

becomes the subject of the book as another conflict erupts between the two (1 Sam 4:1; see also later in the book: 13:2–15, 14:1–35, 14:47, 17:1–54, 23:1–5, 28:1–2, 29:1–11, 31:1–13). In the ensuing battle, the Philistines not only hand Israel a major setback at Aphek (a strategically important route from the coastal plain into the hill country) but they also do the unimaginable: they capture the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 4:11), and we learn from Jeremiah that the Philistines even destroy the sanctuary of the LORD at Shiloh (Jer 7:12). It is clear that if Israel is to have a future in the land God promised to their ancestors, something has to be done about the Philistines.

Other Nations

But the Philistines are only one part of the problem facing Israel. The Books of Judges and 1 Samuel also record pressure from the south (Moab: Judg 3:12–30 and 1 Sam 14:47; Edom: 1 Sam 14:47), the north (Hazor: Judg 4:1–4), the east (Ammon: Judg 10:17–18 and 1 Sam 14:47), and the north-east (Midian and Amalekites: Judg 6:1–3, 33, and 1 Sam 14:48, 15:1–9). In other words, the Israelites are engaged in battles on every front—in the north, east, south, and west (see Figure 8.2). Israel is caught inside a compacter with the switch turned on.

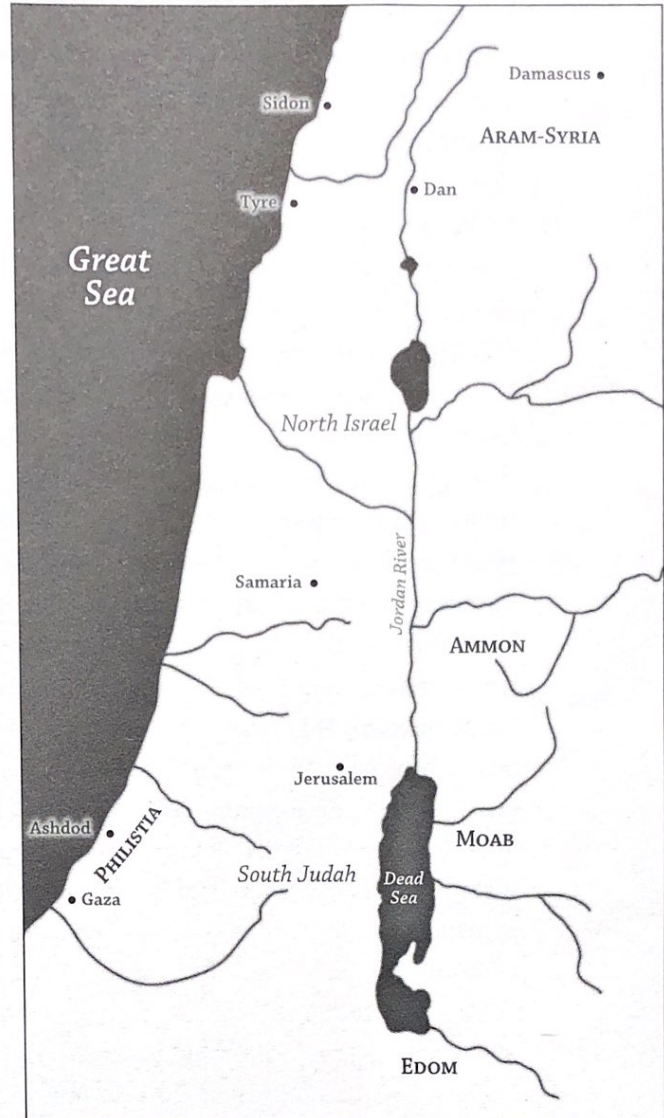


Figure 8.2. Nations Surrounding Israel and Judah

Internal Forces

The First Command and Consequences

As is often the case, even with all of the external pressures, Israel's greatest threat to her existence is from within: "We have met the enemy and he is us."¹ The Book of Judges establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that Israel refuses to keep the first and greatest commandment; instead, Israel chases after every god they find on a Facebook page for Canaanite gods. For example, prior to the rise of Jephthah, the writer observes: "They served the Baals and the Astartes, as well as the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, and the Philistines. They went away from the LORD,

¹Walt Kelly, originally published as a poster for Earth Day in 1970.

and didn't serve him" (Judg 10:6b; see also 2:11, 3:7, 6:25). If there is a god in the land that Israel is not worshipping, it is simply an oversight on Israel's part; they seem determined to worship every god, except for the LORD, who demands monogamy—a single-minded allegiance. In fact, as if there are not already enough gods to worship, some Israelites collect precious metals so they can create even more gods to worship (8:27, 17:3). And at least some Levites, who should be teaching Israel not to worship other gods, are eager to be priests for these new gods and their makers. They put their services on the market to the highest bidder. In one case, a Levite agrees to stay and be the priest for an idolatrous shrine (17:10–13) until he is given a better offer to be the priest for an entire tribe (18:18–20).

The god a person worships is not a neutral choice without consequences; a person becomes like the god he or she decides to serve. Consequently, as Israel worships and serves other gods throughout the era of the judges, the moral quality of the people goes into a steady decline—until they begin to do things they would have never imagined doing before. This moral decay is in the spotlight in the final chapters of Judges (chs. 17–21). Here we find God's people making shrines for new gods (17:3–6) and stealing gods, shrines, and priests from each other (18:18–20). Another Levite pushes his concubine out to a mob of men in Gibeah, to be raped throughout the night while he sleeps (19:22–26). The writer describes Gibeah, a city within the tribe of Benjamin, in the same terms as Sodom (Gen 19:1–11); Israel has deteriorated so much that it is difficult to tell any difference between who they have become and the awful city of Sodom.

The moral decline continues in 1 Samuel with the two sons of Eli, the high priest: Hophni and Phinehas. These brothers are best known for their corruption—stealing the best cuts of meat from sacrifices offered to the LORD (1 Sam 2:12–17) and having sex with the women who served at the tabernacle at Shiloh (2:22). Everyone can see what is going on, even their father. Eli warns his sons, but when Hophni and Phinehas refuse to listen, Eli chooses to turn a blind eye to what his sons are doing (2:22–25).

Israel's failure to keep the first commandment also leads to internal fighting and a threat from within that may cause them to destroy themselves. As early as the story of Deborah, the tribes are failing to work with one another (see Judg 5:9, 15b–17, 23), but she does not take action against those who failed to come when she called. Later, Gideon vows to return to two Israelite cities that refuse to give him aid in his chase and fight against two kings of Midian (8:4–9). When he finishes that battle, he returns with violent vengeance against Succoth and Peniel (8:13–21). Jephthah and his army went to battle against the tribe of Ephraim for their failure to come when he called them (12:1–5). As a result, "Forty-two thousand of the Ephraimites fell at that time" (12:6). Finally, at the end of the Book of Judges, the tribes attack the tribe of Benjamin because it would not give up the village of Gibeah for its crime against the Levite's concubine. By the time their bloodthirsty war comes to an end, only six hundred men from the tribe of Benjamin have escaped death (20:1–48). Now everyone suddenly becomes alarmed that they have almost destroyed an entire tribe. So naturally, the other tribes turn to even more violence to acquire wives for these men, so that the tribe of Benjamin will continue to live (21:1–24).

It is little wonder that by the end of the Book of Judges, the writer is naming the only possible solution for Israel: Israel must have a king. At that time, there is no king in Israel (Judg 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25); there is no human monarch to build a standing army to face all the external threats—and there is no human monarch to lead these people back to their one and only true King: the LORD.

The LORD's Plan for the Monarchy

Deuteronomy 17

The Book of Judges, however, is not the first to raise the issue of a monarchy in Israel. As early as Deuteronomy 17, both Moses and the LORD understood the need for the nation of Israel to eventually have a human king (a monarchy). There was simply no other form of government for nations in the ancient Near East other than a confederation of city-states (each of which had a king), or the occasional judge/military hero, which had proven to be a failure for what Israel needed to become the mighty nation God promised. Even in the promises to Abraham and Sarah, the LORD had not only stated their descendants would be a great nation (which requires some form of human government), but also said they would give birth to kings (Gen 17:6, 16).

The LORD's plan for Israel's monarchy, however, differs radically from the monarchies of all the nations around her. To begin, Israel's king was to come from among native-born Israelites; like American presidents, the king could not be foreign born (Deut 17:15). More important are the rules the LORD gives for the king and the nature of government and kingdom that would develop as a result of these rules:

Rule One: Limited Horses. First, the king must not have too many horses or send people back to Egypt to trade for horses (Deut 17:16)—a very odd restriction; *what does God have against horses?* As part of creation . . . nothing, but in view of their new purpose in ancient Near Eastern armies . . . everything. The principal use of the horse was for pulling chariots, and later, in the first millennium BCE, for mounted cavalry. In other words, the ban on “many horses” is a warning against militarism, setting a principle for Israel's king that the nation's strength must not be achieved through advanced military technology or a large standing army.

Rule Two: Limited Wives. Second, the “king must not take numerous wives” (Deut 17:17). An explicit rationale follows this command: these women will cause the king's heart to turn toward other gods—a violation of the first and greatest commandment. Another principle is also likely to be involved here: large numbers of wives do not come to a king because of romantic attraction or sexual desire. A king acquires wives as the result of political treaties made with other nations, sealed with the exchange of brides (see 1 Kgs 3:1). My country is less likely to attack your country if one of my daughters is among your wives. So once again, a principle emerges: Israel's kingdom was not to gain its strength or security through political maneuvers. Human alliances are notoriously unreliable; the LORD is the only reliable covenant partner.

Rule Three: Limited Wealth. Third, Deuteronomy forbids the king from acquiring “too much silver and gold” (17:17). The command is perfectly clear, but the principle at stake or reason for the law is not easy to discern. What could be wrong with a wealthy king or nation? It

would seem to be a good thing to have great wealth. But in view of the other limitations set for Israel's king, we need to look again. These commandments prohibit gathering and stockpiling what most kings, governments, and their people trust for national security or their well-being: military weapons, treaties and alliances with other nations, *and wealth and a strong economy*. If Israel is to have a monarchy and a united kingdom, the instructions in Deuteronomy demand that the king and nation be like no other country—before or since.

Rule Four: Trust the Lord. Israel's king is to rely on the LORD and lead the nation in trusting God. For this reason, the king must write (or have written for him) "this instruction" on a scroll, keep it with him, and read it every day so that he learns to revere the LORD (17:18–19). Israel's king is not to fall to the common path of monarchs and political leaders and trust himself to build political power. Instead, by following these instructions, Israel's king will recognize the LORD as Israel's true King and not act as if he is more important than other people in the kingdom. If Israel's earthly monarch would only do these things, the LORD promises the king will have a lasting dynasty (17:20).

Samuel and the Monarchy

Despite these plans and instructions, early in 1 Samuel there is still considerable debate about the right course for Israel's future—debate that swirls around Samuel, the man for whom these books are named. Samuel emerges from the corruption at the Shiloh sanctuary as a man who not only keeps his mother's vows for his life (to be a Nazirite; see Hannah's story in 1 Sam 1:1–2:10), but who also becomes a strong leader who fills many different roles: a faithful priest (7:9), a spiritual judge who leads Israel toward God (7:3–6), possibly a judge/military hero who leads Israel in war (7:10–12), and a judge who holds court and gives fair decisions (7:15–17). He also holds the role of prophet, a person who tells others God's message (3:4–4:1). From every perspective, including Samuel's, it appears that he is destined to become Israel's first king. As he grows older, he appoints his own sons to be judges, establishing his own dynasty of judges/kings (8:1). Everything points toward Samuel—except for one small detail: the LORD has other plans.

The conflict between what the people want, what Samuel wants, and what God wants for Israel's future comes to a breaking point at a meeting held in Ramah (1 Sam 8). Samuel has grown old and appoints his sons to take positions in Beersheba. The elders of Israel, however, point out that his sons are not like him; they are only interested in the money they get through bribes and care nothing for justice (8:3). So the elders want Samuel to appoint "a king to judge us like all other nations have" (8:5). Their rationale may not be the highest or best reason for having a king, but, in their own way, the elders are keenly aware of what the writer observed at the end of the Book of Judges: without a king, Israel has no future. They need a king to unite and lead the nation in their battles—before the Philistines and other surrounding countries pick them off, one by one.

Samuel, however, is dead set against the idea. After a lifetime of dedicated service to the tribes, he feels the harsh sting of betrayal. The LORD tells him not to take the rejection so personally; the people are not rejecting Samuel but the LORD (8:7). Even so, when the LORD tells Samuel to warn the people about what a king will do, Samuel dumps a truckload of disappointment and anger

The Message of the Old Testament

What Deuteronomy and 1 Samuel say is wonderful on paper: discontinue military build-up, forget about political treaties and alliances, stop worrying about national wealth and the economy, and, instead, write out your own copy of the law to read (assuming each new king knows how to read and write, and if not, make the time to teach him) and just trust the LORD in all matters: military, political, and economic. Then how is the king to know exactly what the LORD wants him to do? (*Did the priests just put themselves in charge of the nation?*) Or is this the idealism of a new nation—like the idealism of youth? Many a nation has trusted in their god, or even God, only to be pulverized by an enemy with cutting edge military equipment and/or massive numbers of soldiers, paid for by money pouring in from savvy alliances and shrewd profit-driven economies.

Let's be clear up front: the *message* never intended for Israel to scrap the army, nor ever make a treaty or alliance with another nation, nor become irresponsible with the national treasury—*because after all, we read the law and trust in the LORD*. We also need to be careful of equating any contemporary nation with ancient Israel and the God-given laws for her type of government: a **theocracy** (a nation directly under God's rule). No matter how often we may say that we are "one nation, under God," we are not, and have never been, like Israel was. And finally, if we are to make sense of Israel's Scripture and its meaning or message for us, we must drop our presupposition that the Old Testament is a book of hard, inflexible laws, set up so we will fail. Yes, there are laws. But most either state a principle or are the application of a principle to Israel's cultural setting. Our failure to recognize how the Hebrew Bible is embedded within a culture, just as the New Testament is embedded in a specific time and place, will forever rob Christian ears of the testimony and *message* of the Old Testament.

So, have we managed to sweep away any significance of Deuteronomy 17 for anyone other than Israel three thousand years ago? Hardly. Now we can see that these laws carry principles valid for any person or nation at any time, principles that require wisdom to see and apply anew. Let me give a couple of examples to ignite your own insight or, perhaps, vigorous discussion.

- My trust in God must come above trust in myself: my wealth (whatever my *wealth* may be) or my strength (whatever I imagine to be my *strength*).
- New technology is a wonderful thing and our tendency is to believe, perhaps even trust, in the new to save us (just as war horses changed the ancient Near East). Do we misplace our confidence?

on the people (8:11–18); and when the LORD tells Samuel to appoint a king (8:7, 22), he tells all the people to go back home. It is difficult to tell if Samuel is being stubborn and disobedient or following further unwritten directions.

The people demand a king, Samuel hates the idea, and the LORD is somewhere between the two extremes. The LORD tells Samuel to cooperate with the people's request (8:7, 22) and explains that if anyone is being rejected as king, it is him (8:7-8). But this is nothing new; Israel has been rejecting their true King since the day God brought them out of Egypt (8:7-8). Political realities lead the LORD to agree with the people. It would be wonderful if Israel would be united in the service of the King who is enthroned on the cherubim of the ark of the covenant, but the LORD is in the business of working with realities, not unrealistic expectations about the human heart (once again, see Gen 8:21). Israel will never become the great nation God intends for her to become without some form of human government. The only questions now are who will be king and how well will Samuel work with what he hates.

The Beginning of Israel's Monarchy

Saul

The answer to our first question comes quickly in the next chapter of 1 Samuel: the first king will be Saul, the handsome son of a wealthy family from the tribe of Benjamin (9:1-2). As we have already observed, the process of changing the form of government from a loose confederation of twelve tribes to a united kingdom with a centralized monarchy is no easy move. Unless Israel's first king is a political genius, a man of great faith, and has strong support from Samuel, he is bound to fail. Unfortunately, Saul does not appear to be a genius or a man of great faith, and he certainly doesn't have Samuel's support. He does, however, take the first wobbly steps for a monarch in the new, united nation of Israel.

Three stories take Saul from being no one special to the throne of a united kingdom (9:1-11:15). As you read these stories and prepare to discuss them in class, you might fill in the following chart, which will help guide your reading.

STORY	WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT SAUL'S CHARACTER?	HOW DOES SAUL SEEM TO FEEL ABOUT BECOMING THE KING?
1. A Private Anointing (9:1-10:16)		
2. A Public Selection at Mizpah (10:17-27)		
3. Saul Leads the Army to Rescue Jabesh-Gilead (11:1-15)		

Table 8.1. Saul's Rise to the Throne

In addition to what you have learned about Saul's character and his attitude about becoming king in these stories, three further observations will be helpful for unpacking the contents of the text. First, at the end of the first story, only Samuel and Saul know about the private anointing to be king, and neither man is telling anyone anything. Saul is evasive, especially when his uncle asks him directly what Samuel said to him (10:15). I wonder if his uncle could tell something was on Saul's mind or if he had changed in some way since his talk with Samuel.

Second, in the next story, God's selection of a king comes through the process of casting the holy lots, probably the Urim and Thummim, to discover the LORD's choice. These "lots" were likely a set of two small flat stones with the same mark or paint on one side of each stone. Consequently, when shaken like dice or tossed in the air like coins, the two stones would either land with both marked sides up (the answer is yes), both unmarked sides up (the answer is no), or one marked side up and the other down (meaning no answer); in this way, a priest could ask a series of yes or no questions to discern God's will. We will see the use of these "lots" frequently in the texts ahead of us. Curiously, when Saul is selected by casting lots at Mizpah, he is hiding among the baggage.

STORY	INSTRUCTIONS (IF ANY) GIVEN TO SAUL	THE SITUATION AND SAUL'S ACTIONS	WHY DOES SAUL ACT AS HE DOES?	CONSEQUENCES TO HIS ACTIONS?
1. Saul's Sacrifice (13:1–15)	(see 10:8)			
2. Saul's Hasty* Decisions (14:1–46)				
3. Saul's Battle against the Amalekites (15:1–35)				
*“Hasty” means to do something rash or without really thinking about it—or, in Saul's case, doing things that were thoughtless and foolish.				

Table 8.2. Saul's Demise

Third, at the end of the public selection, Saul went back home to Gibeah with a few “courageous men whose hearts God had touched” (10:26). Again, the formation of a national government under the king's leadership is a slow process. In fact, as the third story begins, Saul is coming in from the field where he has been plowing—hardly the image of a strong ruler (11:5). Saul may have been anointed privately by the LORD's prophet and even selected in public by the holy lots, but the only way a new monarchy will ever gain traction in Israel is for the new king to lead his people to a military victory. Saul gets that opportunity in the third story when a crisis breaks out against Jabesh-Gilead (10:28–11:4). After he has proven himself in battle, some are ready to kill those who earlier doubted the selection of Saul (10:27), but he stops them, giving credit where it belongs, “Today the LORD has brought deliverance to Israel” (11:13). Samuel then leads the

people to Gilgal to “renew the kingship”—and there “they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal” (11:12). Israel finally has her king.

Though Saul will remain king until his death at the end of 1 Samuel, the writer is anxious to tell us why Saul failed to establish his own dynasty, eventually losing that privilege to David. So, just as before, the writer uses three stories to document Saul’s downfall. To guide your reading and facilitate class discussion, once again, fill out Table 8.2 as you read the three stories (13:1–15:35).

Two additional observations will help us put the whole picture together. First, the relationship between Saul and Samuel raises a number of questions about Samuel’s behavior—especially in the first story. Saul waits seven days for Samuel, watching as his troops desert and his hopes for Israel disappear with them. Seven days and no Samuel. So Saul does what has to be done before any ancient army will go into battle: he offers the sacrifices (13:9)—and just as if Samuel has been watching from behind the bushes, no sooner does Saul offer the sacrifices than Samuel shows up and is furious at Saul for what he has done:

- Saul argues that Samuel was late; Samuel doesn’t disagree.
- Saul says the Philistines could attack at any moment; Samuel has no response.
- Saul argues that the troops were deserting; Samuel doesn’t seem to care.
- So Saul says he took control of the situation and offered the sacrifice; Samuel calls Saul “stupid” and says that his actions have cost him his dynasty (13:10–13).

Maybe Samuel is correct; maybe Saul panicked when he should have waited for the priest. But Samuel’s actions raise equal, if not more serious, objections.

- Where has Samuel been for the past seven days?
- What has been so important that Samuel waits until the last second—or later—to come to Saul?
- Does Samuel not understand how serious the situation is for the new king—and for the entire nation?

Some will argue that Saul failed to trust the LORD and should have waited for Samuel, regardless of how late the prophet may be. Others will argue the whole thing was a trap—set and sprung by the prophet-judge-priest who hated the idea of the monarchy in the first place. And if it is a trap, it works. Samuel announces, “. . . but now your rule won’t last. The LORD will search for a man following the LORD’s own heart, and the LORD will commission him as leader over God’s people, because you didn’t keep the LORD’s command” (13:14). Either way, the first story concludes with an announcement of a fast end to Saul’s dynasty; Saul will continue to reign for many years—and many chapters in 1 Samuel, but his future has already been determined: Saul is a lame-duck king.

Second, viewing all three stories, we see the saga of a king who grows more and more self-confident—and trusts the LORD less and less. In the second story, Saul is out of control with his hasty decisions: (1) He stops the priest’s inquiry of the LORD (14:16–19) and sends his troops into battle with his, but not God’s, directions. (2) He puts a curse on anyone in the Israelite army who

stops to eat anything “before evening when *I have taken revenge on my enemies*” (14:25, emphasis mine). Stupid—what else can we say? Jonathan, Saul’s son, who knows nothing of the oath, stops later in the day to eat a little honey and regains strength for the fight (14:27). Matters turn worse that evening when troops ravaged by hunger begin slaughtering and eating animals, including the blood, a major infraction of the LORD’s laws (see Gen 9:3–4 and Lev 17:10–12). Saul calls them all “traitors” and quickly builds an altar for the proper sacrifice and eating of meat (1 Sam 14:31–35); he then calls for a continuation of the battle through the night (14:36). The Philistines are on the run and Saul has a chance to score a major victory for Israel. The troops agree, but the priest Ahijah urges Saul to ask the LORD first; and when God refuses to answer (most likely one stone face-up and the other face-down) Saul realizes something has gone wrong and makes another terrible decision. He declares that whoever is to blame will be put to death—even if it is my son Jonathan. *It is Jonathan* who broke the oath and ate, and so Saul is ready to kill his own son until the troops put a stop to Saul’s madness (14:38–45). (3) Finally, in the third story, Samuel orders Saul to attack the Amalekites and put them under “the ban” (*herem*, 15:1–4). So Saul summons the troops, goes to war, and acts as if he had not heard Samuel’s instructions at all; Saul spares the king, along with all the best sheep, cattle, calves, lambs, and anything of value; the only things they completely destroy are things that are worthless (15:5–9).

That night, the LORD’s word came to Samuel: “I regret making Saul king because he has turned away from following me and hasn’t done what I said” (15:11). Samuel reacts in anger and cries out to the LORD all night (15:11b NRSV). It’s not hard to imagine why he is angry and what he might have to say to the LORD that night. *I told you so* is probably near the top of the list. The next day Saul is at Carmel setting up *a monument to himself* (15:12)—not a good decision—when an angry Samuel finds him to tell him he is finished:

So because you have rejected the command of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king. (15:23 NLT)

Saul has changed from a man uncertain of himself and unsure that he even wants to be king, to a man who no longer trusts the LORD, but himself (Genesis 3 all over again). So, it’s over. Saul will continue as king for years to come, but his reign is finished—he is on his way out.

David

Like Saul’s rise to the throne, the writer brings David onto the stage of Israelite politics in three stories that are difficult to piece together (if we are even supposed to try; use Table 8.3 to make notes about David’s rise and the difficulties you see).

Story one. The first story captures something of the political climate as the LORD commands a sulking Samuel to get up and go anoint a new king, a rather hazardous task since Saul still holds that position and most likely blames Samuel for at least some of his problems (16:1–2). So the LORD provides Samuel with a cover story about a **peace offering** and dinner party with part of the meat from the sacrifice. Nonetheless, when the city elders (leaders) spot Samuel coming, they go out to meet Samuel “shaking with fear” and ask if he comes in peace (16:4). The nation

appears to be torn between Saul and Samuel—and supporting the wrong man might prove deadly. Samuel assures them of his peaceful intentions and invites them to the sacrifice dinner—the barbecue—later that evening; he also invites a man named Jesse and all his sons.

As guests arrive at the dinner that evening, Samuel watches the sons of Jesse to see who the LORD will point out as the next king. He sees the firstborn Eliab and thinks he must be the one, but the LORD speaks to Samuel:

Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven't selected him. God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart. (16:7)

So Jesse presents one son after another to Samuel, and one after the other is not selected (perhaps using the Urim and Thummim again). Finally, Jesse has presented all seven sons that have come with him, and the LORD has passed on all seven. So Samuel asks if there is not another son and discovers there is: the youngest son, whom Jesse considered unimportant and left behind to tend the sheep. Dinner is put on hold until this young man arrives (16:8–11), and when David does arrive, the LORD tells Samuel he is the one. Samuel takes the oil and anoints him, presumably in front of his brothers and the other dinner guests (16:13). But the writer doesn't tell us whether or not the brothers, other guests, or even David recognize the significance of the anointing. Maybe Samuel tells David secretly, as he did with Saul. But we are left with this and other questions about how David is to become king, as Samuel returns home to Ramah (16:13b). Ironically, however, despite what the LORD told Samuel about looking at the heart and not externals, David is good-looking, with a reddish-brown complexion and beautiful eyes.

STORY	HOW DAVID RISES TO THE THRONE (OR RISES IN SAUL'S COURT)	POINT(S) OF TENSION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OR OTHER STORIES
1. Anointed by Samuel (16:1–13)		
2. Entry into Saul's Court (16:14–23)		
3. Faces Goliath (17:1–58)		

Table 8.3. David's Rise

Story Two. Another feature of David's life brings him into Saul's presence in the second story: he wins "Israel's Got Talent!" by playing a small harp (a lyre). Before we get to this story, however, we need to deal with two technical issues that come into play. In the prior story, after David was anointed, "the LORD's spirit came over David" (16:13). Now we learn that "the LORD's spirit had departed from Saul" and instead, the LORD sent "an evil spirit" to torment him (16:14). Two issues are on the table:

1. Who or what is the Lord's spirit? Reading through Christian (or New Testament) glasses, it is easy to conclude the spirit is the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity. The Common English Bible, however, is correct not to suggest such an idea by not capitalizing the word "spirit," because from the perspective of the writer and original audience, such a meaning would be a foreign idea. In the Book of Judges, the "LORD's spirit" came upon some of the judges and denoted the presence or power of the LORD working through the judge, perhaps inspiring courage or strength (see Judg 3:10; 4:12–16, 34; 11:29; 13:25). For example, in Judges 14, "the LORD's spirit rushed over" Samson and he was able to kill a lion with his bare hands (14:6). A similar episode occurs later in chapter 14 when the "LORD's spirit" rushes over Samson and he kills thirty Philistines in the town of Ashkelon (14:19). In 1 Samuel, the same concept continues when the LORD's spirit comes over Saul when he hears about the crisis in Jabesh-Gilead and "he burned with anger" (1 Sam 11:6–7). Consequently, the evidence from the surrounding context does not suggest that "spirit" denotes the Holy Spirit, but the special presence of the LORD that gives supernatural strength or courage.

2. What is the "evil spirit" the Lord sent? The "evil spirit from God" is not a demon, but the result of an unfortunate translation. The Hebrew term behind "evil" (*ra*) has a wide range of meaning, most often conveying such ideas as bad, degenerate, harmful, or even vicious. The term may denote moral evil, but more often lacks any moral sense or judgment. So, instead of God's spirit to help and encourage Saul, God sends "a spirit" that torments Saul; and whatever it is, David can play the lyre for Saul and "Saul would relax and feel better" so the harmful or painful spirit would "leave him alone" (16:23). If the "evil spirit" were a demon, it is unlikely that soothing music would be helpful; instead, the "punishing spirit" (my translation) causes physical pain, just as the "spirit of God" enables great strength.

Back to the second story. Once Saul begins to suffer from the "punishing spirit" he asks his men to find iTunes, Pandora, or Spotify and, since all are a few thousand years in the future, they find the next best thing: a young David, who plays the lyre. Oddly, however, Saul's men describe David as "a strong man and heroic, a warrior who speaks well and is good-looking too. The LORD is with him" (1 Sam 16:18). So, David enters Saul's service and Saul likes David; and in time, David becomes his armor bearer (1 Sam 16:21). Once again, how these stories fit together is not an easy puzzle to solve.

Story Three. The third story of David's rise is the best known and perhaps the least understood. Saul is with his troops at war against the Philistines, with the battle developing in ancient

Near Eastern style. Each day a hulk of a man named Goliath, somewhere over six feet tall² and as strong as any NFL lineman, would put on all his armor and step out into the valley to talk smack and challenge Israel to send out their own hulk for hand-to-hand combat. Goliath represents one of three types of military troops in ancient Near Eastern armies—(1) the heavily armored men prepared for hand-to-hand combat; (2) the troops of chariots and cavalry; and (3) the light infantry who were projectile warriors: archers, slingers, and javelin hurlers.³

It is at this point David enters the picture, having been sent from home to bring food to his brothers in the army and check on their condition (17:16–19). He arrives just in time to see the big daily show with Goliath (17:20–24) and to hear the rumor that the king has promised his daughter in marriage to any man who will face Goliath (17:25–27). A terrific prize, of course, provided the man escapes with his head still on his shoulders, instead of at the end of Goliath's spear. David, however, seems oblivious to the danger and keeps asking one man after another about the reward—and keeps asking why everyone is letting “that uncircumcised Philistine” insult the army of the living God? His presence and questions finally reach the ears of his older brother Eliab, who reacts in anger. He questions David's motives for coming to the front lines and charges him with arrogance (17:28). In Eliab's defense, we must admit that Jesse sent David to go find his brothers and deliver supplies, a task David seems to have forgotten about in all his excitement; but in David's defense, Eliab is his older brother, and we don't know what Eliab knows about the earlier anointing or how he feels about being passed over in favor of his little brother.

Eventually, David's questions also reach Saul, who sends for him (17:31). David confidently tells Saul he will go fight Goliath, to which Saul points out the obvious: David couldn't last a single round of hand-to-hand combat against the Philistine. He is just a boy and Goliath is a grown man. Goliath wears the armor of a Sherman tank; David can't even walk across the room with all of Saul's armor on (17:38–39). But Saul doesn't understand, nor do we—yet. David has no intentions of playing by the rules of the game—not now, not ever; he is not heavy infantry, but a sharp shooter. So, instead of coming out dressed in heavy armor to engage in hand-to-hand combat, David goes out as himself (with a loaded gun). He is Indiana Jones in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when a large black-robed man appears with terrifying sword in hand, swinging it back and forth and shouting his battle cry. The people around step back in fear, while Indiana takes out his pistol and casually shoots the man dead.

For the Philistine Goliath, the fight was over before it ever began. First, as David points out in the pre-fight smack talk, the battle is not between two men—or even a man and a boy—but between Yahweh of the angelic armies and a man in Philistine battle armor who has insulted Yahweh (17:41–44). Now Yahweh has a point to prove about who holds power and who owns the war (17:45–47). Goliath is done. Second, while the Philistine is sneering at David and complaining about Israel sending out a boy to fight a man's battle (17:41–44), the sharp shooter is lining up

²Some texts put Goliath at over nine feet tall; but older, more reliable texts bring Goliath down to a more reasonable, though still formidable size, at just over six feet tall.

³See Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 11.

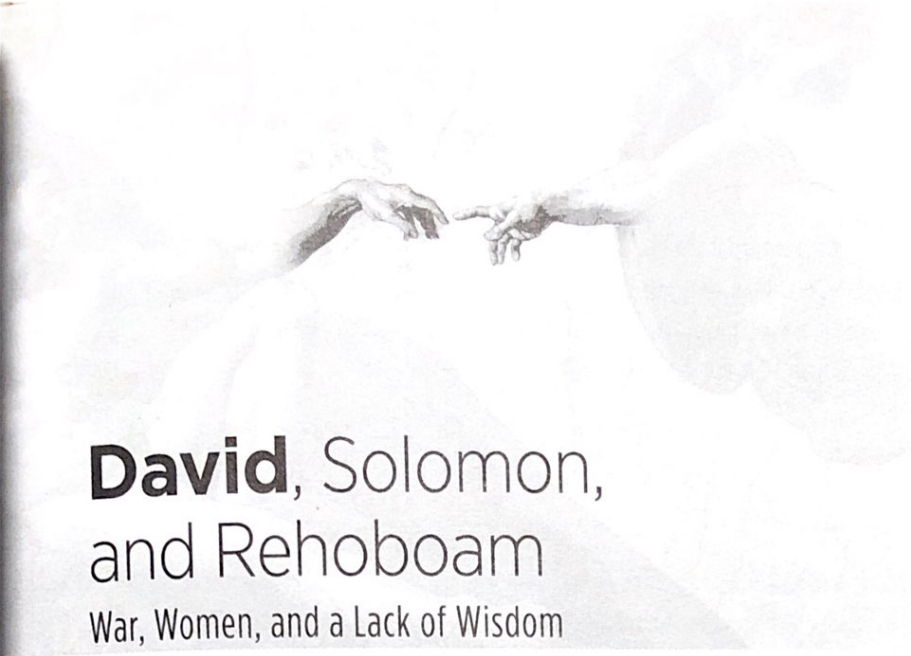
an easy kill shot. For an ace slinger, the shot is a no brainer—at least until the stone sunk into Goliath's skull (17:49). The hulk falls face first, and David uses Goliath's own sword to relieve him of his head (17:50–51). Goliath didn't count on a sharp shooter in what was supposed to be hand-to-hand combat. And so, all of our pep rally speeches about facing and defeating the mighty Goliath are forever ruined by a careful reading of the text in its ancient context. I would offer my apologies, but I would be insincere; this reading is a good example of what time travel into ancient Israel's world offers us.

Conclusion

As a result of David's heroic actions, strangely, he is introduced to Saul as if they have never met (17:55–58); and in what must be a summary of things to come, we learn that David becomes best friends with Saul's son Jonathan who, at some point in their friendship, recognizes that David will be the next king. He gives David the things that represent his own claim to the throne: armor, sword, bow, and belt (18:1–4). We also learn that at some future point Saul will put David in charge of his army (18:5). But for the present, back in the days following David's unconventional conquest of Goliath, a new song makes its way up the hit charts in the newly united Israel:

Saul has killed his thousands,
but David has killed his tens of thousands! (18:7)

The young women are singing, dancing, and crying out for their hero: David—not Saul. Kings never like being upstaged, or having someone's approval ratings higher than their own. The spirit of God may have left Saul, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand what is happening between David and Saul. Saul knows exactly what all this means for his reign and his dynasty: David is the man who must be watched at all times, and if possible, be removed from the picture (18:8–9). For better or worse, David has soared into the public spotlight. His life will never be the same.

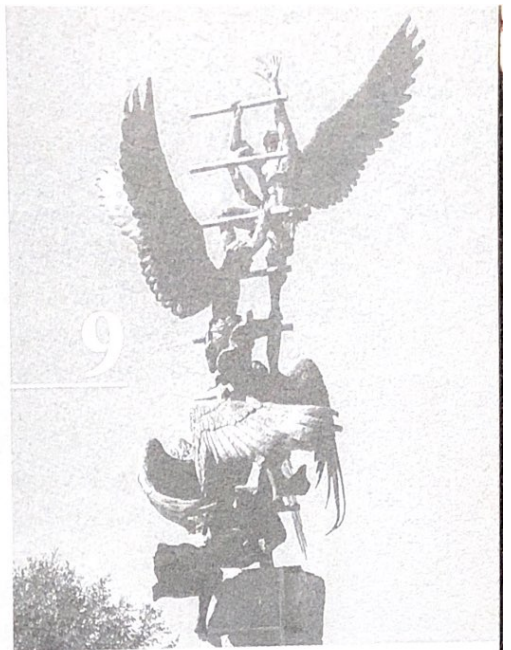


David, Solomon, and Rehoboam

War, Women, and a Lack of Wisdom

By every measurement, David is the most celebrated king in Israel. More text is devoted to David than any other person in the Old Testament. He comes onto the scene in 1 Samuel 16 and shares the spotlight with a fading King Saul until Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31 (sixteen chapters). David is the leading man in all of 2 Samuel (twenty-four chapters), and his final days and death are recorded in 1 Kings 1–2 (two chapters). In addition, just as the gospels in the New Testament retell the story of Jesus for their own purposes, 1 Chronicles retells the story of David for its own purposes (1 Chron 11–29, another nineteen chapters). Together, the **Deuteronomistic History (DH)** and Chronicles devote sixty-one chapters to David, 105 pages in my Bible, which is 6.7 percent of the Old Testament.

More significantly, David is celebrated by words of high praise. Before he is anointed to be king, Samuel says in reference to David, “The LORD will search for a man following the LORD’s own heart, and the LORD will commission him as leader over God’s people” (1 Sam 13:14). After his death, Solomon refers to David in positive terms as he prays to the LORD: “You showed so much kindness to your servant my father David when he walked before you in truth, righteousness, and with a heart true to you” (1 Kgs 3:6). And even God speaks highly of David as he tells Solomon, “As for you, if you walk before me just as your father David did, with complete dedication and honesty . . . then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, just as I promised your father David, ‘You will never fail to have a successor on the throne of



READING ASSIGNMENTS

1 SAMUEL 18–31

2 SAMUEL 1–12, 22–24

1 KINGS 1–12

KEY TERMS

Census: either counting the number of people or determining the number of men available to fight

Chronicler’s History (CH): the books of 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah

Dynasty: a succession of kings from a single family, from father to son or to the son’s heir

Puppet King: a weak king from a dynasty set in place by a more powerful person who is not of the dynasty (not qualified to be king), but who controls the king

Succession Narrative: 2 Samuel 11:1–1 Kings 2:11, a story about who will become the next king in David’s dynasty

Israel” (1 Kgs 9:4–5). Finally, in the New Testament, Paul refers to David as he preaches, “. . . he raised up David to be their king. God testified concerning him, ‘I have *found* David, Jesse’s son, a man who shares my desires. Whatever my will is, he will do’” (Acts 13:22, emphasis in original).¹

So it is little surprise that David becomes the example for the good kings who follow. Introductions to these kings sometimes include a reference to David.

Asa became king of Judah. He ruled in Jerusalem for forty-one years. . . . Asa did the right things in the LORD’s eyes, just like his father David. (1 Kgs 15:9–11, the term father often means “ancestor”)

Amaziah, the son of Judah’s King Josiah, became king in the second year of Israel’s King Joash. . . . He did what was right in the LORD’s eyes, but not as well as his ancestor King David. He did everything his father Jehoash did. (2 Kgs 14:1, 3; see also 18:1–3 and 22:1–2)

Other kings might be described to be unlike David (the first example below); but more often, if they are wicked they are allied with a different, unrighteous king (see the second example).

Abijam became king of Judah. . . . Abijam followed all the sinful ways of his father before him. He didn’t follow the LORD his God with all his heart like his ancestor David. (1 Kgs 15:1, 3)

Ahaziah, the son of Judah’s King Jehoram, became king. . . . Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became king, and he ruled one year in Jerusalem. . . . He walked in the ways of Ahab’s dynasty, doing what was evil in the LORD’s eyes, just as Ahab’s dynasty had done, because he had married into Ahab’s family. (2 Kgs 8:25–27; see also 8:16–18, 13:10–12, 21:1–3, et al.)

Initial impressions, then, set us up to read about an incredibly righteous man who rarely, if ever, did anything wrong. But as we begin to read the stories about David, discarding the flannelgraph or VeggieTales™ movies and skits performed for us when we were children, we are likely to be shocked by what we see. If we are not startled at least a little, we are probably not reading as slowly and carefully as we should, or with adult glasses. Sharp-eyed reading again and again causes readers to wonder how anyone could declare David to be a faithful, righteous man. It’s difficult to see how the claims in the text about David “following the LORD’s own heart”—and the stories in the same text about David’s enormous failures—could possibly be talking about the same man.

Nonetheless, David is “the man” in the Old Testament—with more high praise spoken about him and text devoted to him than any other figure, and his legacy serving as examples for every king in Judah. Consequently, much of this chapter will be devoted to unpacking David’s life—the good and the bad—and trying to solve the mystery of David. In the last third of this chapter, we will

¹ A reference to 1 Samuel 13:14. Most translations are more like the NRSV: “I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my own heart, who will carry out all my wishes.”

move ahead to the succession of Solomon, David's son, to the throne—the Israelite king celebrated for his great wisdom. As with David, our challenge will be to read the narrative about Solomon with eyes wide open to see his wisdom and the great things he accomplishes, and to see the heavy debt he and the nation rack up for his accomplishments. Finally, we will watch as Rehoboam proves unable to negotiate the debts left by his father and grandfather, while his own folly pits Israel against itself.

1. David

A. The View from 25,000 Feet

In order to help guide your reading and set the context for whatever parts of the narrative you may read, we will first look at David's story from a distance that enables us to see the major parts or eras in his life and how they all fit together (see Figure 9.1). Even here, we should begin to exercise our critical thinking and evaluate what David is doing, whether his actions match what a person should do—if he is “following the LORD's own heart.”

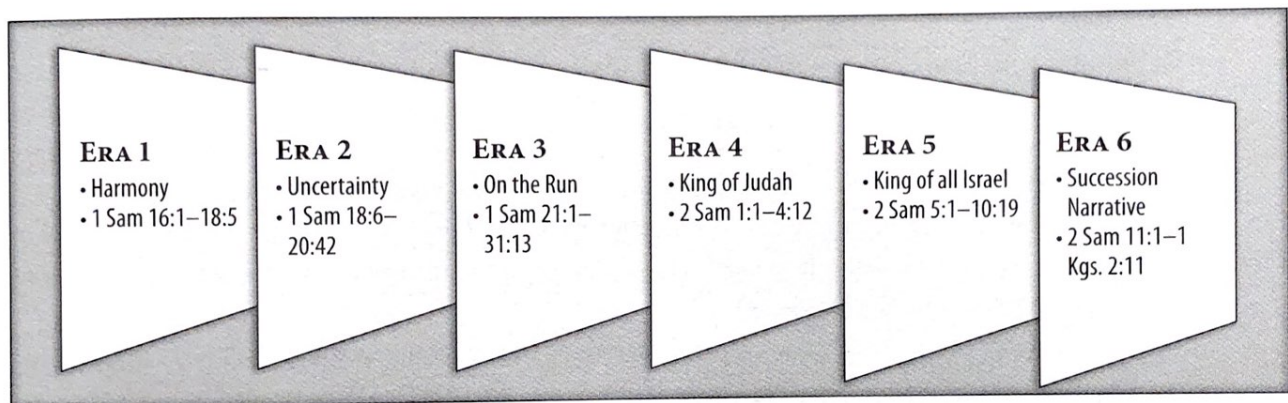


Figure 9.1. The Eras of David's Life

Era 1: Harmony with Saul 1 (Samuel 16:1–18:5)

As we have already seen, David enters the story in such a way that Saul has no reason to be suspicious of him (see Chapter Eight). He first comes to Saul playing music to soothe his suffering from God's punishing spirit. David also helps Saul out of a tough situation by not only facing, but killing the Philistine giant, Goliath. In our new reading, Saul's son Jonathan and David begin a lifelong, close friendship (18:1–4) and Saul promotes David to a position over the entire Israelite army (18:5). Had Saul known about David's private anointing to be king (16:1–13), or Jonathan giving up the emblems that signified who would be the next king (18:1–4), things would have been quite different. But since he didn't know, David was able to enjoy a time of favor with Saul.

Era 2: Uncertainty (1 Samuel 18:6–20:42)

The era of harmony did not last long. As David became more successful in war than Saul, women would come dancing, making music, and singing:

Saul has killed his thousands,
but David has killed his ten thousands! (18:7)

Upstaged and humiliated, Saul begins to keep his eye on David (18:9). Consequently, David can never be sure where he stands with Saul, whether it is safe to be with him or if David must be ready to jump away from a spear thrown at him while he plays music (18:10–16; 19:9–10), evade a trap set for him during the night (19:11–17), or overcome a plot Saul has planned to get David killed (18:17–30). Twice, Jonathan tries to reconcile his father with his best friend. The first time he succeeds (19:1–10), but only briefly; the second time Jonathan fails, so he and David know that it is no longer safe for David to be near Saul (20:1–42).

Era 3: On the Run (1 Samuel 21:1–31:13)

Once David recognizes the danger, he runs to Nob to see the priest, Ahimelech, where he takes a weapon (Goliath's sword) and food for his journey (21:1–9). He then seeks refuge in the Philistine city of Gath (21:10–15)—the hometown of Goliath. Soon he moves to the cave of Adullam where a large number of troubled and discontented people gather to him: a militia with a common bond against Saul (22:1–2). At this point, David seeks protection from the king of Moab for his parents (22:3–5). When David hears that the Philistines are attacking Keilah, an Israelite town, he consults God through a priest (now with him) and goes to their rescue (23:1–5). But, when the priest also tells him that Keilah is ready to betray David and hand him over to Saul (23:6–13), he's on the run again, into the wilderness where he and Saul play "ring around the mountain" (23:26). Just as Saul is about to catch David, a messenger informs Saul of a Philistine raid and he has to return home (23:26–29).

The game of chase continues with David having the opportunity to kill Saul twice but refusing to hurt the LORD's anointed king (24:1–22; 26:1–25). During this time he also has an encounter with a man by the name of Nabal ("Fool") and his wife Abigail ("Beautiful"); by the time the story concludes, Nabal is dead and David has a "Beautiful" new wife (25:1–42). Finally, David is worn down from the chase and thinks, "One day I will be destroyed by Saul's power" (27:1). So he moves into Ziklag, one of the villages associated with the Philistine king of Gath. David will live here with his army for almost a year and a half (27:1–12).

Era 4: David Becomes King of South Judah (2 Samuel 1:1–4:12)

At the end of David's time with the Philistines, Saul and Jonathan die in a war against the Philistines—a war in which David is nearly caught up on the Philistine side (1 Sam 28:1–2; 29:1–11). Instead, David is sent home, and after avoiding death at the hands of his own army (30:1–31), David learns of the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 1:1–27). Soon, the leaders of the southern tribes of Judah come to David and anoint him to be their king (2:1–4). In the north, however, the military leader, Abner, has set up one of Saul's sons, Ishbosheth² as a puppet king

²Ishbosheth is called "Esh-baal" in 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39; "Esh-baal" means "Man of Baal" (most likely his original name), changed in 2 Samuel to "Ishbosheth," which means "Man of Shame" as a derogatory comment on his commitment to Baal.

(2:8–10). Soon a civil war breaks out between the north and south (2:12–32) with David slowly but steadily becoming more powerful (3:1). Eventually, through a series of events for which David denies any responsibility (3:22–4:12), he wins the war.

Era 5: David Rules all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1–10:19)

After the war, the northern tribes come to David and ask him to be their king (5:1–3). Finally, David reigns over a reunited Israel (5:4–5). He quickly takes steps to strengthen the unity and the nation as a whole: making Jerusalem the new capital city (5:6–12), attempting to relocate the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem (6:1–23), desiring to build a temple for the LORD in Jerusalem (7:1–17), reaching out in kindness to Saul's descendants (9:1–13), and defeating many longstanding enemies and establishing a state government (5:17–25; 8:1–18; 10:1–19).

Era 6: The Succession Narrative (2 Samuel 11:1–1 Kings 2:11)

The final era in the story of David's life is the **Succession Narrative**; or, more simply put, who will become king after David and how? The question is especially important because, despite common assumptions, Solomon is not the natural choice to be the next king. So, these chapters lead us through David's sin against Bathsheba, her pregnancy, and David's efforts to cover up his sin. The cover-up then leads to the murder of Bathsheba's husband Uriah, the birth of a child who dies, and finally, the birth of Solomon (11:1–12:24). David's family life is in shambles with one son, Amnon, raping his half sister, Tamar; and another son, Absalom, killing Amnon (13:39), for which Absalom is exiled from Jerusalem. After David restores Absalom back to the capital city (14:1–33), Absalom begins to plot an overthrow of David's government (15:1–12). His plan leads to another civil war that forces David to flee the capital city (15:13–17:29). The war finally ends with Absalom killed in battle—an incredible grief for David (18:1–19:8). David then returns to Jerusalem (19:9–43) to face another rebellion out of the north that is soon put down (20:1–22).

The book of 2 Samuel concludes with reports of wars (21:1–22), a thanksgiving psalm from David (22:1–51), final words from David (23:1–7), and a list of David's mighty warriors (23:8–39). David takes a **census** to which the LORD objects, leaving David to choose his punishment from a multiple choice quiz (24:1–25). First Kings opens with an old, feeble David and his oldest son, Adonijah, declaring himself king (1:1–10; and see 2 Sam 3:2–4). The prophet, Nathan, and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba, act quickly. They either remind David of an earlier promise he made to them (not in the text), or they devise a way to save their lives and put Solomon on the throne (1:11–31). Whatever the situation may have been, David declares Solomon to be the next king (1:32–52). Finally, after leaving last instructions for Solomon, David dies (2:1–11).

DAVID: THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART		
Good or Admirable Actions (with text reference)	Questionable or Other Activity (with text reference)	Bad Actions or Behavior (with text reference)
		David lies to the fearful priest, Ahimelech (21:1–2)
		David tricks Ahimelech into providing food for his men (21:3–6)
	Doeg, one of Saul's servants, is present and sees everything that happens (21:7)	
		David tricks Ahimelech into providing a weapon—Goliath's sword (21:8–9)
	David runs away to the Philistine city of Gath (21:10; the home of Goliath, 17:4)	
	When King Achish is warned of David's presence and his position in Israel, David becomes afraid and acts like a madman (21:11–15)	
	David escapes to the cave of Adullam where his family joins him—as well as others who are in debt or unhappy with their lives; it seems David has attracted a small militia who dislike Saul (22:1–2)	
David asks the king of Moab to protect his parents (22:3–4)		
David listens to the prophet Gad and leaves the stronghold of Adullam (22:5)		
	As a result of David's lies to the priest at Nob, Doeg tells Saul that Ahimelech has given provisions and the sword of Goliath to David (22:6–10)	
	Saul accuses the priests of treason and massacres them and everyone in the village of Nob (22:11–19)	
	One priest, Abiathar, escapes the massacre. He flees to David and tells him what has happened (22:20–21)	
David confesses his responsibility for what happened to the priests at Nob (22:22)		
David offers Abiathar protection if he will stay with David (22:23)		

Table 9.1. David: The Man After God's Own Heart (Sample)

[illegible]

Table 9.2. David: The Man After God's Own Heart (Blank)

B. The Man After God's Own Heart

The preceding survey has left the work of close reading and evaluation to the reader; again, I offer the survey so that whatever portion or portions of the David story you may read, you will be able to fit your text within its context. The challenge is for you to read critically—slowly and carefully—without blinders to the realities of David's actions. Use Table 9.2 below to assess his actions and record it in one of three categories: (1) a good or appropriate action; (2) a questionable, or vague event where you are unsure whether David should be involved (or the text shifts its focus to someone other than David); or (3) inappropriate or wrong—without question, David should not do this. As an example, my analysis of 1 Samuel 21–22:23 is provided in Table 9.1. Use the blank chart provided (make copies, or sketch three columns in your notes) to work through the texts you are assigned to read. Do not be alarmed at differences of opinion among your colleagues; different readers are likely to come to different conclusions about David's activities. As you read, you may also refer to Table 9.1, which provides a brief review of the eras of David's life.

Now that you have examined David's life more carefully, depending on which texts you read, you will have discovered a David who is very different from any childhood memories we may have. Instead, we see a deeply flawed man who lies (frequently), murders (frequently), rapes or commits adultery (depending on your view of the events in 2 Sam 11:1–4), marries many women (recall Deut 17), has a large idol at home (1 Sam 19:13), lives for a time as a common bandit (27:8–12), demands mafia-like protection money (25:1–11), and participates in many other activities that are, at a minimum, questionable. How can this man receive such high praise, including being called “a man following the LORD's own heart”? I hope you will pause long enough to wrestle with this question for yourself, and then write your own observations below (or in your own notes) before rushing on to my comments.

<i>DAVID: THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART WHAT CAN IT MEAN?</i>	
Observation #1:	
Observation #2:	
Observation #3:	

Table 9.3. David: The Man After God's Own Heart: What Can It Mean?

How do we harmonize what we see in David's life with all the high praise given to him? As one who also wrestles with this question, I can only offer three observations. First, it is possible that our English translations have let us down. Kyle McCarter Jr. suggests that the Hebrew phrase

may mean “a man of his [God’s] own choosing.” Rather than establishing Saul’s dynasty by the natural selection of Saul’s oldest son, God makes his own choice.³ Even if correct, however, this change does not deal with all of the other accolades circling about David.

Second, we may confidently conclude that Solomon, God, and others knew the truth about David’s life when they call him loyal, faithful, and righteous; a man with a true heart and complete dedication, who shares God’s desires—with or without the phrase: a heart after God’s own heart. The writers are not trying to do a snow job that covers over all David’s flaws. David’s character is painted by the text, warts and all. So we may conclude that to be or become all the things for which David is celebrated (e.g., righteous, loyal, faithful), does not require a person to be perfect—and that is good news for all of us. We too may be deeply flawed, wrestling with sin—just like David—and we can still be people who are righteous and faithful to God.

Third, but how? What is the secret or crucial element that is also present in David’s life—that changes a sexually immoral man and murderer into a person of God? Let’s identify and carefully read several texts.

1. When the priest, Abiathar, escapes the massacre at Nob (because of David’s lies, see above) and comes to report the tragedy to David:

David told Abiathar, “That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew that he would tell Saul everything. *I am to blame for the deaths* in your father’s family. Stay with me, and don’t be afraid. The one who seeks my life now seeks yours too. But you will be safe with me.” (1 Sam 22:22–23, emphasis mine)

David not only accepts the blame for what has happened, he does his best to make things right by promising protection to Abiathar.

2. When David’s small army is angry and ready to kill him for the loss of their families to bandits. (Ironically, this the same thing David and his men had been doing, except they killed everyone.) The writer describes David as follows:

David was in deep trouble because the troops were talking about stoning him. Each of the soldiers was deeply distressed about their sons and daughters. But *David found strength in the LORD his God.* (1 Sam 30:6, emphasis mine)

After a time in his life when he lived as a bandit, ransacking villages and killing every witness, David turns back to the LORD for strength. He then calls upon the priest to ask directions from God, which he follows (30:7–8).

3. When David wants to build a “house” (temple) for the LORD, the LORD makes a covenant with David and his family. Instead of David building a “house” for God, the

³Kyle McCarter Jr., *The HarperCollins Study Bible*, fully rev. upd. ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 407, note to 1 Sam 13:14.

LORD promises to build a “house” (dynasty) for David. In this covenant, the LORD promises that “I will never take my faithful love away from him like I took it away from Saul” (2 Sam 7:15). When David’s sons do wrong, the LORD will punish them (7:14). But much like the covenant after the flood, after seeing Saul’s failures, the LORD realizes that pledging his faithful love is the only way a dynasty can exist in Israel. Every king will fail to measure up to God’s standards, so the LORD promises that, despite their failures, a descendant of David will always be on the throne of Israel.

4. The prophet, Nathan, comes to David after his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah; Nathan confronts David about his sin, and David responds:

I’ve sinned against the LORD! (2 Sam 12:13)

The superscription (heading) to Psalm 51 suggests that David wrote the psalm as part of his confession and prayer for forgiveness after his sin against Bathsheba (it is difficult to know, however, whether the superscriptions are a reliable part of the text; see our final chapter on Psalms and the God Who Saves). Whether accurate or not, the psalm expresses deep grief for sin that fits this occasion in David’s life.

5. David conducts a census of the nation, either as a matter of pride or to determine the strength of his army, or perhaps both (2 Sam 24:2). When all the numbers are reported, before any prophet comes to tell David he has done wrong, the text reports,

But after this David felt terrible that he had counted the people. David said to the LORD, “*I have sinned greatly in what I have done*. Now, LORD, please take away the guilt of your servant because I have done something very foolish.” (2 Sam 24:10, emphasis mine)

In your reading, you may have found other texts that give further understanding into David’s heart or how such a sinful person could be given such high praise. To be honest, I still would not want David to be my roommate or my next-door neighbor, but these texts do provide important insights into David’s inner life. He has a heart that can be broken by sin and experiences deep distress when he realizes he has done wrong, qualities that were absent from Saul’s life.

In terms of gymnastics or karate, David knows how to take a fall. He might get caught up in his own ego, but when he comes to his senses, he knows how to humble himself before the LORD. He appears to take (at least some) responsibility for helping those he has harmed (e.g., the priest, Abiathar, is given protection; he leads his men to recover their families). Beyond these simple observations, however, it still remains a question for you (and me) to settle. Now, however, at least you have some, if not most of the textual evidence to work with.

Texts in Conversation

The **Chronicler's History (CH)**—consisting of 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah—stands in relationship to the Deuteronomistic History (DH) like the four Gospels of the New Testament. Just as the Gospels tell the story of Jesus from distinct perspectives for different purposes, so the CH tells the story of Israel from a distinct perspective and for a different audience than the DH. Some of these differences stand out in bold print:

- The CH begins with an extensive genealogy that ostensibly stretches from Adam, through the twelve tribes of Israel, and into the post-exilic period (1 Chr 1–9).
- The DH begins its narrative with Moses, his final speeches to the new generation of Israel (Deut), and the conquest (Josh). The CH explains why Saul and Jonathan died: "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD and hadn't followed the LORD's word. He even consulted a medium for guidance. He didn't consult the LORD, so the LORD killed him and gave the kingdom to David, Jesse's son" (1 Chr 10:13–14). A story also reported in the DH, but with the slight difference that Saul went to the medium because the LORD would no longer answer him through any approved means of consultation (1 Sam 28:6).
- Unlike the narrative tennis match back and forth between the north and south in the DH, after a common report of the division (2 Chr 10:1–19; 1 Kgs 12:1–19), the CH tells only the story of South Judah, with mention of the north only when it is relevant to South Judah (2 Chr 11–36).
- The DH concludes with Judah's fall to Babylon, the beginning of captivity, and four verses that announce the release of King Jehoiachin from prison in his thirty-seventh year of captivity (560 BCE, 2 Kgs 25:27). In the CH, 2 Chronicles concludes with the decree of King Cyrus releasing the captives to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple (26:22–23). In addition, if the CH includes Ezra and Nehemiah (at one time a consensus among scholars, much less so today), then its story continues late into the post-exilic history of Jerusalem.

Of much greater significance are the ways in which the CH differs in theology. I draw our attention to the portrait of David in 1 Chronicles 11:1–29:30. It is as if David's story from the DH has been taken to the cleaners and brought back clean, pressed, and folded in the CH. Not every questionable action is erased, but most is nowhere to be found. Uzzah's death for reaching out to steady the ark remains (1 Chr 13:1–14), but the problem is soon remedied so that the ark comes to Jerusalem with only one phrase to replace the intense argument with Michal ("she lost all respect for him" [1 Chr 15:29; 2 Sam 6:20–23]), and, most noticeable,