deceived by appearances. It is very important for Christian communities that

city came to him asking, fearfully, "Do you bring us peace?" ⁵Samuel replied, "I come in peace; I am here to sacrifice to Yahweh. Cleanse yourselves and join me in the sacrifice." He also had Jesse and his sons cleansed and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶As they came, Samuel looked at Eliab the older and thought, "This must be Yahweh's anointed." ⁷But Yahweh told Samuel, "Do not judge by his looks or his stature for I have rejected him. Yahweh does not judge as man judges; humans see with the eyes; Yahweh sees the heart."

⁸Jesse called his son Abinadab and presented him to Samuel who said, "Yahweh has not chosen this one either." ⁹Jesse presented Shamamah and Samuel said, "Nor has Yahweh chosen this one." ¹⁰Jesse presented seven of his sons to Samuel who said, "Yahweh has chosen none of them." ¹¹But are all your sons here?" Jesse replied, "There is still the youngest, tending the flock just now." Samuel said to him, "Send for him and bring him to me; we shall not sit down to eat until he arrives." ¹²So Jesse sent for his youngest son and brought him to Samuel. He was a handsome lad with ruddy complexion and beautiful eyes. And Yahweh spoke, "Go, anoint him for he is the one." ¹³Samuel then took the horn of oil and anointed him in his brothers' presence. From that day onwards, Yahweh's Spirit took hold of David. Then Samuel left for Ramah.

• ¹⁴The spirit of Yahweh had left Saul and an evil spirit sent by Yahweh tormented him. ¹⁵Saul's servants said to him, "We know that an evil spirit sent by God is tormenting you. ¹⁶If you so wish, your servants who stand before you will look for someone who can play the lyre so when the evil spirit from God comes over you, he will play and you will feel better."

¹⁷So Saul answered them, "Get someone who can play the lyre well." ¹⁸One of them said, "A son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite, plays very well. He is, moreover, a courageous man, intelligent and pleasant to talk with and Yahweh is with him."

¹⁹So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and asked for his son David who tended the sheep. ²⁰Jesse loaded an ass with bread, a wineskin and a kid and had David take all these to Saul. ²¹David then left and entered Saul's service. Saul grew very fond of David and made him his armor-bearer. ²²Then he sent word to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service for I am very pleased with him."

²³So, whenever the evil spirit from God overpowered Saul, David would play on the lyre and Saul would feel better for the evil spirit would leave him.

17 ¹The Philistines prepared their forces for battle and gathered together at Socoh, a territory of Judah. They encamped between Socoh and Azekah in Ephesdammim. ²Saul and the Israelites, meantime, assembled and pitched camp in the valley of Elah, ready for their encounter with the Philistines. ³The Philistines took their position on one hill while the Israelites took theirs on another hill, with a valley separating the two forces.

David and Goliath

• ⁴Then a champion named Goliath came out from the Philistine camp. He

those with responsibility know how "to look into the heart" of brothers and sisters, whether they be the quiet ones or those who show much zeal. Then it will not be long before they find the persons needed to animate the community, and can bypass the ambitious ones.

tions with respect to David's promotion—16:1-13; 16:14-23; 17:17-58. What is history and what is legend in each of these?

An evil spirit sent by Yahweh (v. 14). This is an ancient way of saying that God allowed Saul to suffer some psychological disorder.

• 14. We find in the Bible different tradi-

• 17.4 David's challenge delighted the Is-

was from Gath and was about three meters tall. ⁵He wore a helmet of bronze, and a coat covered with bronze scales. His armor weighed sixty kilos. ⁶He had bronze greaves strapped on his legs and a bronze spear slung between his shoulders. ⁷The shaft of his spear was the size of a weaver's rod; its head weighed seven kilos. His shield-bearer went before him.

⁸He stood in front of the Israelite ranks and shouted, "Why have you come out in battle array? I am a Philistine and you are Saul's men! Choose a man from among yourselves who can challenge me. ⁹If he fights better and kills me, we shall be subject to you; but if I overpower him and kill him, you shall be subject to us."

¹⁰The Philistine added, "This is my challenge to the Israelite troops this day. Give me a man who can fight with me alone!" ¹¹When they heard this challenge of the Philistine, Saul and his men were afraid and greatly terrified.

¹²Now, David was the son of Jesse, an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah who had eight sons. Jesse was already old during Saul's reign but he had sent men to the army. ¹³Three of his eldest sons had joined Saul in battle: Eliab, the first-born, Abinadab, the second and Sham-

mah, the third. ¹⁴David was Jesse's youngest and, while the three eldest followed Saul, ¹⁵he would alternate his goings and comings to the army with the care of his father's flock in Bethlehem.

¹⁶Every morning and again in the evening, the Philistine would come out to throw his challenge; this he did for forty days. ¹⁷One day, Jesse told his son David, "Bring a measure of this roasted grain and these ten loaves to your brothers; ¹⁸and take these ten cheeses to the field officer. Find out how your brothers are and bring me back some token from them." ¹⁹David's brothers and the field officer were with Saul and the Israelites in the valley of Elah, facing the Philistines.

²⁰David woke up early the next morning and entrusted the sheep to a shepherd. Taking the food along with him, he left in obedience to Jesse's command and arrived at the encampment just when the army was leaving for the battleground, shouting out their battle cry. ²¹Israel and the Philistine drew up facing one another. ²²On seeing this, David entrusted his load to the baggage keeper and rushed to the ranks to greet his brothers. ²³While he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion of Gath, came up from the ranks of the Philistines and shouted out the same challenge as before, this time reaching David's ears.

²⁴When the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him terrified ²⁵and one

18:27

raelites down through the centuries and still delights us today. We should not be surprised therefore that the redactors have elaborated with generous details David's fight with "the Philistine" who was later called Goliath (see 2 S 21:19).

Those who wrote these books were inspired by God; they understood that David's struggle with Goliath symbolized the struggle between good and evil.

You have come against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you with Yahweh. In the world, victory will not come to those who are stronger or more heavily armed. Such people insult God by their pride and self-confidence. They will not last long if they insult the people of God, especially the lowly.

Victory belongs to the weak who trust in

God's help. Here the winner is a young man who personifies those who remain young in heart and always have a clear conscience.

Some encourage David to protect himself with Saul's armor and arms. David understands that if he uses arms similar to those of the Philistine, he will not know how to use them and the latter will prevail over him. In the end, the Philistine dies, a victim of his own weapons.

David's fight can easily be compared to that of the Church. She leaves behind Saul's armor when she looks for less structure, less worry over financing her works and buildings; when she frees herself from political support. In abandoning all these securities, she makes herself freer and younger. Like David, she goes to battle trusting "in the name of Yahweh, the God of the armies of Israel."

of them said, "Have you seen this man who comes up challenging Israel? Whoever succeeds in killing him will be richly rewarded by the king. He will give him his daughter in marriage and set his family free of every contribution."

²⁶David asked those who were around him, "What will be the reward for the person who kills this Philistine and lifts this disgrace from Israel? And who is this uncircumcised Philistine who defies the armies of the living God?" ²⁷The people answered him in the same way, "This will be the reward of whoever kills him."

²⁸When he saw David talking to the men, his eldest brother Eliab was angry and said, "Why did you come here? With whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know you are an insolent fellow. You have come only to see the battle." ²⁹David asked, "What have I done this time? I was merely asking something!" ³⁰Leaving his brother, David turned to another man and asked him the same question, and the people answered him the same way as before.

³¹David's remarks spread around and reached Saul, who asked for him.

³²David said to Saul, "Let no one be discouraged on account of this Philistine, for your servant will engage him in battle." ³³Saul told David, "You cannot fight with this Philistine for you are still young, whereas this man has been a warrior from his youth." ³⁴But David said, "When I was tending my father's sheep, whenever a lion or bear came to snatch a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I would run after it, kill it and rescue the victim from its mouth. If it attacked me, I would hold it by its beard and slay it. ³⁶I have killed lions and bears and will do the same with this uncircumcised Philistine, for he has defied the armies of the living God." ³⁷David continued, "Yahweh, who delivered me from the paws of lions and bears, will deliver me from the hands of the Philistine."

Saul then told David, "Go and may Yahweh be with you!"

³⁸Saul fitted his armor on David, put a bronze helmet on his head, clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹David secured his sword over the armor but could not walk because it was his first time. So he said to Saul, "I cannot move with all these trappings on me because I am not accustomed to wearing them." David got rid of all this armor, ⁴⁰took his staff, picked up five smooth stones from the brook and dropped them inside his shepherd's bag. And with his sling in hand, he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹The Philistine moved forward, closing in on David, his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴²When he saw that David was only a lad, (he was of fresh complexion and handsome) he despised him ⁴³and said, "Am I a dog that you should approach me with a stick?" Cursing David by his gods, ⁴⁴he continued, "Come and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field!"

⁴⁵David answered the Philistine, "You have come against me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come against you with Yahweh, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have defied. ⁴⁶Yahweh will deliver you this day into my hands and I will strike you down and cut off your head. I will give the corpses of the Philistine army today to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, and all the earth shall know that there is a God of Israel. ⁴⁷All the people gathered here shall know that Yahweh saves not by sword or spear; the battle belongs to Yahweh, and he will deliver you into our hands."

⁴⁸No sooner had the Philistine moved to attack him, than David rushed to the battleground. ⁴⁹Putting his hand into his bag, he took out a stone, slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead; it penetrated his

Dt 28:26

1K 18:37;
2K 19:19

forehead and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, felling him without using a sword. ⁵¹He rushed forward, stood over him, took the Philistine's sword and slew him by cutting off his head.

When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they scattered in all directions. ⁵²The men of Israel and Judah raised the battle cry and pursued the Philistines as far as Gath and the gates of Ekron. Wounded Philistines fell on the way from Shaaraim to Gath and Ekron. ⁵³Returning from their pursuit of the Philistines, the Israelites plundered their camp. ⁵⁴David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem but left the armor in his tent.

⁵⁵When Saul saw David come out to oppose the Philistine, he asked his general, Abner, "Abner, whose son is that young man?" Abner answered, "I swear, O king, I do not know." ⁵⁶The king said, "Ask whose son that lad is." ⁵⁷So when David returned after killing the Philistine, Abner took him to Saul. ⁵⁸Saul asked David, who stood before him holding the head of the Philistine, "Whose son are you, young man?" David answered, "I am the son of your servant, Jesse the Bethlehemite."

David, Saul and Jonathan

18 • ¹When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan felt a deep affection for David and began to love him as himself. ²Saul kept David with him from that day and did not allow him to return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made an agreement with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan, taking off the cloak he was wearing, gave it to David; he also gave him his own armor, sword, bow and belt.

⁵Wherever Saul sent David, he went and succeeded. For this reason, Saul put David in charge of the soldiers—a move which pleased Saul's men and his officers as well. ⁶When they arrived after David had slain the Philistine, the women came out from the cities of Israel to meet king Saul singing and dancing with timbrels and musical instruments. ⁷They were merrily singing this song: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David, his tens of thousands."

⁸Saul was very displeased with this song and said, "They have given tens of thousands to David but to me only thousands! By now he has everything but the kingdom!" ⁹From then on, Saul became very distrustful of David.

¹⁰The following day, an evil spirit from God seized Saul, causing him to rave in his house. David then played on the lyre as he used to do, while Saul had his spear in hand. ¹¹Then Saul pointed it at David thinking, "I will nail David to the wall." But David escaped on two occasions.

¹²Saul saw that Yahweh was with David and had left him. And he was afraid.

19:1;
23:16;
2S 1:26

15:20;
Jdg
11:34

16:14

• **18.1** *Jonathan felt a deep affection for David.* The Bible describes for us this deep and loyal friendship as a gift of God, overcoming the rivalry with Saul. *He gave David his own mantle, his sword, his bow and belt... spontaneity, frankness and a disinterested love.*

Although David and Jonathan were not children but young men, we can apply to them these words of a poet. "Remember that this horrible world is yet solely maintained by the sweet complicity, continually opposed, always renewed of poets and children. Never become an important person! There is a conspiracy of personalities against childlikeness and it suffices to read the Gospel to be aware of this. God said: *Become like children.* Yet those

who have become important say repeatedly to the betrayed infancy: 'Become like us'."

After his victory, David is the renowned man of the kingdom. He immediately earns Saul's envy.

Saul feared David. The subsequent chapters show us how, as David rises in people's estimation, Saul's mind is ravaged by jealousy. Saul is guilty, the book tells us, since he departed from his obedience to God. His fault is that of many rulers and his punishment is the same: he becomes a prisoner of his office which he cannot, or knows not, how to give up. He guesses that David is God's choice, but he cannot share power with him and does not see any other solution but to kill him.

¹³So he removed David from his presence by making him chief of a thousand men. David went ahead of his troops ¹⁴and was successful each time because Yahweh was with him. ¹⁵The more successful David was, the more afraid Saul became. ¹⁶But all Israel and Judah loved David because he led them in their expeditions.

¹⁷Saul said to David, "You know my eldest daughter, Merab. I will give her to you as your wife; be brave and fight Yahweh's battles." For Saul thought, "Let the Philistines strike him instead of myself." ¹⁸David answered Saul, "Who am I? And what is my father's family in Israel that I should be the king's son-in-law?" ¹⁹Yet when it was time for Merab to be married to David, she was given instead to Adriel the Meholathite.

²⁰Now, Saul's daughter, Michal, fell in love with David. When this came to Saul's knowledge, he was very pleased ²¹for he thought, "I shall promise her to him and it will be a snare to him. The Philistines will kill him." So, Saul said to David a second time, "You shall now be my son-in-law." ²²Then he commanded his servants to talk to David privately and say, "The king and all his servants like you. You should become the king's son-in-law!" ²³Saul's servants repeated these words to David who replied, "Do you think it is easy to become the king's son-in-law, poor and unknown as I am?" ²⁴When Saul's servants repeated to the king what David had said, ²⁵Saul ordered them to tell David, "The king wants no marriage gift other than a hundred Philistine foreskins to take revenge on his enemies." For Saul wanted David to fall into the hands of the Philistines. ²⁶Saul's servants told this to David and it seemed to him that he could easily become the

king's son-in-law. ²⁷David and his men set out and killed two hundred Philistines. And they brought the king the foreskins so that David could become the king's son-in-law. So Saul had to give his daughter Michal to David to become his wife.

²⁸Saul feared David for he knew that Yahweh was with him. But Michal, Saul's daughter, loved him. ²⁹Saul feared David more and more and was his enemy until the end.

³⁰Whenever the Philistine chiefs engaged David in battle, he succeeded more than any of Saul's officers, in earning great fame for himself.

19 • ¹Saul told his son Jonathan and his servants of his intention to kill David. But Jonathan, who liked David very much, ²said to David, "My father Saul wants to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning and hide yourself in a secret place. ³I will go out and keep my father company in the countryside where you are and I will speak to him about you. If I find out something, I will let you know." ⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to his father Saul and said, "Let not the king sin against his servant David for he has not sinned against you. On the contrary, what he has done has benefited you. ⁵He risked his life in killing the Philistine and Yahweh brought about a great victory for Israel. You yourself saw this and greatly rejoiced. Why then sin against innocent blood and kill David without cause?" ⁶Saul heeded Jonathan's plea and swore, "As Yahweh lives, he shall not be put to death." ⁷So Jonathan called David and told him all these things. He then brought him to Saul and David was back in Saul's service as before.

⁸War broke out again and David set

2S 11:15

• **19.1** Chapters 19–25 are about the life of David as a fugitive. He becomes chief of a band of not very desirable companions and lives with them in the marginal parts of the country.

David is no "saint," as we would actually imagine one. He is God's friend in the way people can be in a primitive society. In spite of his defects, he becomes an example of what God can do with a person who allows himself to be guided by him.

The Bible highlights David's magnificent soul and his generosity while living with outlaws and everything that this implies. David is always conscious of his mission. He faces dangers without fear, acts as an educator of his companions and is a man with prophetic intuitions.

When God wants to entrust a great mission to someone, he sets that person apart from his or her usual environment for a time. Like Moses, David also goes to the desert.

out to fight the Philistines. David crushed them so badly that they had to flee. ⁹ Then an evil spirit from Yahweh seized Saul as he sat in his house holding his spear while David was playing on the lyre. ¹⁰ Saul made an attempt to pin David to the wall with his spear. David, however, dodged the blow and the spear hit the wall instead. David fled and escaped.

¹¹ That night Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep an eye on him as he intended to kill him the following morning. But David's wife, Michal, told him, "If you do not run for your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed."

¹² So Michal let David down through the window, allowing him to escape.

¹³ Next Michal took the household idol, laid it in the bed and put a bundle of goat's hair on its head. She then covered this with a blanket. ¹⁴ When Saul sent messengers to capture David, Michal told them, "He is sick." ¹⁵ Saul sent messengers back to David and said, "Bring him up to me on his bed for me to kill him." ¹⁶ But when the messengers entered, they saw the household idol in the bed with the bundle of goat's hair at its head. ¹⁷ Saul, therefore, asked Michal, "Why did you deceive me and allow my enemy to escape?" Michal answered, "He threatened to kill me if I did not let him go!"

Saul and the prophets

- ¹⁸ David had fled and was in safety. He went to Samuel at Ramah and related all that Saul had done to

him. He and Samuel then went to live at Naioth. ¹⁹ Saul was told that David stayed at Naioth in Ramah, ²⁰ so he sent messengers to capture David. But when they saw the band of prophets prophesying (signifying that they had fallen into a trance) with Samuel leading them, the spirit of Yahweh came upon them and made them prophesy.

²¹ Upon hearing what happened, Saul sent more messengers who also began to prophesy. Saul sent more the third time and the same thing happened.

²² Then Saul himself went to Ramah and arrived at the deep well in Secu. He asked, "Where can I find Samuel and David?" The people answered, "They are at Naioth in Ramah." ²³ So Saul proceeded to Naioth in Ramah but the Spirit of Yahweh came upon him as well. And he walked along prophesying until he reached the entrance of Naioth in Ramah. ²⁴ He took off his clothes and prophesied in Samuel's presence. Then he fell down naked, remaining in that position all day and all night. Hence sprang the saying, "Is Saul also among the prophets?"

20 ¹ David fled from Naioth in Ramah and went to Jonathan to

• 18. Israel lives its faith with songs and dances, celebrating Yahweh's deeds. That is why they need those groups of prophets. Here, they are mentioned for the first time in the Bible. These men excited themselves to the point where they fell into a frenzy very similar to a state of hysteria. At that time, nevertheless, such manifestations were considered to be the work of the Spirit of Yahweh. In their beginnings, the prophets of Israel were not very different from the "prophets" of other neighboring pagan peoples. Later in the Bible other prophets who are very different appear, and are called by God for an exceptional mission. These prophets will retain only a semblance of that primitive religious frenzy.

It is good to compare these actions of the prophets with others manifested in the early Church (see Acts 21), and to read what Paul says with respect to the manifestation of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12-14. No manifestation of the Spirit is solely the work of the Spirit of God. It depends also on the capabilities of those in whom the Spirit acts, just as the light of the sun takes on the color of the glass through which it passes. In groups consisting of simple and uneducated people, the Spirit of God acted (and still acts) by arousing ecstatic manifestations which, in fact, are also observed in non-Christian religions. But these things strengthened them in their faith.

18:10

Jos 2:15;
2Cor
11:32

10:5

ask him, "What have I done? What am I guilty of? What sin have I committed against your father that he wants to kill me?" ² Jonathan, however, assured him, "No! You shall not die. My father does nothing small or great without informing me. Why should he hide this from me? No, this cannot be."

³ But David replied, "Your father knows very well that you are pleased with me, so he thinks it is better not to tell you and grieve you. But I swear there is but one step between death and me!" ⁴ Then Jonathan told David, "What can I do for you?" ⁵ David answered, "Tomorrow is the new moon and I should be dining with the king. But let me hide myself in the open country until the evening of the third day. ⁶ If your father looks for me, say to him: 'David asked me to let him go over to Bethlehem because they have their yearly sacrifice there with the entire family.' ⁷ If he says, 'Good' then I am in no danger. But if he gets angry, then you can be certain that he wants to harm me. ⁸ Do this for me according to our agreement. But if I am guilty, kill me yourself. Why hand me over to your father to be killed?"

⁹ Jonathan answered, "Nonsense! If I knew that my father wanted to harm you, would I not warn you?" ¹⁰ David then asked him, "Who will tell me if your father answers you angrily?" ¹¹ Jonathan said, "Come, let us go into the open country." So they both left for the open country.

• ¹² Then Jonathan said to David, "Yahweh, the God of Israel, be our witness. About this time tomorrow or the following day, I shall be sounding out my father. If he is well-disposed toward you, I shall send you word. ¹³ But if my father

intends to do you harm, may Yahweh punish me if I do not warn you that you may escape safely. Surely Yahweh will be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴ If I live, always be kind to me. But if I die, ¹⁵⁻¹⁶ never cut off your friendship with my family even when Yahweh takes vengeance on David's enemies and wipes them out from the face of the earth."

So Jonathan made a covenant with the family of David. ¹⁷ And he made David swear once more because of the affection he felt for him for he loved David as himself.

¹⁸ Then Jonathan said, "Tomorrow is the new moon. Your absence will be noticed because your seat will be vacant. ¹⁹ On the third day it will be noticed all the more. So go and hide yourself where you hid before and stay beside the heap of stones there. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows near the stones as if I were aiming at a target. ²¹ I will then send a lad with this instruction: 'Go, look for the arrows.' If I say to the lad: 'The arrows are on this side, pick them up,' then you may come out for, I swear, you are not in danger. ²² But if I say to the lad: 'The arrows are beyond you,' leave, for Yahweh is sending you away. ²³ But as to our covenant, Yahweh is our witness forever."

²⁴ So David hid himself in the open country. On the day of the new moon the king came to dine. ²⁵ He took his usual place on the seat against the wall while Jonathan sat facing him and Abner was beside him. David's seat remained vacant.

²⁶ Saul did not say anything on that day, thinking that something may have happened and David was unclean. ²⁷ On the second day of the new moon, David's seat was still vacant and Saul asked his son Jonathan, "Why has the son of Jesse not come to table yesterday and today?" ²⁸ Jonathan answered, "David asked leave to go over to Bethlehem for he said, ²⁹ 'Our family is offering a sacrifice in the city and my brothers insisted that I be present. So please allow me to go and visit my brothers.' This is why he has not come to the king's table."

³⁰ Saul became very angry at Jonathan and told him, "You son of a perverse

• **20.12** Here follows the account of David and Jonathan's friendship. The Bible shows how David never forgot his pact with Jonathan (2 S 21:7).

and rebellious woman! Do I not know that you prefer the son of Jesse to your shame and your mother's shame? ³¹For as long as the son of Jesse lives, neither you nor your Kingdom can stand. Send for him and bring him to me for he is doomed to die!" ³²Then Jonathan asked his father, "Why should he die? What has he done?" ³³At this, Saul pointed his spear at him and Jonathan understood that his father intended to kill David. ³⁴Jonathan rose angrily from the table and did not eat that second day of the month, grieving for David, because of what his father said against him.

³⁵The next morning, Jonathan went to the open country with a young man, according to what he and David had agreed on. ³⁶He told the lad, "Run, fetch the arrows." While the lad was running, Jonathan shot an arrow that flew beyond the lad. ³⁷When the lad reached the spot where Jonathan had shot the arrow, Jonathan called after him and said, "The arrow is beyond you! ³⁸Run quickly and do not waste time!" The lad picked up the arrow and ran back to his master. ³⁹The lad knew nothing of Jonathan and David's agreement.

⁴⁰After that, Jonathan gave his weapons to the lad and commanded him to take them to the city. ⁴¹When the lad had gone, David came out from behind the mound and lay on the ground. The two embraced each other and wept with one another until David was through. ⁴²Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have made an oath to one another in Yahweh's name when we said: Yahweh shall be between you and me and between your descendants and mine forever."

David and the priest Ahimelech

21 • ¹David went on his way while Jonathan returned home.

²David came to Nob to the priest Ahimelech. Ahimelech came to meet

him and asked trembling, "Why are you alone?" ³David replied, "The king sent me on a mission and strictly ordered me not to tell anyone about it. Because of this I have decided on a place where I shall meet my men. ⁴What do you have here? Can you give me five loaves of bread or whatever you have?" ⁵The priest answered David, "I do not have ordinary bread at hand; there is only holy bread. If your men have had no relations with women they may eat it." ⁶David answered, "Indeed we have abstained from women these days since I set out. The young men remained sexually clean though it was an ordinary expedition and today they are clean." ⁷So the priest gave him holy bread for there was no other bread. This was the bread of Presence which had been replaced by fresh bread on the day it was removed.

⁸Yet one of Saul's men was there on that day. He was Doeg, the Edomite, and Saul's chief shepherd.

⁹David asked Ahimelech, "Do you have a spear or a sword with you? I did not take my arms with me because the king's order was urgent." ¹⁰The priest replied, "I have here, wrapped in a piece of cloth behind the ephod, the sword of Goliath the Philistine whom you killed in the valley of Elah. You can take this if you wish, for I have nothing else here." David said, "There is none like it. Give it to me."

• ¹¹That same day, David fled far from Saul. He went to Achish, king

• **21.1** The *loaves of Presence* represented the twelve tribes of Israel. They were offered every sabbath and remained on the altar for the entire week, signifying thereby the people's loyalty to Yahweh. Only the priests could eat of them (Lev 24:5-9).

Jesus refers to this text when his disciples

do not observe the rules about the sabbath (see Mk 2:25). Jesus wants to free us from the slavery of the "sacred," because a person is more sacred than anything else.

• 11. David has to pretend madness. The Bible shows how this chosen one of Yahweh

18:7 of Gath. ¹²Achish's servants remarked, "O king, is this not David? Did the people not dance on his account and sing: 'Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands?'" ¹³David understood these words and began to fear Achish, king of Gath. ¹⁴So he pretended to be mad, making marks on the doors of the gate as he let his spittle run down his beard. ¹⁵At this Achish told his servants, "Look, it is a madman. Why did you bring him to me?" ¹⁶Am I short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow to act foolishly in my presence? Will this fellow come into my house?"

David begins his wanderings

22 • ¹David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adulam where his brothers and his father's family came down to him. ²Then those who had problems or debts or were embittered joined him there. Thus he became their chief; he had with him about four hundred men.

³From there, David went to Mispheh in Moab and asked the king of Moab to let his father and mother stay with him until he found out what God would do for him. ⁴So David left them with the king of Moab and they stayed there as long as David remained in the refuge.

⁵The prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the refuge; go to the land of Judah." So David left and entered the forest of Hereth.

⁶Saul heard that David and his men had been seen. Saul was in Gibeah at the time, sitting under the tamarisk tree on

the high place, his spear in hand, while his servants were standing by. ⁷Saul addressed them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields of vineyards? Will he make each one of you a commander over a thousand or over a hundred men that you should all be conspiring against me?" ⁸Why, then, did no one tell me that my son made an agreement with the son of Jesse? No one among you had mercy on me and told me that my own son had stirred up my servant to conspire against me as is the case today."

⁹At this, Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with the officers of Saul, spoke up, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, in Nob. ¹⁰Ahimelech consulted Yahweh for him, provided him with food and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine as well."

¹¹On hearing this, the king sent for Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub, and all his family who were priests in Nob. They all came to the king. ¹²Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub." He replied, "Yes, my lord." ¹³Saul asked him, "Why did you conspire with the son of Jesse, giving him food and a sword and consulting Yahweh for him so that he could rebel against me as is the case today?" ¹⁴Ahimelech answered the king, "Who among all your servants is as faithful as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and honored in your house?" ¹⁵Is today the first time that I have consulted Yahweh for him? By no means! Let not the king accuse me or any member of my family of such a thing for I knew nothing at all about the entire matter." ¹⁶But the king said, "You and your entire family shall die, Ahimelech." ¹⁷And the king at once commanded the guards

8:12;
8:14

21:8

was humiliated before he could sit on his throne, thereby mysteriously foretelling Christ's humiliations. Jesus loved us to the point of madness when he humbled himself to the extent of living as a servant and undergoing an ignominious and painful death on the cross (see Phil 2:7-9).

• **22.1** Chapter 22:2 does not hide the fact that those who went to David were those who found themselves in difficult straits, in debt or embittered. The wars that made it possible for the people of God to live and progress

were not the doings of pure saints. The same happens with struggles waged anywhere in the world for the sake of justice. In the best causes are found questionable or corrupt elements. It will be fortunate if leaders have, like David, a very elevated sense of their mission and of solidarity with their people.

This text refers to the practice of consulting Yahweh by using the *ephod*, an object which contained lots. This was an ancient practice, in ordinary use among the priests of Israel. Later, this practice fell into disuse when prophets ceased to make predictions (see chap. 9).

who were standing by, "Turn and kill the priests of Yahweh for having assisted David. They knew very well that David was a fugitive but they did not tell me anything at all." The king's servants, however, refused to lift their hands against the priests of Yahweh. ¹⁸And so the king turned to Doeg and commanded him, "Come and stab the priests." And so Doeg the Edomite drew near and stabbed the priests.

On that day he killed eighty-five persons who were wearing the linen ephod. ¹⁹After that, Saul put Nob, the city of priests, to the sword, killing men and women, children and infants, oxen, asses and sheep.

^{23:6} ²⁰A son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to David. ²¹Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of Yahweh. ²²David said to him, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. So I am responsible for the death of all your family. ²³Stay with me and do not be afraid for he who wants to kill you must also kill me. You will be safe with me."

How David consulted God

23 ¹David received a report that the Philistines were attacking Keilah and plundering the threshing floors. ²He, therefore, consulted Yahweh and asked, "Shall I go and fight with these Philistines?" The answer was, "Go and attack the Philistines and rescue Keilah." ³But David's men protested and said, "Look, here in Judah we are in danger and afraid. What then if we go to Keilah and face the Philistines?"

^{25:5:19} ⁴So David consulted Yahweh again and got this answer, "Go down to Keilah for I will deliver the Philistines into your hands." ⁵David went with his men to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, seizing their cattle and causing a great slaughter among them; and he rescued the inhabitants of the place.

⁶When Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, fled to David at Keilah, he took along the ephod. ⁷When Saul was told that David had come to Keilah he said, "God has delivered him into my hands for he has shut himself in by entering a city with gates and bars." ⁸He then called on all the people to go down to Keilah and en-

gage David and his men in battle. ⁹When David found out that Saul meant to harm him, he told the priest Abiathar to bring the ephod. ¹⁰Then he consulted Yahweh, "O Yahweh, God of Israel, listen to your servant for I have heard that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the city on my account. ¹¹Will Saul come down as I heard? O Yahweh, God of Israel, speak to your servant." Yahweh answered, "He will come down." ¹²Then David asked, "Will the lords of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?" Yahweh answered, "They will hand you over to him." ¹³So David set out with his six hundred men. He left Keilah and wandered from one place to another. When Saul was informed that David had escaped from Keilah, he abandoned the expedition. ¹⁴Meanwhile David stayed in the strongholds in the hill country of the desert of Ziph. Saul, however, kept on searching for him but God did not deliver David into his hands.

¹⁵David knew that Saul had come out to kill him. And he remained at Horesh in the desert of Ziph. ¹⁶Saul's son, Jonathan, went to him and encouraged him in God's name with these words, ¹⁷"Have no fear, for my father Saul will not harm you. Even my father Saul knows that you shall be king over Israel and that I shall be second to you." ¹⁸The two made an agreement before Yahweh in Horesh, after which David remained there while Jonathan returned home.

¹⁹Some of the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David is hiding among us in the refuges of Horesh on the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon. ²⁰Come down, therefore, O king, whenever it may please you and we shall deliver him into your hands." ²¹Saul replied, "May Yahweh bless you for you have had mercy on me. ²²Go and make sure where he has been and who has seen him there for I am told that he is very cunning. ²³Check all the places where he may be hiding and come back to me, and I will go with you. If he is in the region, I will search him out among all the clans of Judah."

²⁴So they went off to Ziph ahead of Saul. At this time, David and his men were in the desert of Maon, in the valley south of Jeshimon.

²⁵When David learned that Saul and his men were looking for him, he went down to a ravine in the desert of Maon. Saul heard of this and pursued David into the desert of Maon. ²⁶Saul moved along one side of the mountain, and David along the other. David was hurrying to escape from Saul who with his forces was closing in on him and his men. ²⁷It was then that a messenger came to Saul and said, "Come quickly because the Philistines have invaded the land!" ²⁸Saul then left off pursuing David and went to face the Philistines. This is how that place came to be called the Ravine of Parting.

David spares Saul

²⁶ **24** ¹David then went up from there and stayed in the hiding places at Engedi. ²When Saul returned from his pursuit of the Philistines, he was told that David was in the desert of Engedi. ³So Saul took three thousand picked men from all Israel and went in search of David and his men to the east of the Wild Goat crags. ⁴When he came to the sheepfolds along the way, he entered a cave to relieve himself.

⁵Now David and his men were far back in the cave. David's men said to him, "This is the day which Yahweh spoke of: look I will deliver your enemy into your hands and you will do with him as you see fit." So David moved up and stealthily cut off an end of Saul's robe. ⁶But afterward,

David regretted having cut off an end of Saul's robe, ⁷and he said to his men, "Let me not lay my hands on my master, for he is Yahweh's anointed." ⁸With these words, David restrained his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. Saul then left the cave and went on his way.

⁹Then David himself stepped out of the cave and called after Saul, "My master, the king!" When Saul looked back, David knelt and then bowed to the ground in homage and asked him, ¹⁰"Why do you listen to those who say that I want to harm you? ¹¹Look, today you have seen that Yahweh delivered you into my hands in the cave, and I was told to kill you but I held myself back and I said: 'I will not lift my hands against my master who is Yahweh's anointed.' ¹²My father, look at this end of your robe which I am holding! I cut off the end of your robe but did not kill you. Now you may know that I mean you no harm or treason. I have done you no wrong and yet you are hunting me down to kill me. ¹³May Yahweh be judge between you and me and may he exact justice from you in my case, but I shall do you no harm.

¹⁴As the saying goes, 'From the wicked comes wickedness'; as for me, my hand shall not harm you. ¹⁵But who is it you are after, O king of Israel? Are you pursuing a dead dog? A flea? ¹⁶May Yahweh be judge between you and me. May he see and uphold my cause and deliver me from your hands."

¹⁷After David had spoken these

• **24.1** David's respect for "the anointed one" of the Lord (since Saul had been anointed by Samuel), gives evidence of his faith.

Persons instructed in the Scriptures know that leaders share with God duties and power which exceed the capabilities and the rights of a human being. Though we should replace evil or ineffective leaders, we must respect their person and the fearful responsibility God has delivered into their hands (Rom 13:1).

God will do me justice. This is not the grudging complaint of someone who did not even try to defend himself but the certainty of one who fights for what seems to him to be just, but recognizes that God alone is the master of history. In particular cases, he renounces his rights as a way of showing his full confidence in God. This is what Jesus says in Matthew 5:38-42.

words, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, my son David?” He wept aloud ¹⁸and said to David, “You are right and I am wrong, for you have repaid with kindness the harm I have inflicted on you. ¹⁹This day you have shown your righteousness to me by not taking my life when Yahweh put me into your hands. ²⁰For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go unharmed? May Yahweh reward you for what you have done for me today. ²¹Now I know for certain that you shall reign and the kingdom of Israel will be firm in your hand. ²²Now swear to me by Yahweh that you will not wipe out my descendants and erase the name of my family.”

²³David swore to this before Saul after which Saul went home while David and his men went up to the hiding place.

David and Abigail

28:3 **25** ¹The day Samuel died, all Israel gathered together to mourn him; after which they buried him at his home in Ramah.

Then David went down to the desert of Maon. ²A very rich man, owner of three thousand sheep and a thousand goats, lived there and had his farm in Carmel.

³This man was named Nabal; his wife, Abigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful; but the man himself, a Calebite, was rough and ill-mannered. He was at the time shearing his sheep in Carmel.

⁴When David heard in the desert that Nabal was shearing his sheep, ⁵he sent ten young men to the farm with this instruction, “Go to Nabal in Carmel and greet him for me ⁶in these words: peace be with you and your family; peace be with all that is yours. ⁷I hear that you have shearers with you. Now when your shepherds were with us, we did not harm them; neither did they miss anything while they were in Carmel. ⁸Ask your servants and they will tell. So be kind to my servants since we come on a festive day; please give them and your son David whatever you can.”

Lk 10:5

⁹When David’s young men arrived, they delivered this message to Nabal in David’s name and then waited. ¹⁰But Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? Many nowadays are the servants who run away from their masters. ¹¹Must I take my bread, my wine, my meat which I have slaughtered for my shearers and give it to men who come from I don’t know where?” ¹²At this, David’s young men left and returned to him, reporting everything Nabal had said. ¹³David then said to his men, “Let every man strap on his sword!” And every one of them, including David, strapped on his sword. About four hundred men followed David while two hundred remained with the baggage.

30:10

¹⁴One of Nabal’s servants told Abigail, his wife, “David sent messengers from the desert to greet our master but he shouted at them. ¹⁵Yet these men were very good to us. We suffered no harm and did not miss anything while we were living among them during our stay in the open country. ¹⁶They were like a wall for us night and day while we were tending the sheep in their midst. ¹⁷Now think over what you should do; for our master and his entire family are surely doomed to die, but he is so wicked no one can speak to him.”

¹⁸Abigail hurriedly prepared two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five measures of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of pressed raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs and loaded them on asses. ¹⁹Then she said to her servants, “Go on ahead and I shall follow you.” But she told her husband nothing of this.

²⁰As she rode down the mountain on her ass, David and his men were coming down from the other direction. When she met them, ²¹David was reflecting, “It was useless guarding all that this fellow has in the desert. Although he lost nothing belonging to him, he has returned me evil for good. ²²May God do so to David and more if by morning I leave a single

• **25.1** The incident we read here compares two men and two mentalities: the person with possessions has no advantage over the other. This means that wealth has to be shared.

The role of the woman is highlighted. Her wisdom is able to ward off a disaster provoked by men. David is humble enough to see that his impulsive temperament leads him to violence and injustice.

male alive among those who belong to him.”

²³On seeing David, Abigail quickly dismounted from the ass and threw herself on the ground before him. ²⁴As she fell at his feet she said, “My lord, let the blame be on me! Let your handmaid speak to you; listen to her words. ²⁵Let not my lord pay attention to this ill-mannered man, Nabal, for he is just what his name says: he is a fool. I, your handmaid, did not see the young men whom you sent.

²⁶Now, my lord, as Yahweh lives and as you live, it is Yahweh who prevents you from shedding blood and avenging yourself. Let your enemies and those who seek to harm my lord become like Nabal! ²⁷And now let this present which I have brought you, my lord, be given to the young men who follow you, ²⁸and please forgive me.

Yahweh will certainly give you a lasting family because you are fighting the battles of Yahweh and no evil shall be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹Should anyone make an attempt on your life, may the life of my lord be bound in the bundle of the living in the care of Yahweh, your God. May he hurl away the lives of your enemies as from the hollow of a sling.

³⁰So when Yahweh fulfills his promises and appoints you as commander over Israel, ³¹you shall have no reason to grieve or to feel any grief or regret for having unrightfully shed blood or taken revenge yourself. May Yahweh bless you, and you, my lord, remember your handmaid.”

³²David then said to Abigail, “Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! ³³Blessed be your good judgment and may you yourself be blessed, for you have prevented me from shedding blood and avenging myself today! ³⁴For as Yahweh, the God of Israel, lives, he has prevented me from hurting you. If you did not hurry to meet me, not a single male belonging to Nabal would have been alive by morning.” ³⁵David accepted what she had brought him and told her, “Go back home in peace. I have

listened to you and granted your request.”

³⁶Abigail went back to Nabal and found him holding a feast in his house.

He was joyful and very drunk so Abigail did not mention anything to him until the following day. ³⁷When morning came and Nabal had slept it off, his wife spoke to him about all these things. On hearing it Nabal had a stroke and remained paralyzed. ³⁸Ten days later, Yahweh let him die.

³⁹When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Blessed be Yahweh who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal and has prevented me from doing wrong. Yahweh himself has made Nabal’s wrongdoings fall on his own head.”

⁴⁰David then sent his servants to Abigail in Carmel to propose marriage to her saying, “David has sent us to you to say that he wants you to be his wife.” ⁴¹Rising and bowing to the ground, Abigail answered, “May I be as a slave to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” ⁴²She quickly rose and mounted an ass and, attended by five of her servants, she left with David’s messengers and became his wife.

⁴³David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, making both her and Abigail his wives. ⁴⁴Saul, in the meantime, had given Michal, his daughter and David’s wife, to Palti, son of Laish who was from Gallim.

26 • ¹Ziphites came to Saul in Gibeah to tell him that David was hiding on the hill of Hachilah, east of Jeshimon. ²On hearing this, Saul went down with three thousand picked men of Israel to the desert of Ziph in search of David. ³He encamped on the hill of Hachilah beside the road east of Jeshimon. ⁴When David who was in the desert saw that Saul had come after him, he sent out spies who confirmed Saul’s arrival. ⁵David came to Saul’s place of encampment and saw where Saul was resting with Abner, son of Ner, chief of his army. Saul was sleeping in the center and his men were around him.

24:15;
1K 2:44

24

Jdg 7:10;
2:16

⁶David then asked Ahimelech the Hittite, and Abishai, son of Zeruah and Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?" Abishai answered, "I will go down with you." ⁷So, that night, David and Abishai went into the camp and found Saul sleeping in the center, his spear thrust into the ground at his head, while Abner and the rest of the soldiers were sleeping around him. ⁸Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hands this day. Let me nail him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I will not repeat it." ⁹But David answered Abishai, "Do not harm him. For who could harm Yahweh's anointed and not be punished? ¹⁰As Yahweh lives, only Yahweh may strike him; either he dies on the day appointed or is killed in battle. ¹¹Don't let me harm Yahweh's anointed! Instead take the spear that is at his head and the water jug and let us be on our way."

¹²So David took the spear and the water jug from near Saul's head and they left. Nobody saw, nobody knew, nobody woke up. All remained asleep, for a deep sleep from Yahweh had fallen on them.

¹³On the opposite slope David stood at a distance, on top of the hill, ¹⁴and called out to both Abner son of Ner and the soldiers, "Why don't you answer, Abner?" Abner answered back, "Who are you to awaken the king?" ¹⁵David said to Abner, "Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then did you not closely guard your lord the king? An ordinary man has broken into the camp and made an attempt on the life of the king your lord. ¹⁶Is this the way you fulfill your duties? You deserve to die because you did not guard your lord, Yahweh's anointed. Now look for the king's spear and the water jug that were at his head."

¹⁷Saul recognized David's voice and asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" David answered, "It is my voice, my lord, O king! ¹⁸Why does my lord pursue me? What have I done? What am I guilty of? ¹⁹Now, let my lord the king hear my words. If it is Yahweh who has incited you against me, may an offering appease him; but if men have done so, may they be cursed before Yahweh, for they have made me an exile to this day and have driven me from my share of the

inheritance of Yahweh as if saying to me: 'Go and serve other gods.' ²⁰Let not my blood flow to the ground far from the presence of Yahweh! For the king of Israel has come to seek out a flea as a man hunts a partridge in the mountains."

²¹Then Saul said, "I have done wrong. Come back, David my son. I will not harm you anymore since you valued my life this day. I have acted like a fool and have made a great mistake." ²²David answered, "I have your spear with me, O king! Let one of your servants come over to fetch it. ²³Yahweh rewards a righteous and loyal man. Today he delivered you into my hands but I refused to harm Yahweh's anointed. ²⁴As I valued your life today, may Yahweh value my life and deliver me from all distress."

²⁵Finally Saul told David, "Blessed are you, David my son! You shall succeed in everything you do." Then David went his way and Saul went home.

David among the Philistines

27 ¹David thought, "Some day I shall die at the hand of Saul. It is better for me to escape to the land of the Philistines where I shall be beyond his reach and Saul will get tired of searching for me within the borders of Israel." ²So David went with his six hundred men to Achish, son of Maoch, king of Gath. ³He and his men lived with Achish in Gath; each one had his family with him and David had his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. ⁴When Saul was informed that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

⁵David said to Achish, "If I meet with your approval, let me have a place to live in one of the country towns. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" ⁶That very day, Achish gave David Ziklag, which since then and up to the present time has belonged to the kings of Judah. ⁷David lived one year and four months in the country of the Philistines.

⁸David and his men raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites—all these lived in the land extending from Telem to Shur and the land of Egypt. ⁹David would attack the land leaving neither man nor woman alive and carrying off their sheep, oxen, asses, camels and garments. Then he would

come back to Achish. ¹⁰Whenever Achish asked, “Whom did you raid this time?” David would answer, “The Negeb of Judah,” or “The Negeb of the Jarahmeelites,” or “The Negeb of the Kenites.” ¹¹David left neither man nor woman alive. For he said, “If I brought them to Gath, they could talk against us and say: This is what David did.” Such was his practice as long as he lived in the country of the Philistines. ¹²Achish trusted David and said to himself, “David is now hated by his own people. He shall be my servant forever.”

Saul consults the witch of Endor

28 ¹In those days, the Philistines mustered their forces to fight against Israel, and Achish told David, “I want you to know that you and your men must join me to fight this battle.” ²David answered, “Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do.” Achish said to David, “I will make you my permanent bodyguard.”

25:1

³Now Samuel had died and when all Israel had mourned for him, they buried him in his own city, Ramah. Meanwhile, Saul had driven those who consult spirits of the dead and fortunetellers out of the land.

⁴As the Philistines gathered together and encamped in Shunem, Saul also mustered the Israelite forces and encamped in Gilboa. ⁵But on seeing the Philistine camp, Saul was afraid and his heart failed him. ⁶Saul consulted Yahweh but Yahweh gave no answer whether in dreams

or by the Urim or through prophets. ⁷Then Saul said to his servants, “Find me a woman who consults the spirits of the dead, that I may go and consult her.” His servants told him, “There is a medium at Endor.”

Dt 18:11

⁸Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and left with two men. He arrived at night and said to the woman: “Tell my fortune through a ghost and call the spirit I shall name.” ⁹But the woman answered him, “Do you not know that Saul has driven medium and fortunetellers out of the land? Why do you set a trap for me to bring about my death?” ¹⁰But Saul swore to her by Yahweh, “As Yahweh lives, you will not be in trouble for this.”

1K 14:2

¹¹Then the woman asked him, “Whom do you want me to call up?” Saul said, “Call up Samuel.”

¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” ¹³The king then told her, “Have no fear. What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see him rising from the ground. He is a god.” ¹⁴Saul asked her, “What does he look like?” She replied, “The one rising is an old man clothed in a mantle.” Saul knew that it was Samuel. He knelt and bowed face to the ground in homage.

¹⁵Samuel spoke to Saul, “Why did you disturb me by summoning me up?” Saul answered, “I am in great

• **28.1** Nowhere else does Saul appear so human and so close to us. While David, trusting in Yahweh and loved by all, courts danger with the utmost serenity, Saul carries all by himself the burden of his anxiety. His opponent, Samuel, with whom he could at least discuss and quarrel is no longer there. God himself does not speak, and the man remains alone, facing hostile circumstances, tortured by his own doubts and anxieties.

Saul wanted to wrest from God a favorable

response. He gets a death sentence from Samuel, and then leaves peacefully since what weighed on him was not so much the fear of death as the solitude which was his lot while he was in power. The man who “surpassed everyone in height from the shoulders upwards” has become like all the rest and depends on the assistance of a poor woman, a sinner according to God’s law, but someone full of understanding.

distress, for the Philistines are waging war against me and God has abandoned me. He no longer answers me either through prophets or in dreams. Because of this I have called you to tell me what I should do.”

¹⁶Samuel said, “Why do you ask me, if Yahweh has abandoned you and turned against you? ¹⁷Yahweh has done to you what he foretold through me. He has torn the kingdom from your hand and has given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸Remember that you disobeyed Yahweh by not executing his fierce anger against Amalek; that is why Yahweh has done this to you today. ¹⁹Now Yahweh will deliver Israel, together with you, into the hands of the Philistines. By tomorrow, you and your sons shall be with me when Yahweh delivers the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

²⁰Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, terrified by what Samuel said. He had no strength left because he had not eaten anything all that day and night.

²¹The woman drew close to Saul and, seeing how frightened he was, said to him, “Look, your maid-servant has obeyed you and risked her life doing what you have asked her to do. ²²Now it is your turn to listen to me. Let me give you something to eat so you may have strength when you go on your way.” ²³Saul refused and said, “I will not eat.” But on the insistence of his servants and the woman, he agreed, rose from the ground and sat on the bed. ²⁴The woman had a fattened calf in the house which she immediately butchered. She also took some flour, kneaded it and baked unleav-

ened bread, ²⁵and set it before Saul and his servants. They then ate and left that night.

29 ¹Now the Philistines mustered all their forces at Aphek; the Israelites were encamped beside the spring in Jezreel. ²While the Philistine rulers went ahead of their groups of thousands and hundreds, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. ³The Philistine chiefs asked, “Who are these Hebrews?” Achish replied to the Philistine chiefs, “This is David, servant of Saul, king of Israel. He has been with me for over a year and since he fled to me up to the present day I have found no fault in him.” ⁴But the Philistine chiefs were angered at this and said to him, “Send that man back! Let him return to the place where you assigned him. He must not go down into battle with us lest during the battle he turn against us. How better could this fellow regain his master’s favor than by bringing him the heads of our men?” ⁵Is this not the David for whom they danced and sang: Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands?”

⁶So Achish called David and said to him, “As Yahweh lives, you are honest and I would like you to be with me in the camp for I have found nothing wrong in you since you came to me up to the present day. But you displease the lords. ⁷So it is better for you to leave and go back quietly and do nothing to displease the Philistine lords.” ⁸David asked Achish, “But what have I done? Have I done anything since I entered your service until the present time that would bar me from joining the fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” ⁹Achish replied to David, “I myself hold nothing against you, but the Philistine chiefs are determined not to allow you to join us in battle. ¹⁰Now, therefore, get up early tomorrow morning and leave with the soldiers who came with you.” ¹¹So David and his men left early in the morning and returned to the land of the Philistines. The Philistines, in the meantime, went on to Jezreel.

The sack of Ziklag

30 • ¹David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day, but the Amalekites had just raided the Negeb and Ziklag, storming it and burning it to the ground. ²They had taken captive the women and all who were in the city, young and old. They killed no one but carried them off when they left.

³When they reached the town, David and his men found it burned to the ground and their wives, sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴Then David and those with him wept aloud until they could weep no more. ⁵David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, widow of Nabal of Carmel had also been taken captive. ⁶Now David was greatly distressed because the people were talking of stoning him; for they were embittered because of what had happened to their sons and daughters. But David found strength in Yahweh his God.

⁷David told Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, to bring him the ephod. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David ⁸who then consulted Yahweh, "Shall I go after these raiders? Can I overtake them?" The answer was, "Go after them for you shall surely overtake them and recover the captives."

⁹David set out with his six hundred men and they reached the brook of Besor. There, two hundred men stayed behind, for they were too exhausted to cross the brook, ¹⁰and David continued the chase with four hundred men.

¹¹They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. They gave him food, which he ate, and water to drink. ¹²They gave him a piece of fig cake and two pieces of raisin cake. The Egyptian ate and recovered his strength, for he had been three days and three nights without eating or drinking. ¹³David then questioned him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He answered, "I am an Egyptian, slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me because I fell sick three days ago. ¹⁴We raided the Negeb of the Cherethites, the territory of Judah and the Negeb of Caleb and set Ziklag on fire." ¹⁵David then asked him, "Will you lead me to this raiding band?" He replied, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master and I will lead you to this raiding band."

¹⁶So the Egyptian led David to the raiding band whom they found scattered all over the ground, eating, drinking, dancing and feasting with the spoils they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. ¹⁷David fought them from early morning to the evening of the following day, allowing no one to escape except four hundred young men who mounted their camels and fled.

¹⁸David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken and rescued his two wives. ¹⁹Nothing and no one was missing, small or great, son or daughter, booty or anything the Amalekites had taken. David brought

• **30.1** This is one of those events in which David appears totally crushed.

But David found strength in Yahweh, his God. Even when he has reached the bottom of the pit, he does not lose hope.

The share of those who go down to battle and of those who remain with the baggage

shall be the same. David refuses to allow that kind of distribution which we sometimes make, distinguishing between those who serve and those who do not serve. This concept of social solidarity is the very thing which animates all of Deuteronomy's legislation.

back everything. ²⁰He then gathered flocks and herds and the people drove them before him, saying, "These are David's spoils!"

²¹David reached the two hundred men who had been too tired to follow him, and were left behind at the Besor brook. These men came to meet David and those who were with him. David then drew near and greeted them. ²²But the malicious and worthless people among those who had accompanied David said, "Since they did not come with us, we shall not share the booty with them; let each of them take his wife and children and leave." ²³But David said, "My brothers, you shall not do that after what Yahweh has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the band that raided us. ²⁴Who would agree to what you have said? The share of those who go down to battle and of those who remain with the baggage shall be the same; they shall share alike." ²⁵From that day to the present, this has been a statute and custom for Israel.

²⁶When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent part of the booty to the elders of Judah, to each of his friends, saying, "This is a gift to you from the booty of Yahweh's enemies: ²⁷to those in Bethel, in Ramoth-negeb, in Jattir, ²⁸in Aroer, in Sipmoth, in Esh-temoa, ²⁹in Racal, in the Jerahmeelite cities, in the Kenite cities, ³⁰in Hormah, in Borashan, ³¹in Athach, in Hebron, and in all the places where David and his men had stayed.

Death of Saul

31 ¹Now the Philistines fought against the Israelites who, in

their flight, fell mortally wounded on Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines surrounded Saul and his sons and killed Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua, Saul's sons. ³The battle raged around Saul, and he was afraid when he saw that the archers had found him.

⁴Then Saul commanded his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through lest these uncircumcised men come and stab me themselves, making fun of me." But his armor-bearer did not move because he was greatly terrified. So Saul drew his own sword and fell upon it. ⁵Seeing that Saul was dead, the armor-bearer also fell upon his sword and died with him. ⁶Thus, Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer and all his men died together on the same day.

⁷When the Israelites on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. Then the Philistines came and occupied those cities.

⁸The following day, the Philistines came to strip the slain and found Saul and his three sons lying dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off his head and stripped off his armor and then sent messengers throughout the Philistine lands to proclaim this good news in the temples of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth and pinned his body on the wall of Bethshan. ¹¹When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all their warriors set out, marched through the night and removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of

Num
31:27

10:1-12;
2S 1:1-16

• **31.1** There will be no further question of Saul in the Bible: no competition with David. But it had to be a respectful silence. All his people shared the responsibility of his failure

because of the little support they had given him, and could they condemn him without accusing God and Samuel?

Bethshan. They then returned to Jabesh and burnt the bodies there. ¹³ Then they took their bones and

buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, after which, they fasted for seven days.



David learns of Saul's death

1S 31:
1-13

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

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

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

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

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

¹³David asked the young man who told him this, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the

1S 31:4

1Mac
9:21

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

Mountains of Gilboa. David is already known for his poetic talents (see 1 S 16:18). This poem attributed to him is one of the more ancient songs in the Bible.

son of an Amalekite immigrant.”

1S 9:26 ¹⁴ David said, “Why were you not afraid to lay your hands on Yahweh’s anointed and kill him?” ¹⁵ He then called one of his men and ordered him, “Come and strike him down.” He struck down the Amalekite and killed him.

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

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

Jos
10:13

1Mac
9:21

Mic 1:10

1S 31:9;
Jdg
16:23;
Gen
27:28

1S 18:4;
14:47

Jdg 5:30

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

How the mighty ones have fallen!

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

²¹ *Mountains of Gilboa, let neither dew nor rain visit you, no more fertile fields on you!*

For on you the shield of the valiant was defiled.

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

but with the blood of the slain.

From the fat of the warriors, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, nor did the sword of Saul return unstained.

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

swifter than eagles they were and stronger than lions.

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

²⁵ *How the valiant have fallen!*

In the midst of the battle Jonathan lies slain on your mountains.

²⁶ *I grieve for you, my brother Jonathan; how dear have you been to me!*

Your love for me was wonderful, even more than the love of women.

²⁷ *How the valiant have fallen!*

The weapons of war have perished!”

David is anointed King over Judah

2 • ¹ After this, David consulted Yahweh, “Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” Yahweh answered him, “Go!” Then David asked, “Where shall I go?” He answered, “To Hebron.” ² So David went up to Hebron with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³ David also brought up his men with their families and they settled in the towns of Hebron. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the nation of Judah.

1S 27:3

1S 31:11

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

⁸ Now Abner, son of Ner, Saul’s general, had taken Ishbaal, son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim ⁹ where he made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin and the rest of Israel. ¹⁰ Ishbaal, Saul’s son, was forty

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

David is proclaimed king by the people of his own tribe of Judah. The north remains faithful to Saul’s son. With the aim of uniting them, David seeks the sympathy of Saul’s al-

lies, and praises the people from the north who gave Saul burial.

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

years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for two years. Only the people of Judah followed David. ¹¹David was their king in Hebron and he ruled over them for seven years and six months.

Civil war

¹²Abner, son of Ner, and the mensevants of Ishbaal, Saul's son, left Mahanaim for Gibeon ¹³where Joab, son of Zeruiah and the men of David met them at the pool of Gibeon. There they sat, one group on one side of the pool, the other on the opposite side. ¹⁴Abner told Joab, "Let the young men rise and perform for us." Joab replied, "Let them rise!" ¹⁵So they rose and were counted off: twelve of the Benjaminites of Ishbaal, Saul's son, and twelve of David's men. ¹⁶Each one caught his opponent's head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, and all fell down together. Therefore, that place in Gibeon was called field of the fighting.

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

²⁴Joab and Abishai, however, pursued Abner and, by sunset, arrived at the

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

²⁹Abner and his men marched all night through the lowland, crossed the Jordan, and marched the whole morning until they reached Mahanaim. ³⁰As for Joab, he stopped pursuing Abner and gathered all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's servants were missing. ³¹But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men from among the Benjaminites. ³²Asahel was taken and buried in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

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

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

⁶While war was going on between the party of Saul and that of David, Abner was strengthening his position in Saul's family. ⁷Now Saul had a concubine named Riz-

18:16;
20:22

3:1-4;
2S 5:
13-16

2:18

• **3.2** David's children will be the cause of much suffering for him. David's numerous wives will bring about fratricidal struggles for succession to the throne: actually each of the first-born, urged on by his own mother, will aspire to replace David. Consequently three of

his sons: Amnon, Absalom and Adoniah will in turn lose their lives in this struggle for power, before finally leaving the throne to Solomon who had not yet been born when David reigned in Hebron (see also 1 K 2:1).

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

1S 13:14

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

1S 18:25

• ¹⁴Then David sent messengers to Ishbaal, Saul's son, to tell him, "Give me my wife Michal whom I married for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins."¹⁵ Ishbaal sent for her and took her away from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish,¹⁶ who followed her weeping all the way to Bahurim. There Abner said to him, "Go back!" and he turned back.

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

David at Hebron the proposals of Israel and the Benjaminites.

Joab murders Abner

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

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

²⁶Joab left David and sent messengers to go after Abner and they had him brought back from the cistern of Sirah. But David did not know of that.²⁷ When Abner arrived at Hebron, Joab took him aside within the city gate as though to speak with him, privately. There he stabbed him in the belly and he died. Joab did so

20:8

• 14. Sometimes, the Bible says that God intervened to guide David and lead him to victory. This does not negate the fact that David was an intelligent and capable man, and was able to impose himself on Israel. God was not acting differently at that time than he does today. It is always men and women who write history and, in so doing, write it with light and shadow.

The new king strives to create a united and strong nation. This account shows us an at-

tempt to achieve unity which fails because of the mean and vindictive attitude of David's military officers.

The story illustrates three successive steps in political fanaticism:

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

in revenge for the murder of his brother, Asahel.

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

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

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

³³ The king began the mourning song for Abner with these words, "Should Abner die as a fool dies?"

³⁴ Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered; as one falls at the hands of the wicked, so you have fallen." And all the people again wept over him.

³⁵ Then the people tried to persuade David to take some food while it was still day, but David swore, "May God do so to me and more if I touch food before sundown!" ³⁶ The people heeded this and it pleased them; in fact, they were pleased at whatever the king said. ³⁷ This day they realized, as did all the people of Israel, that the king had no part in the murder of Abner, son of Ner. ³⁸ Then the king said to his servants, "Do you realize that a general and valiant warrior passed away today in Israel? ³⁹ Although I am the anointed king, today I feel helpless to control

the sons of Zeruah. May Yahweh repay the one who did evil."

Ishbaal is murdered

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

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

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

⁹ But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "Let Yahweh hear, he who has saved me from all adversities. ¹⁰ When somebody reported Saul's death to me, thinking he was bringing me good news, I took hold of him and killed him at Ziklag, instead of giving him a reward. ¹¹ Will I do less when wicked men have murdered a just one in his own house and on his bed? Shall I not now demand his blood from your hands and sweep you away?"

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

1S 2:33

1S 31:13

16:10;
19:23;
1S 26:61:15;
1S 31:10

David is anointed King over Israel

11:1-3 **5**[•] ¹All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your bone and flesh. ²In the past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel. And Yahweh said to you, ‘You shall be the shepherd of my people Israel and you shall be commander over Israel.’ ³Before Yahweh, king David made an agreement with the elders of Israel who came to him at Hebron, and they anointed him king of Israel.

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

David captures Jerusalem

11:4-9 ⁶The king and his men set out for Jerusalem to fight the Jebusites who lived there. They said to David, “If you try to break in here, the blind and the lame will drive you away,” which meant that David could not get in. ⁷Yet David captured the fortress of Zion that became the “city of David.”

⁸That day David said, “Whoever wants to defeat the Jebusites, let him reach these lame and blind, David’s enemies, through the tunnel for fetching water.” From this came the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14:1-2;
1K 5:15

14:3-7;
2S 3:2-5

3:5-8

14:8-16

deliver the Philistines into your hands.”²⁰ So David came to Baalperazim where he defeated them. He said, “Yahweh has scattered my enemies before me like a sudden bursting flood.” That is why that place is called Baalperazim.²¹ There the Philistines left their idols and David and his men picked them up.

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

The Ark is brought to Jerusalem

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

⁶When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled

13:1-4;
Ps 132:
6-10;
132:
13-14

1S 7:1;
1K 8:1;
1S 6:7-12

Ps 68:25

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

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

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

God certainly loves all people, but David is

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

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

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

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

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

and Uzzah stretched his hand to the Ark of God to hold it. ⁷Yahweh's anger burnt against Uzzah and God struck him there; Uzzah died there beside the Ark of God. ⁸David was angry because Yahweh had struck Uzzah, and that place is called Perez-Uzzah to the present day.

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

¹²King David was told that Yahweh had blessed the family of Obededom and all that belonged to him because of the Ark of God, so he went to bring up the Ark of God from the house of Obededom to the city of David, rejoicing. ¹³After those who carried the Ark of Yahweh had walked six paces, they sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf.

¹⁴David whirled round dancing with all his heart before Yahweh, wearing a linen ephod, ¹⁵for he and

all the Israelites brought up the Ark of Yahweh, shouting joyfully and sounding the horn.

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

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

²⁰When David returned to bless his household, Michal, Saul's daughter, met him and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, exposing himself before his servants' maids as uncouth men do!" ²¹But David said to Michal, "I did that before Yahweh who chose me instead of your father and his family, making me commander over Israel, Yah-

Luke's gospel discovers other imagery in this story. Like the Ark, and in a more wonderful way, the Virgin Mary carried for nine months God himself who, on becoming man, sealed the Covenant with all the peoples of the world. This is why some have given her the title, "Ark of the Covenant." Luke himself had this text before him when he was narrating the Virgin's visit to Elizabeth. (Pay attention to vv. 9 and 11 and compare them with Lk 1:39-45 and 56-64.)

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

its rightful place—in the capital of the country.

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

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

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

weh's people. By Yahweh's life I swear that I will dance and whirl again before him. ²²I will humble myself still more and you may look at me, but I will not be rejected by the maids you spoke about." ²³And Michal, Saul's daughter, had no child to the day she died.

The prophecy of Nathan

^{17:1-15} **7** [•] ¹When the king had settled in his palace and Yahweh had rid him of all his surrounding enemies, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look, I live in a house of cedar but the Ark of God is housed in a tent." ³Nathan replied, "Do as it seems fit to you for Yahweh is with you."

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

rael? Did I say: Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

⁸Now you will tell my servant David, this is what Yahweh of hosts says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the sheep, to make you commander of my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you went, cutting down all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great as the name of the great ones on earth. ¹⁰I will provide a place for my people Israel and plant them that they may live there in peace. They shall no longer be harassed, nor shall wicked men oppress them as before. ¹¹From the time when I appointed judges over my people Israel it is only to you that I have given rest from all your enemies. Yahweh also tells you that he will build you a house.

¹²When the time comes for you to rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your son after you, the one born of you and I will make his reign secure. ¹³He shall build a house for my name and I will firmly establish his kingship forever. ¹⁴I will be a father to him and he shall be my son. If he

1S 16:11;
17:15

Ps 89:28

15:17;
Jer 24:6;
32:41

Acts 2:30;
1K 2:4

1K 5:18

Heb 1:5

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

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

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

I will provide a place for my people Israel. God chooses this moment for a decisive step in the development of his people. Israel had been

a people of twelve tribes since Joshua's time. Now, it will be a nation organized in its own land, with a central and stable authority: the kings descending from David.

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

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

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

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

I will raise up your son after you (see Lk 1:32). God's promise points to Solomon, David's son and successor, and also to those who will come after. To all appearances the promise was broken when, after four cen-

1S 13:14; 15:20
23:5; Lk 1:32
does wrong, I will punish him with the rod, as men do. ¹⁵ But I will not withdraw my kindness from him as I did from Saul when I removed him out of your way. ¹⁶ Your house and your reign shall last forever before me, and your throne shall be forever firm.”

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

17:16-27; 1S 18:18
Lk 12:30
¹⁸ Then king David went in, sat before Yahweh and said, “Who am I, O Yahweh God, and who is my family that you have brought me so far? ¹⁹ Yet this was not enough for you, O Yahweh God, for you have also spoken of your servant’s house for a long time to come. Is this the way men act, O Yahweh God? ²⁰ What more can David say to you? You know your servant, O Yahweh God! ²¹ You fulfill your promise and carry out your plan, as you do now in bringing about all these great things and revealing them to your servant. ²² Therefore you are great, O Yahweh God, for there is no one like you, nor is there a God other than you from all that we ourselves have heard. ²³ Is there on earth another nation like your people Israel, whom God has come to redeem, and to make his people? Indeed you made them famous when you did, for your glory, great and awesome things, rescuing them out of Egypt, from their people and their gods. ²⁴ You have set apart your people Israel to become your

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

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

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

David’s victories

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

³ David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he tried to retake the valley of the Euphrates.

⁴ David captured from him a thousand

18:1-13

Jos 11:6; 11:9

turies, the kingdom of David was destroyed. Nevertheless, it is Jesus, one of his descendants, who, much later, will fully realize what Nathan announced. Several times in the Gospel, Jesus will be called *Son of David* (Mk 12:35).

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

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

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

– As in David’s case, very often people want to offer God something. In reality we can

never anticipate him; he gives his favors even before we have begun to serve him.

– What pleases God is not so much the temples we build for him, as the spiritual temple which he wants to build in people themselves—a project which he will realize after many centuries through his Church.

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

At that time, primitive instincts were so powerful that the humble and merciful David

and seven horsemen and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all the chariot horses but left a sufficient number for a hundred chariots. ⁵The Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer, king of Zobah, but David won over twenty-two thousand of their men. ⁶Then David set up governors in Aram of Damascus and the Arameans became David's servants, paying tribute to him.

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

⁹When Toi, king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰he sent his son Joram to king David to greet him and thank him for having fought against Hadadezer and defeating him. For the latter had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold and bronze ¹¹which king David consecrated to Yahweh together with the silver and gold which he consecrated from all the nations he subdued: ¹²from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, as well as the booty of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

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

¹⁵David reigned over all Israel, issuing decrees and administering justice to all his people. ¹⁶Joab, son of Zeruiiah, was commander of the army; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, recorder; ¹⁷Zadok, son of

Ahitub and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, priests; Seraiah, secretary; ¹⁸and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and the Pelethites. David's sons were priests.

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

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

⁹The king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have turned over to your master's son everything that Saul and his family possessed. ¹⁰You yourself, your sons and servants shall till the land for him and carry in the harvest so that your master's family may have food, although your master's son Mepibaal shall always eat at my table." Ziba, who had

1S 18:3

2:17

18:14-17

20:23-26;
1K 4:1

did not hesitate to execute his prisoners. The Bible praises him for having spared some of them.

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

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

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

fifteen sons and twenty servants ¹¹said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands. Yet Mepi-baal ate at my table like a king’s son.”

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

19:1-5

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

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

19:6-15

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

⁹When Joab saw that there were two battlefronts, one in front of him and the other behind, he selected picked men of

Israel and arranged them in battle formation against the Syrians. ¹⁰Then he entrusted the rest of his army to Abishai his brother and arranged them in battle formation against the Ammonites. ¹¹And he said, “If the Syrians are too strong for me, you shall help me; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come to your assistance. ¹²Take courage! Let us act like men for the sake of our people and God’s cities; and may Yahweh do what seems good to him.”

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

19:16-19

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

David and Bathsheba

11 ¹In the spring of that year, when kings usually set out to fight, David sent out Joab, his officers and all the Israelite troops. They slaughtered the Ammonites

20:1;
1K 20:26

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

We observe David’s defects in several incidents. He is impulsive and deceptive. Here (in

chap. 11) everything contributes toward making his crime more odious:

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

– Uriah strictly observes the religious laws

and attacked Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem.

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

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

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

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

Uriah left the palace and the king had a portion from his table sent to him. ⁹Uriah, however, did not go down to his house but slept by the door of the king's palace with all the servants of his lord. ¹⁰David was told that Uriah did not go down to his house, and he said to him, "Have you not come from a journey? Why did you not go down to your house?"

¹¹Uriah replied, "The ark, the men of Israel and Judah are housed in tents

while my lord Joab and his servants are encamped in the open country. Shall I go to my house to eat and drink there and sleep with my wife? As you live, I will not do this!"

¹²So David said to Uriah, "Remain here today also and I will dismiss you tomorrow." Uriah therefore stayed in Jerusalem that day and the day after.

¹³David invited him to table and he ate and drank until he was drunk. When evening fell, however, he went to lie down on his couch with the guards of his lord instead of going down to his house.

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

¹⁸Then Joab sent a messenger to tell David everything that had happened during the battle. ¹⁹And he said to him, "When you have finished recounting the outcome of the battle to the king, ²⁰perhaps he will get angry and ask you, 'Why did you go so near the city to fight? Did you not know they would shoot from the wall?' ²¹Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerubbesheth? Was it not a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall so that he died at Thebez? Why did you

Lev 15:19

Jdg 9:50
2 Sam 11:6

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

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

How could a book intended to preserve the memory of the model king dare to narrate this event without hiding anything that makes David's crime more odious and win greater

sympathy for his victim? An official historian of another people would never have done this.

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

go so close to the wall?'; then you shall say: Your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead."

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

²⁵David said to the messenger, "Try to encourage Joab with this message: Do not let this thing disturb you, for the sword devours one this time and another at another time. Intensify your attacks against the city and overthrow it."

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

12 • ¹So Yahweh sent the prophet Nathan to David. Nathan went to the king and said to him, "There were two men in a city: one was rich; the other, poor. ²The rich man had many sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had only one little ewe lamb he had bought. He himself fed it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup

and slept on his lap. It was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now a traveler came to the rich man, but he would not take from his own flock or herd to prepare food for the traveler. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared that for his visitor."

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

⁷Nathan said to David, "You are this man! It is Yahweh, God of Israel, who speaks: 'I anointed you king over Israel and saved you from Saul's hands; ⁸I gave you your master's house and your master's wives; I also gave you the nation of Israel and Judah. But if this were not enough, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise Yahweh by doing what displeases him? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife for yourself. Yes, you killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now the sword will never be far from your family because you have despised me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite for yourself.

¹¹Thus says Yahweh: Your misfortune will rise from your own house! I will take

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

You did what displeases me. David easily forgets that Yahweh does not look for external ceremonies, but rather for purity of heart and justice to the neighbor.

You struck down Uriah and took his wife. God brings into broad daylight what David had

hidden from everyone and from his own conscience.

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

God's attitude:

– *Yahweh has forgiven your sin.* God remains faithful and keeps his promises to David's descendants. More than that, Solomon, son of Bathsheba and David, will be the beneficiary of the promises mentioned: God will let grace pass through where sin had passed.

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

your wives from you and give them to your neighbor who shall lie with them in broad daylight. ¹²What you did was done secretly, but what I do will be done before Israel in broad daylight.”

^{24:10;}
^{1S 15:24;}
^{Ps 51} ¹³David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against Yahweh.” Nathan answered him, “Yahweh has forgiven your sin; you shall not die. ¹⁴However, because you have dared to despise Yahweh by doing such a thing, the child that is born to you shall die.” ¹⁵Then Nathan left and went to his house.

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

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

After that, he went to his own house, asked for food and ate. ²¹Then his servants asked him, “Why are you acting like this? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but after it died, you got up and took food.” ²²David answered, “While

the child was still alive, I fasted and wept thinking: who knows? Perhaps Yahweh will be kind to me and let my child live. ²³But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back to life? I can go to him but he cannot return to me.”

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

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

20:1-3

Amnon and Tamar

13 • ¹Now David’s son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. It happened that Amnon, another of David’s sons, loved her. ²Amnon was so obsessed that he became ill and, as Tamar was a virgin, he could not do anything.

• 15. The child born without love between David and Bathsheba falls sick and dies. The king realizes that this is another sign to make him understand the gravity of his sin. God is not vindictive nor does he bear grudges. His heart is not like ours. He is “slow to anger and no one surpasses him in kindness.”

Another child is born of the same woman, now his wife; it is the future king Solomon,

whom God chooses to succeed David. In spite of his sin, God has not abandoned David.

• **13.1** Amnon’s crime and assassination appear to be a repetition of David’s sin in his own family—a thing which hurts his feelings deeply.

Such incidents were common occurrences anywhere in ancient times. Other religions of

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

⁷So David sent for Tamar and said to her, “Go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare him some food.” ⁸Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house where he was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made and baked cakes before him. ⁹But when she took the pan and set the cakes before him, he refused to eat and said, “Send everyone outside.” After they all left, ¹⁰Amnon said to Tamar, “Bring the food into the bedroom and let me eat from your hand.” Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to her brother Amnon in the bedroom. ¹¹But when she brought them to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, “Come, lie with me, my sister.”

Gen
34:7;
Dt 22:21

¹² She answered him, “No, my brother, do not force me. No such thing is done in Israel. Do not commit this foolishness.

¹³ Where will I hide my shame? And you yourself would be regarded as a foolish man by all the people. So please, talk to the king for he will not keep me from you.” ¹⁴But he refused to listen to her and, being stronger than she, forced her and lay with her.

¹⁵ Afterwards, Amnon hated her with a hatred exceeding the love he had had for her; and he said to Tamar, “Get up and leave.” ¹⁶But she answered him, “No, my brother. Sending me away is a

greater offense than what you did to me.” But Amnon refused to listen. ¹⁷He called his servant and said, “Get this woman out and bolt the door behind her.” ¹⁸(Now Tamar was wearing a long robe with sleeves like the virgin daughters of the king used to wear.) So the servant brought her out, bolting the door behind her. ¹⁹Tamar then put ashes on her head and tore the long robe she was wearing. Laying her hand on her head, she went away crying aloud.

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

Gen
38:11

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

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

1Mac
16:16

³⁰ While they were on the way, a report

that time demanded cult and sacrifice; they did not talk, or scarcely talked, of moral uprightness. On the contrary, from the beginning of the Bible one sees how Yahweh demands mo-

ral behavior and justice on the part of his people. The people of the Bible are not always better than other peoples who do not know God, but they know better what sin is.

reached David, "Absalom has slain all the king's sons, leaving no one alive."

³¹ At this, the king tore his garments and lay on the ground; and all his servants around him also tore their garments.

³² But Jonadab, son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "Don't imagine that they have killed all your sons. Only Amnon is dead, for Absalom had decided to kill him from the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. ³³ So let not my lord the king believe that all his sons are dead: Amnon alone is dead."

³⁴ Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Then the young watchman saw many people coming from the Horonaim road by the side of the mountain. ³⁵ Jonadab said to the king, "Was it not true what I said to you? It is your sons who are coming."

³⁶ As soon as he had spoken, the king's sons came, crying aloud; the king, too, and all his servants wept bitterly.

³⁷⁻³⁸ As for Absalom, he fled to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur, where he remained for three years. ³⁹ All this time king David mourned for his son. And when he had recovered from the death of Amnon he began to yearn for Absalom.

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

⁴ When the woman of Tekoa appeared before the king, she fell on her face in homage and said, "Help me, O king!"

⁵ The king asked her, "What is wrong?" She answered, "Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶ I, your handmaid, had two sons who quarreled with one another in the field. Since there was no one to part them, one struck the other and killed him. ⁷ Now the entire family demand that I give up the one who struck his brother. And they say: 'We will kill him and avenge his brother's death.' So they want to quench my remaining hope; with this they will leave my husband without name or posterity on the earth."

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

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

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

²¹ Then the king told Joab, "Well, I shall do it. Go, fetch the young man Absalom." ²² Joab fell on his face to the ground in homage and blessed the king, saying, "Today I know that you look kind-

1S 25:24

1S 29:9

Gen
37:35

2K 4:1

Gen 4:8

ly on me, my lord the king, because you have granted this my request.”²³ Joab went on his way to Geshur to fetch Absalom and bring him to Jerusalem.²⁴ The king, however, told him, “Let him stay in his own house for I shall not receive him.” So Absalom stayed in his own house and was not received by the king.

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

²⁶When he cut his hair (every year he cut his hair when it became too heavy for him), he weighed it, and it weighed two hundred shekels by the king’s weight.

²⁷There were born to Absalom three sons and a daughter named Tamar, a beautiful woman.

²⁸For two years Absalom stayed in Jerusalem but the king did not receive him.²⁹ Absalom called for Joab to send him to the king, but Joab refused to see him. He called for him a second time but Joab would not come.³⁰ So Absalom said to his servants, “You know Joab’s field which is next to mine, planted with barley. Go set it on fire.” And so they did. Then the servants of Joab came to him to tell him, “The servants of Absalom set your field on fire.”³¹ Then Joab went to Absalom’s house and asked him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?”

³²Absalom replied, “Come over, for I want to send you to the king with this message, ‘Why did you let me return from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there yet.’ Now I want to be received by the king. If I am guilty, let him send me to death!”³³ Joab went to the king and brought him the message. So the king called for Absalom who appeared before the king, bowing low with his face to the ground. And the king embraced Absalom.

15¹After this, Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, as well as fifty men to run before him.² Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the gateway. Whenever a man with a grievance came before the king’s tribunal, Absalom would call to him and say, “From which city are you?” Should he say, “Your servant is from such and such a tribe in Israel,”³ Absalom would tell him, “Your cause is good and just but there is no one to hear you on behalf of the king.”

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

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

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

Absalom’s rebellion

• ¹⁰Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel with this instruction, “As soon as you hear the trumpet sound, proclaim: ‘Absalom is king in Hebron!’”

¹¹Two hundred men from Jerusalem had left with Absalom as invited guests. But nothing of his purpose dawned on them.¹² While Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent

Gen
28:20

16:23

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

The sword shall never be far from your house. Nathan has announced the conse-

quence of David’s adultery. In the trial, what emerges is only the humble loyalty of David who, without complaint, accepts Yahweh’s will.

The way David bears with the curses of Shimei astonishes us. How much more puzzling it was to people of those times who could only understand revenge. David knows that God will never leave him; his present misfortune is like an invitation from Yahweh to have greater trust. In order to attract Yahweh’s

for Ahitophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. Mean-
time, the conspiracy grew strong and
the number of people with Absalom
kept increasing.

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

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

¹⁹Then the king said to the com-
mander, Ittai, the Gittite, "Why are
you also coming with us? Go back
and stay with your king, for you are
a foreigner, an exile from your home.
²⁰Are you setting out when you have
just arrived? Shall I make you wan-
der about with us? Go back, take
your brothers with you and may Yah-
weh show you kindness and faithful-
ness. ²¹Ittai, however, answered the
king, "As Yahweh lives, and as my
lord the king lives, wherever my lord

the king shall be, whether in life or in
death, there also will your servant
be."

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

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

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

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

1K 2:37;
Jn 18:1

1S 27

1S 3:18

Ru 1:16;
Lk 9:57

mercy, he refuses to defend himself or to take
revenge.

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

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

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

15:30 – the Mount of Olives.

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

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

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

Humiliation for David

Ps 33:10

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

³²When David reached the summit where God is worshiped, Hushai the Archite met him with his coat torn and dust strewn on his head. ³³David said to him, "If you come with me, you will be a burden to me. ³⁴It would be better for you to return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king! Just as I have been your father's servant in the past, I will now be your servant.' In that way you will be useful to me in thwarting the counsel of Ahitophel. ³⁵The priests Zadok and Abiathar are there to help you. Report whatever you hear from the king's house. ³⁶Both their sons are there, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son, and you shall report to me through them everything you hear." ³⁷So David's friend Hushai arrived in the city just as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

1S 25:18

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

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

19:30

⁵When king David came to Bahurim, a man from the clan of Saul's family named Shimei, son of Gera, came out cursing him. ⁶He threw stones at David and his officers although the king's men and warriors flanked the king on the right and left.

⁷Shimei said as he cursed, "Go away! Go away! You bloodthirsty good-for-nothing! ⁸Yahweh has brought down on your head all the blood of the family of Saul. You became king in his place, but God has now placed the kingdom in the hands of your son Absalom. Ruin has come upon you because you are a bloodthirsty man."

1S 17:46

⁹Then Abishai, son of Zeruiah, said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go and cut his head off." ¹⁰But the king said, "Why should I listen to you, sons of Zeruiah? If Yahweh has ordered him to curse me, who shall ask him why he acts like this?"

19:23

¹¹Then David said to Abishai and his officers, "If my own son wants to kill me, how much more this Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse me if Yahweh has ordered him to do so. ¹²Perhaps Yahweh will look on my affliction and turn to good things the curses heaped on me today." ¹³So David and his men went their way while Shimei, following on the hillside opposite him, continued to curse as he threw stones and flung dust at him. ¹⁴The king, together with his men, arrived exhausted at the Jordan where he refreshed himself.

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

²⁰Then Absalom said to Ahitophel, "Have a meeting to decide what we shall do." ²¹Ahitophel said to Absalom, "Go and be with the concubines your father has left to keep his house. When the Is-

raelites hear that you have made yourself odious to your father, all those of your party will be strengthened.”²² So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the terrace and Absalom went in to his father’s concubines in the sight of the Israelites.²³ In those days, Ahitophel’s counsel was deemed as sound as the oracle of God, and so it was deemed by both David and Absalom.

17¹ Ahitophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men that I may set out and pursue David tonight.²¹ I will attack him while he is tired and discouraged and throw him into a panic. All those who are with him will flee so I will strike down only the king.³ Then I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. Seek the death of only one man and then all the people will be unharmed.”⁴ The advice pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

⁵ Then Absalom said, “Call in Hushai the Archite to hear what he has to say.”⁶ When Hushai came before Absalom, Absalom asked him, “Ahitophel has given this advice. Shall we follow it? If not, you speak.”⁷ So Hushai said to Absalom, “This time, Ahitophel’s advice is not good.⁸ You know that your father and his men are warriors. When enraged, they are like a bear robbed of her cubs in the field. Besides, your father is expert enough in war not to spend the night with his men.⁹ Right now he is hiding in one of the pits or in some other place. If some of your men fall in the first attack, whoever hears of it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the men who follow Absalom.’¹⁰ Then even the valiant man whose heart is like that of a lion will utterly melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a warrior, as are the men who are with him.¹¹ My advice is for you to gather all the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, as many as the sands of the sea, and go to battle in person.¹² Then we shall find him wherever he is and fall on him as the dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive.¹³ If he withdraws into a city, all Israel will bring ropes and drag it into the valley until not even a pebble of it remains.”¹⁴ Absalom and all the Israelites said, “The counsel of Hushai the

Archite is better than the counsel of Ahitophel.” For Yahweh had decreed that the good counsel of Ahitophel be defeated, so that he might bring evil upon Absalom.

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

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

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

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

²⁴ David had already entered Mahanaim when Absalom crossed over the Jordan with all the Israelites.²⁵ Absalom had put Amasa in charge of the army instead of Joab. Amasa was the son of Ithra, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail the daughter of Isai, sister of Zeruiah, the mother of Joab.²⁶ The Israelites and Absalom pitched camp in the land of Gilead.

²⁷When David arrived at Mahanaim, Shobi the son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Machir the son of Ammiel from Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, ²⁸brought beds, basins, earthen vessels, wheat, barley, meal, roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep and cheese from the herd. All this was for David and the people with him to eat ²⁹for they said, “The people are hungry, weary and thirsty in the desert.”

18 ¹David then mustered the men who were with him and set over them commanders of a thousand men and commanders of a hundred men. He sent forth the army, of which one third was under the command of Joab; ²one third, under the command of Abishai, son of Zeruah, Joab’s brother, and one third, under the command of Ittai, the Gittite. Then the king said to the men, “I myself will go out with you.” ³But the men replied, “You shall not go out. They could not care less if we flee or if half of us die. But you are worth ten thousand of us and it is better if you are able to send us assistance from the city.” ⁴So the king said to them, “I will do whatever seems best to you.” Then the king stood by the side of the gate while the entire army marched out by hundreds and by thousands. ⁵The king ordered Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Don’t hurt the young man Absalom for my sake.” All the army heard the king giving orders to all the commanders concerning Absalom.

Defeat and death of Absalom

- ⁶The army of David went out into the field against Israel. The battle was fought in the forest of Ephraim ⁷where the Israelites were defeated by the men of David. The slaughter there on that day was great, numbering twenty thousand

men. ⁸The battle spread over the entire country and more people perished in the ravines of the forest than were killed by the sword that day.

⁹Absalom was riding a mule and happened to meet the guards of David. As the mule passed under the thick branches of a big oak tree, his head was caught in the oak tree and he was left hanging between heaven and earth, while the mule he was riding went its way. ¹⁰Someone reported to Joab, “I saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree.” ¹¹Joab said to the man who reported this, “What! You saw him but did not strike him at once? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt.” ¹²But the man answered Joab, “Even if I felt in my hand the weight of a thousand pieces of silver, I would not raise my hand against the king’s son, for we heard the king command you, Abishai and Ittai: ‘For my sake, spare the young man Absalom.’” ¹³If I had not done my duty, the king would come to know about it and you yourself would have kept your distance.” ¹⁴Joab replied, “I will not waste time talking with you.” So he took three spears in his hand and thrust them into Absalom’s heart while he was still alive in the oak tree. ¹⁵Then ten guards, Joab’s armor-bearers, surrounded Absalom and struck him down.

¹⁶Joab blew the trumpet and the troops stopped pursuing the Israelites as Joab restrained them. ¹⁷They then took Absalom, threw him into a deep pit in the forest and covered him with a great heap of

13:29

21:17

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

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

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

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

stones. In the meantime all the Israelites fled, each one to his own home.

1S 15:12;
2S 14:16;
14:27

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

¹⁹Then Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, said, "Let me run and report to the king that Yahweh has delivered him from the power of his enemies." ²⁰But Joab said to him, "Today you would not be a bearer of good news; another day you will run, but today there is no good news because the king's son is dead." ²¹Joab then said to a Cushite, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed before Joab and ran. ²²But Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, again said to Joab, "Come what may, let me also run behind the Cushite." Joab asked, "Why must you run, my son, seeing that you will have no reward for this news?" ²³Ahimaaz insisted, "It does not matter, I will run." So Joab allowed him to go, and Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain, outrunning the Cushite.

David is told of Absalom's death

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

2K 9:20

²⁸Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well." Bowing before the king with his face to the ground, he said, "Blessed be Yahweh your God who has delivered up the men who

rebelled against my lord the king!"

²⁹The king asked him, "How is the young Absalom?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult but did not know what it was all about." ³⁰So the king said, "Move away and stand here." He moved aside and stayed there.

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

19 ¹The king was greatly disturbed and, going up to the room over the gate, he wept and said, "O, my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

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

⁶Joab then came to the king's house and said, "You have today put to shame all your servants who saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, and of your wives and concubines. ⁷Yes, you love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that your commanders and guards mean nothing to you. I know

that if Absalom were alive today and all of us dead, you would be pleased. ⁸You must now show yourself and say a good word to your guards for, I swear by Yahweh, if you do not, no one will stay with you tonight, and this will be worse than all the evil that has happened to you from your youth to the present day.”

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

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

David returns to Jerusalem

¹²King David heard what the Israelites said. So he sent this message to the priests Zadok and Abiathar, “Say to the elders of Judah: ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house? ¹³You are relatives, of my own race. Why should you be the last to bring back the king?’ ¹⁴Say also to Amasa, ‘Are you not of my own family? I swear before God that I will make you general of my army in place of Joab.’”

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

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

Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was about to cross the Jordan, ²⁰and said to him, “Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember the

wrong your servant did when my lord the king left Jerusalem. Let not the king remember this, ²¹for I confess that I have sinned; and therefore I have come today, the first from Joseph’s tribes to welcome my lord the king.”

²²Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered, “Shall not Shimei be put to death for having cursed Yahweh’s anointed?”

²³But David said, “Far be it from me to listen to you, you sons of Zeruiah! This is bad advice; no one shall be put to death in Israel today. Do I not know that I am ruling again over Israel this day?” ²⁴So the king assured Shimei with an oath, “You shall not die.”

²⁵Mepibaal, the son of Saul, came down from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not washed his feet, or trimmed his beard, or cleaned his clothes since the king departed. ²⁶When he arrived to meet the king, the king said to him, “Why did you not go with me, Mepibaal?” ²⁷He answered, “My lord, O king! My steward deceived me. For I said to him, ‘Saddle an ass for me so that I may ride on it and go with the king,’ since I am lame. ²⁸But he has slandered me to my lord the king. And yet my lord the king is like an angel of God. Do, therefore, what seems good to you. ²⁹My father’s family was doomed to die before my lord the king, but you counted your servant among those who eat at your table. What further right do I have to complain to the king?” ³⁰The king said to him, “Why talk more? I have decided—you and Ziba shall divide the land.” ³¹Mepibaal answered, “Oh, let him take it all since my lord the king has come home safely.”

³²Now, Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim and he crossed the Jordan with him; then he said goodbye to him. ³³Barzillai was a very old man of eighty, who, being a very wealthy man, had provided the king with food when he remained in Mahanaim. ³⁴The king said to Barzillai, “Come, join me and stay with me; I will take care of you in Jerusalem.” ³⁵But Barzillai said to the king, “How many more years will I live that I should go up with the king to Jerusalem? ³⁶Today, I am eighty years old and can discern neither what is pleasant nor what is not. Can your servant still taste what he eats or drinks; or listen to the voice of men and women singing?

16:10;
1S 11:13

1S 20:15

1K 2:7

Ecl 2:8

Why then should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? ³⁷Your servant will accompany the king just a little past the Jordan. Why should the king reward me for this? ³⁸Please allow me to return to my own city where I may die and be buried near the graves of my father and mother. But let this my son Kimham, your servant, continue with my lord the king. You can do for him whatever it may please you. ³⁹The king answered, "Kimham will come with me and I will give him whatever seems fit to you. Besides, I will do for you whatever you desire of me." ⁴⁰As all the people had crossed the Jordan, the king also crossed. Then the king embraced and blessed Barzillai who then returned to his own home.

• ⁴¹The king went on to Gilgal accompanied by Kimham, together with the men of Judah and some Israelites. ⁴²Then the Israelites came to the king and asked, "Why have our brothers, the men of Judah, grabbed you and brought the king and his entire family over the Jordan together with all your soldiers?" ⁴³The men of Judah answered the Israelites, "Because the king is our immediate relative. But why does this rouse your anger? Have we fed ourselves at the king's expense or received any gift from him?" ⁴⁴But the Israelites answered the men of Judah, "We have more right to the king than you because we are ten tribes. Why did you disregard us? Were we not the first to have the king brought back?" But the men of Judah argued more vehemently than the Israelites.

Sheba rebels against David

1K 12:16

20 ¹There happened to be there a base fellow named Sheba, son of Bichri, a Benjaminite, who sounded the

trumpet and said, "We have nothing to do with David. What can we expect from the son of Jesse? Go back, O Israelites, each man to his home!" ²So all the Israelites left David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. The men of Judah, however, steadfastly followed their king from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

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

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

Then Joab and Abishai his brother pursued Sheba, son of Bichri. ¹¹Meanwhile, one of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Let him who is for Joab and stands by David follow Joab." ¹²Amasa then lay bathed in his blood,

16:21

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

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

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

lying on the highway. When the man saw the people stopping to look, he carried Amasa from the highway into the field and covered him with a garment. ¹³When he was removed from the highway, the people followed Joab in pursuit of Sheba, son of Bichri.

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

¹⁶Then a wise woman called out from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here that I may speak to him." ¹⁷As Joab approached, the woman asked, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am."

¹⁸The woman continued, "They used to say in olden days to settle a matter, 'Seek advice at Abel if you want to know the ancient customs ¹⁹of the faithful of Israel.' And you want to destroy a city which is a mother city in Israel. Why do you want to destroy the heritage of Yahweh?" ²⁰Joab answered, "By no means do I want to destroy it! ²¹But a man from the hill country of Ephraim, named Sheba, son of Bichri, has rebelled against king David. Only surrender him and I will withdraw from the city." So the woman said to Joab, "We shall throw his head over the wall to you." ²²The woman then gathered the inhabitants and spoke to them so persuasively that they beheaded Sheba, son of Bichri, and threw his head out to Joab who then sounded the trumpet for the people to depart from the city. Then everyone went home and Joab himself returned to the king in Jerusalem.

²³Joab was in command of all the army of Israel while Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in command of the Chere-

thites and the Pelethites. ²⁴Adoram was in charge of the forced labor, and Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, was the recorder. Sheva was secretary, ²⁵and Zadok and Abiathar were priests, ²⁶and, Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

The great famine

21 ¹There was famine during the reign of David for three consecutive years and David consulted Yahweh. The answer was, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and his family because he put the Gibeonites to death."

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

⁷David spared Mepibaal, son of Jonathan, Saul's son, because of the oath David and Jonathan took before Yahweh. ⁸But he took the two sons of Rizpah, daughter of Aiah whom she bore to Saul—Armoni and Mepibaal; and the five sons of Merab, daughter of Saul, whom she bore to Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite. ⁹He delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites who hanged

Dt 7:22

1S 20:15

8:16-18

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

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

God. This episode also confirms that seeking a response from God can lead to worse deviations: "those responsible for the famine are the descendants of Saul because he killed the Gibeonites..."

A disaster occurs and the people say it is God's punishment and, if it is a punishment, they must find the one responsible. Possibly David himself shares the common belief; ex-

them on the mountain of Yahweh where all seven perished together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest.

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

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

¹⁸After this, there was more fighting with the Philistines at Gob; there Sibbecai the Hushathite, slew Saph, one of the descendants of the giants. ¹⁹There was another battle with the Philistines at Gob where Elhanan, son of Jaareoregim, the Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was the size of a weaver's beam. ²⁰In another encounter at Gath, there was a huge man with six

fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, numbering twenty-four in all. He too was a descendant of the giants. ²¹When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimei, David's brother, slew him. ²²All four descendants of the giants fell by the hand of David and his guards.

13:3;
1S 17:10

David's song of praise

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

Ps 18

*The Lord is my rock, my rampart,
my deliverer³ and my God,
the rock in whom I take refuge.*

*He is my shield, my salvation,
my stronghold and my refuge,
my Savior; you save me from violence.*

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

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

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

⁷*But I called upon the Lord in my
distress,*

*to my God I cried for help;
and from his temple he heard my voice,
my cry of grief reached his ears.*

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

⁹*From his nostrils smoke rose,
from his mouth a devouring fire
throwing off live embers.*

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

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

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

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

cept that he uses his authority to save the son of his friend, Jonathan.

We cannot say that this mentality has completely disappeared. If something goes wrong in society or in an institution, many search out

whom to sacrifice before finding out if they themselves have had a share in the fault.

• **22.1** This "cantic" of David is reproduced almost identically in the Psalms: Psalm 18.

18:3;
1K 11:36

20:4-8

1S 17:4

¹⁴ From heaven the Lord thundered;
 the voice of the Most High resounded.
¹⁵ Sending out a hail of arrows,
 he scattered them;
 flashing forth bolts of lightning,
 he routed them.
¹⁶ The beds of the seas lay uncovered
 as the foundations of the world
 were laid bare,
 at your rebuke, O Yahweh,
 at the blast from your nostril's breath.
¹⁷ Reaching down from above,
 he drew me out of the deep water.
¹⁸ Too strong for me were my enemies,
 but he rescued me from my adversaries.
¹⁹ They have launched their attack
 in an opportune day
 but the Lord has been my stay.
²⁰ In the open he has set me free.
 How great indeed is his love for me!
²¹ Yahweh rewarded me according to
 my justice,
 and according to my righteousness.
²² For I have been faithful to Yah-
 weh's way
 and I did not sin far from him.
²³ With his ordinances all before me,
 I have always followed his statutes.
²⁴ Before him I have done uprightly
 and kept myself from iniquity.
²⁵ Therefore Yahweh has given me
 recompense according to my right-
 eousness.
²⁶ To the faithful you show yourself
 faithful;
 to the blameless you show yourself
 blameless;
²⁷ to the pure you show yourself pure;
 but to the crooked you show your-
 self astute.
²⁸ For you raise up the humble
 and humiliate the arrogant.
²⁹ Yahweh, you are my lamp.
 O my God, you brighten up my
 darkness.
³⁰ Yes, with you I can crush an
 armed band,
 and by my God I can leap over a wall.
³¹ This God—his way is perfect;
 the word of the Lord is always fulfilled.
 To those who seek refuge in him, he
 is a shield.
³² There is no other God but Yahweh;
 there is no other rock but our God.
³³ This God is my stronghold
 and keeps my path unerring and safe.

³⁴ He has made my feet as swift as
 the hinds;
 he has set me secure on the heights.
³⁵ He trains my hands for war
 and my arms to bend a bow of brass.
³⁶ You have given me your shield for
 protection,
 and your help has made me great.
³⁷ You have given wide room for my
 steps,
 so that they have never faltered.
³⁸ I have pursued my enemies and
 wiped them out,
 I did not turn back till I had destroyed
 them.
³⁹ Thrusting them through,
 I did not give them time to rise
 as they fell under my feet.
⁴⁰ You have given me strength for the
 battle;
 you have subdued my adversaries
 beneath me;
⁴¹ you have put my enemies to flight
 and destroyed those who opposed me.
⁴² They cried for help, but no one came.
 They cried to the Lord;
 he did not answer them.
⁴³ I pulverized them as dust of the earth;
 like mud in the streets I trampled on
 them.
⁴⁴ You have delivered me from
 the people's assault
 and have made me head over the
 nations.
 They came to serve me—
 people I had not known.
⁴⁵ Foreigners approached me,
 cringing and fawning.
 At the sound of my voice,
 they rose to obey.
⁴⁶ Foreigners succumbed
 or locked themselves in their fortresses.
⁴⁷ Yahweh lives! Praised be my rock!
 Exalted be my savior God—
⁴⁸ the God who grants me vengeance
 and subdues the peoples for me.
⁴⁹ He brings me out from my foes;
 he exalts me above my adversaries;
 he rescues me from men of violence.
⁵⁰ For this I will extol you, Yahweh,
 among the nations;
 I will sing praise to your name.
⁵¹ You have given your king great
 victory;
 you have shown your love forever
 to your anointed, to David and to his
 descendants.

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

²“The Spirit of Yahweh speaks through me, his word is on my tongue.

³The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: when one rules justly over people, ruling in the fear of God,

⁴he dawns on them like the morning light,

like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning,

making grass sprout from the ground after the rain.

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

Will he not complete my salvation and fulfill my desire?

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

They cannot be held with one’s hand

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

and they are burned in fire.”

David’s champions

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

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

¹¹Next was Shammah, son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered to-

gether at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground planted to barley, and the men fled from the Philistines. ¹²But Shammah stood in the middle of the plot to defend it and slew the Philistines. And Yahweh worked a great victory.

¹³At about harvest time, three of the Thirty went down to David at the cave of Adullam while a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim.

¹⁴David was in the stronghold while the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem.

¹⁵David longed for water and said, “Who will give me water to drink from the well by the gate of Bethlehem!” ¹⁶At this, the three warriors broke through the Philistine camp, drew water out of the well by the gate of Bethlehem and brought it to David. But David refused to drink of it and poured it out as an offering to Yahweh. ¹⁷He said, “By no means should I do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who risked their lives?” Therefore, he refused to drink it. These were the deeds of the three warriors.

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

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

20:23

1S 17:40

11:11-41;
27:2-15

• **23.8** In dedicating this chapter to the memory of David’s “valiant men” (see also commentary on 1 S 22), the Bible gives them what they deserved. These men lived their faith and accomplished their human mission through fighting and killing their enemies—which seems to us to be very far from Gospel values. Yet David became king because of

them, their sword, their strength and their courage. Here again faith does not suppress human reality, nor the time needed for the evolution of moral standards. It was to take centuries to complete the education of God’s people and for this education to take place this people had to survive: wars were at that time the necessary condition to survive.

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

The census

21:1-5;
Num 25:3;
Jdg
2:14;
2K 13:3

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

³Joab told the king, “May Yahweh your God multiply the people a hun-

dred times and may my lord the king see this blessing. But why does my lord the king want to take a census?”

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

¹⁰But after he had the people counted, David felt remorse and said to Yahweh, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done, but now, O Yahweh, I ask you to forgive my sin for I have acted foolishly.”

¹¹The following day, before David awoke, Yahweh’s word had come to the prophet Gad, David’s seer, ¹²“Go,

21:7-17;
2S 12:13;
1S 13:13

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

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

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

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

and give David this message: I offer you three things and I will let one of them befall you according to your own choice.”¹³ So Gad went to David and asked him, “Do you want three years of famine in your land? Or do you want to be pursued for three months by your foes while you flee from them? Or do you want three days’ pestilence in your land? Now, think and decide what answer I shall give him who sent me.”

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

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

¹⁷ When David saw the angel striking the people, he spoke to Yahweh and said, “I have sinned and acted

wickedly, but these are only the sheep; what have they done? Let your hand strike me and my father’s family.”

¹⁸ Gad went to David that day and said to him, “Go, set up an altar to Yahweh on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” ¹⁹ So David left to follow Yahweh’s command made through Gad. ²⁰ When Araunah saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went forward, paid homage to the king with his face to the ground, and said, ²¹ “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David answered, “I will buy your threshing floor in order to build an altar to Yahweh so that the plague may end among the people.” ²² Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take the threshing floor and offer the sacrifice that seems good to him: here you have my oxen for the burnt offering, the threshing sledges, and the oxen’s yokes for the wood.” ²³ All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king. May Yahweh your God hear you.”

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

12:23;
2K 19:35

Ezk
34:31

21:18-28