

# The Book of Samuel

Lesson 3

King David

Manuscript



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# The Book of Samuel

## Lesson Three

### King David

#### INTRODUCTION

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An older man once described church leaders this way: “They aren’t perfect, but I don’t worry. Christ is still the King.” We all understand what this wise man meant. As much as we may wish for our leaders to be perfect, they never are. But despite their failures, we can put all of our hopes for the future in Christ because he is our perfect King.

In many ways, the author of the book of Samuel offered a similar outlook to his original, ancient Israelite audience. He and his original audience knew that God had promised a righteous son of David to spread God’s kingdom to the ends of the earth in the future. But the failures of David’s house had led many to doubt that this promise would be fulfilled. So, the author of Samuel wrote about God’s favor toward David and his house to reassure the faithful in Israel that God’s promise for this great son of David was sure.

David’s reign in the book of Samuel calls on us as Christians to reaffirm our hope in Christ in similar ways. We still fall short of faithful service to God. But we don’t have to worry. God’s favor toward David and his house will be fulfilled in Christ because he is our perfectly righteous King.

This is the third lesson in our series, *The Book of Samuel*, and we’ve entitled it “King David.” In this lesson, we’ll concentrate on the last major division of the book of Samuel, the chapters that display God’s favor toward David and his house. As we’ll see, this portion of our book offered ancient Israelites an honest but hopeful portrait of David that encourages us today as we serve David’s great son, Jesus.

Throughout this series, we’ve seen that the author of Samuel wrote his book as the people of Israel faced trials — either during the period of the divided monarchy or during the Babylonian exile. He sought to impact their lives in many different ways, but on the whole it helps to summarize his overarching, original purpose in this way:

**The author of Samuel explained how Israel’s transition to kingship culminated in God’s covenant with David so that Israel would put their hopes for the kingdom of God in the righteous rule of David’s house.**

As this summary points out, the author of Samuel wrote about certain historical events that occurred before his day to reveal how Israel’s transition to kingship culminated in God’s covenant with David. He also designed his historical record to call the original Israelite audience to put their hopes for the future of God’s kingdom in the righteous rule of David’s house.

In earlier lessons, we’ve seen that the book of Samuel tackles these subjects in three major divisions: Samuel’s prelude to kingship, in 1 Samuel 1–7; Saul’s failed

kingship, in 1 Samuel 8–2 Samuel 1; and David’s enduring kingship, in 2 Samuel 2–24. In this lesson we’ll focus our attention on this third division of our book.

The record of David’s enduring kingship divides into three main sections: David’s earlier years of blessings from God, in 2 Samuel 2–9; his later years of curses from God, in 2 Samuel 10–20; and the ongoing benefits offered through the house of David, despite its failures, in 2 Samuel 21–24.

Our lesson on King David will explore these three major sections of David’s enduring kingship by looking first at the earlier blessings David received from God in 2 Samuel 2–9.

## EARLIER BLESSINGS

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Throughout this series, we’ve seen that our author’s perspectives on David’s reign were crucial to the purpose of his book. From his point of view, Israel’s transition from the rule of judges to the rule of monarchs was finally completed when David became king. It was during David’s reign that Israel became a full-fledged kingdom, united under the rule of David’s permanent dynasty. To highlight this climactic character of David’s reign, our author began with a record of how and why God poured out unprecedented blessings in the earlier years of David’s reign.

We’ll look into the chapters covering David’s earlier years of blessings in two ways. We’ll first explore their original meaning in the light of their structure and content. Then we’ll turn to their Christian application — how this portion of Samuel should impact our lives as followers of Christ. Let’s begin with the structure and content of David’s earlier blessings from God.

### STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

These chapters touch on a number of events, but just as in every other portion of our book, these events repeatedly draw attention to two main themes. In the first place, our author showed how God’s kingdom in Israel advanced under David. David united all the tribes of Israel, made Jerusalem his new capital city, fortified Jerusalem, and built his palace there. But most importantly, in these chapters God promised to make David’s house Israel’s enduring royal dynasty.

In the second place, the author of Samuel also explained David’s successes in these chapters in terms of the dynamics of God’s covenants. Our author indicated that everything David accomplished resulted from divine benevolence. But he also stressed time and again that David consistently fulfilled God’s requirements of human loyalty. In these chapters, David was especially faithful to the standards of Moses’ laws regarding worship and the exercise of royal authority. And because of David’s loyalty, he received the consequences of tremendous blessings from God. On the whole, our author’s lesson for his original audience was plain enough: Every hope for God’s blessings depended on

David's loyalty, on the loyalty of his sons throughout the generations, and ultimately, on the perfectly righteous son of David who was to come.

**David's blessings that we see in the book of Samuel are a good example for the subsequent kings of his dynasty. I am saying this because, through David's obedience to God, he actually demonstrated what we call the "Deuteronomic principle," which is: obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses. And before David became a king, and within this time period as king of Israel, David was still obedient to God... Now, through this obedience to God, and David realizing that it is God who made him king, [he] was very, very careful to follow God's instructions and also the instructions that he received from God's prophet. When he wanted to fight the Philistines, he didn't just wake up and go. He made sure he consulted God for God to tell him whether it is appropriate for him to go and what he needs to do and so on. And when he received an answer that says, "Yes, go," he goes. When it is, "Don't go," he stays. And I think his style of kingship, that is mainly focused on obeying God, is very, very important for those subsequent kings who followed him.**

— Rev. Dr. Humphrey Akogyeram

The record of David's earlier blessings begins with David moving from his home in Ziklag of the Philistines to live within the territories of Judah. It divides into two parts: first, David's experiences in Hebron in 2:1–5:5; and second, his experiences in Jerusalem in 5:6–9:13.

### **In Hebron (2 Samuel 2:1–5:5)**

Our author recorded how God blessed David in Hebron in two segments. He began with the growing support for David's kingship in 2:1–4:12.

*Growing Support (2 Samuel 2:1–4:12).* The account of David's growing support divides into three episodes. In each episode, David's loyalty to God resulted in God's blessings of increasing support for David's kingship.

The first episode focuses on Judah, in 2:1-4. Here, David showed himself loyal to God by asking the Lord for guidance after Saul's death, and then, as God commanded, immediately leaving the safety of Ziklag and going to Judah. And God blessed him as the men of Judah anointed him king over the house of Judah at Hebron.

In the next episode, in 2:5-7, David also received support from the people of Jabesh-gilead. David had good reason to treat the people of Jabesh-gilead as his potential enemies. They'd been so devoted to Saul that they'd risked their lives to give Saul and his sons honorable burials. But David didn't attack them or even threaten them. Instead, he fulfilled God's covenant requirement in Deuteronomy 17:20 where God ordered that kings not consider themselves better than their countrymen. David pledged to treat the

people of Jabesh-gilead well. He encouraged them in verse 7 saying, “Let your hands be strong, and be valiant, for Saul your lord is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.” And as a result, God blessed David with further support, even from a group of men who had been loyal to Saul.

After reporting on the men of Judah and the men of Jabesh-gilead, our author turned to a third episode highlighting the growing support for David’s kingship. This much longer episode, in 2:8–4:12, begins with a rebellion led by Abner, Saul’s general, and Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son. Ish-bosheth was actually named Ishbaal — “the man of the Lord” — but our author called him Ish-bosheth — “the man of shame” — to reveal his true character. Abner made Ish-bosheth king over all Israel and initiated a long conflict with David. But 3:1 tells us that “David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.”

Our author first illustrated the blessing of David’s increasing strength by noting that several sons were born to David in Hebron. Then to explain how the house of Saul became weaker, our author reported that Abner and Ish-bosheth turned against each other. As many passages in the Old Testament indicate, God often came to the aid of his favored people by having their enemies fight one another. Ish-bosheth began the conflict with Abner by falsely accusing Abner of taking one of Saul’s concubines. Abner responded by defecting to David and encouraging the elders of Israel to join him in supporting David’s kingship. In 3:18, we see God’s tremendous blessing to David when Abner reminded the elders that God had declared, “By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel.”

To emphasize further how David grew stronger while Saul’s house became weaker, our author carefully detailed Abner and Ish-bosheth’s deaths. In both instances, he pointed out that David was innocent of all wrongdoing. First, he reported that Joab, David’s general, murdered Abner. And to show David’s righteousness, our author immediately added, in 3:26, that “David did not know about it.” Moreover, after learning of it, David declared in verse 28 that he and his kingdom were “forever guiltless ... for the blood of Abner.” In fact, in verse 31, David even commanded all Israel to mourn for Abner. And as a result, in verse 37, “All the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the king’s will to put to death Abner the son of Ner.”

Second, David was also innocent of Ish-bosheth’s death. Our author explained that two men murdered Ish-bosheth in his bed and proudly reported their actions to David. But David demonstrated his innocence by calling Ish-bosheth a righteous man and having his murderers executed. Once again, our author’s emphasis is obvious. God blessed David with growing support, even from the ranks of Saul’s supporters and family, because David was God’s loyal servant at this time.

***Full Support (2 Samuel 5:1-5).*** This brings us to the second segment of David’s blessings in Hebron, his full support from all Israel in 5:1-5. In these verses, representatives of all the tribes of Israel gathered at Hebron and anointed David as their king. Once again, David demonstrated his loyalty to God by humbly pledging to be faithful to the people. In 5:3, “David made a covenant with them ... before the Lord.” And as a result, God blessed David with enthusiastic support from all the tribes of Israel.

After his record of David’s earlier blessings in Hebron, our author turned to David’s blessings in Jerusalem in 5:6–9:13. This rather lengthy account consists of

narratives, reports, a speech and a prayer that all demonstrate how David received greater and greater blessings as he continued to be loyal to God in Jerusalem.

### **In Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6–9:13)**

Everyone familiar with the Bible knows that Jerusalem is the geographical center of all of biblical history. From Genesis to Revelation, God’s plan was for his kingdom on earth to start in the vicinity of Jerusalem and to extend from there to the ends of the earth. The author of Samuel was confident that David’s house would fulfill this hope for God’s kingdom. So, it’s no wonder that he took the time to highlight how much God blessed David in Jerusalem.

***Initial Accomplishments (2 Samuel 5:6–6:23).*** The account of David’s time in Jerusalem divides into three episodes. It begins in 5:6–6:23 with David’s initial accomplishments. The author of the book of Samuel reported David’s initial accomplishments in three steps. In the first step, in 5:6-16, David demonstrated his loyalty to God by fearlessly conquering the Jebusite stronghold in Jerusalem. This was no mere human battle. God himself blessed David with victory. As our author explained in 5:10, “The Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.” The expression “the Lord, the God of hosts” was a divine title designating God as the head of heaven’s armies. So, when the author of Samuel said that God was with David, he meant that David received the blessing of God and his angelic armies fighting alongside of and for him when he conquered Jerusalem.

The author of Samuel confirmed that David’s victory in Jerusalem was God’s blessing by adding two brief reports of more blessings from God. In the first report, he mentioned David’s building projects in Jerusalem. David fortified the city, and Hiram, king of Tyre, sent cedar trees, as well as carpenters and masons who built David a palace. And in the second report, our author mentioned, in 5:13, that God blessed David with more children. But these blessings were not simply for David’s sake. They were for the benefit of the entire nation because David was Israel’s king. According to verse 12, “David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.”

In the second step of David’s initial accomplishments, in 5:17-25, the author of Samuel went on to explain David’s success in defending Jerusalem. Twice the Philistines threatened Jerusalem, but in both battles, David showed his devotion to God. In verses 19, 23, he “inquired of the Lord” before he acted, and he immediately obeyed what God commanded. As a result, God blessed David with great victories. After the first battle, the Israelites took possession of Philistine idols — much like the Philistines had taken the ark of God in the days of Eli. And after the second battle, David was able to drive the Philistines far away from Jerusalem to the north and to the east.

In the third step of David’s initial accomplishments, in 6:1-23, the author of Samuel explained how David succeeded in securing Jerusalem. Here we find the well-known story of David bringing the ark of God into the city. You’ll recall from our preceding lesson that the ark had remained at Kiriath-jearim — or Baale-judah as it was



also called — for 20 years. But at this time, David demonstrated his devotion to God by organizing a grand procession to bring the ark into his capital city.

The beginning of David's procession immediately points to David's awareness that the faithful worship of God was crucial to Jerusalem's security. David's procession was not only an act of worship involving priests and Levites, but, as we read in 6:1, David also gathered a large and elite military force. Moreover, in 6:2, the author of Samuel pointed to David's military goal when he noted that "the ark of God ... is called by the name of the Lord of hosts." As we just mentioned, the divine title "Lord of hosts" honored God as the head of heaven's armies. David understood that the only way to secure Jerusalem against enemies was to make his capital city the center of Israel's worship.

As the procession advanced, an unexpected delay occurred. The Levite Uzzah touched the ark, and God struck him dead. God's reaction may seem extreme until we realize that the Levites had disregarded the law of Moses with respect to the sacred ark. According to 6:3, they "carried the ark of God on a new cart," much like the Philistines had years earlier when they returned the ark to the Israelites. The Levites didn't carry the ark on poles as Moses had prescribed in Exodus 25:12-14 and Numbers 7:9. And more than this, when Uzzah touched the ark in this holy procession, he received the sentence God had explicitly declared for this violation in Numbers 4:15 — death.

All too often, interpreters are inclined to blame David for this tragedy, but the author of Samuel had a different focus. You'll recall that, in this portion of Samuel, our author consistently stressed how God blessed Israel during this time in response to David's faithfulness. So, it's unlikely that he would have highlighted David's disloyalty in this scene. Rather, he placed the weight of responsibility on the Levites. As 1 Samuel 6:19 indicates, earlier at Beth-shemesh the Levites hadn't handled the ark according to the law of Moses. And these many years later, they disregarded God's law *again*. Perhaps, as David led this large procession of over 30,000 people, he hadn't paid attention to what the Levites had done.

Yet, in 6:8, when God's judgment came against Uzzah, "David was angry" — probably at the Levites — "because the Lord had broken out against Uzzah." And according to verse 9, "David was afraid of" — or feared — "the Lord that day." He readily acknowledged the Levites' sins by sending the ark away to the house of Obed-edom for three months.

When David learned that God had blessed the house of Obed-edom, he began the procession again. According to 6:13, this time the Levites "bore" — or lifted — "the ark of the Lord." Here our author used the Hebrew term *nasá* (נָשָׂא) — the same term that appears in the law of Moses for lifting the ark by means of poles, as God had commanded. And more than this, our author added, in verse 13, that "when those who bore the ark ... had gone six steps, David sacrificed an ox and a fattened animal." In verses 14, 15, we read that the procession continued joyfully, shouting and blowing horns and dancing. And when the ark of God finally reached Jerusalem, David showed his gratitude to God by offering burnt offerings and peace offerings. To emphasize, once again, the military security that the ark provided, our author reported in verse 18 that "[David] blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts" — the Lord of the heavenly armies. And as a result of David's devotion to God, God blessed David by securing Jerusalem against his enemies.

To highlight David’s humble devotion to God, our author also added a brief scene in which Michal, Saul’s daughter, tried to shame David for donning a humble priestly ephod as he danced before the Lord. But David acknowledged God’s blessing on his kingship by responding in verse 21, “It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house . . . and I will celebrate before the Lord.” Unlike Michal, David was humble before God and was wholeheartedly grateful for the blessing of the security of his royal city.

*Establishment of Dynasty (2 Samuel 7:1-29).* Having described David’s initial accomplishments, we come to the second major episode of his time in Jerusalem: the establishment of David’s dynasty in 7:1-29. These events — involving interactions between David, the prophet Nathan, and God — took place later, after God had given David rest from his enemies.

In this well-known story, David learned that he would not build a temple for God. From our modern point of view, this may not seem very important. But for ancient Israelites who first received the book of Samuel, the fact that David *never* built a temple raised questions about him. In Old Testament times, both in Israel and outside of Israel, it was widely believed that all great kings built temples for their gods. Royal inscriptions from the ancient Near East repeatedly listed building temples as the mark of a great kingship. To deal with this issue, the author of Samuel explained that David was ready and willing to build a house for God. But David didn’t because God determined first to exalt David by building a house, an enduring dynasty *for him*. And in humble submission to God’s instructions, David devoted himself to preparing the way for his son to build a house, or temple, for God.

The narrative reporting the establishment of David’s dynasty divides into three segments. The first segment, in 7:1-3, presents a brief interaction between David and God’s prophet Nathan. David wanted to honor God by building God a temple. But before he began his work, David showed his loyalty to God by seeking approval from Nathan. Now, both David and Nathan knew that great kings built temples for their gods. So, Nathan naturally responded in verse 3, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the Lord is with you.”

But in the next segment, in verses 4-16, we see an unexpected interaction that same night between God and Nathan. Throughout this interaction, God’s words drew upon two different meanings of the Hebrew term *bayit* (בַּיִת), commonly translated “house.” First, in verses 5-7, God revealed to Nathan that David was not to build a “house” — meaning a temple — for him. Rather, in verses 8-16, God declared that he was going to honor David by building a “house” — meaning a permanent royal dynasty — for David. God went on to explain that David’s son, not David, would build the temple. And God would uphold the royal “house” that descended from David’s son forever.

**When David proposed to Nathan the prophet to build a house for the Lord, to build the temple, Nathan came back and said, “You’re not going to build a house for the Lord; the Lord is going to build a house for you.” And by “house,” he meant dynasty; it’s in 2 Samuel 7. And that prophecy — that God would build a house for him, would**

**establish his kingdom forever, that his descendant would reign *forever* on David's throne — became the foundation for the messianic prophecies that followed. And so, when the prophets referred back after the collapse, especially, of the Davidic dynasty, the Davidic kingdom, when they referred back and looked forward to the hope that God would restore the glories of the Davidic dynasty, it was through the line of David that God would raise up a king.**

— Dr. Mark L. Strauss

In 2 Samuel 7:14-15, God told Nathan:

I will be to [David] a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men ... but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul (2 Samuel 7:14-15).

Now, this passage doesn't use the term "covenant" — *berith* (בְּרִית) in Hebrew. Still, it contains all of the elements explicitly associated with God's covenant with David in passages like 2 Samuel 23:1-7 and Psalms 89, 132.

God displayed divine benevolence to David by establishing his royal descendants as Israel's enduring dynasty. And like all other divine covenants in the Bible, God required grateful human loyalty — wholehearted obedience from the sons of David. In addition, David and his descendants would receive the consequences of blessings from God if they obeyed, but curses if they rebelled against him. In particular, God would inflict harm on them through other human beings. The troubled history of David's house during the divided monarchy and the Babylonian exile demonstrated how God brought these curses on David's house. But God promised, nonetheless, that no matter how much David's sons rebelled against God, he would never utterly reject David's dynasty, as he had rejected Saul. As God said to David in 7:16:

Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me (2 Samuel 7:16).

The covenant that God made with David in 2 Samuel 7 was crucial to the theological outlooks the author of Samuel presented to his original audience. God required grateful loyalty from David's house, and he disciplined David and his royal descendants when they sinned. But as severe as this discipline might be, God would never replace the house of David with another. And for this reason, the only hope Israel had for a glorious kingdom in the future was in the righteous rule of David's house.

The third segment in the establishment of David's dynasty in Jerusalem reports a second interaction between David and Nathan, in 7:17-29. Nathan delivered God's revelation to David, and David displayed the depth of his loyalty to God by bowing before God in prayer. David's prayer acknowledged that the permanence of his house was a blessing for him and for Israel. And he also acknowledged that this blessing

impacted the future of every nation on earth. As he said in verse 19, “This is instruction for mankind, O Lord God!”

You’ll recall that, in 1 Samuel 2:10, Hannah sang that God’s kingdom would one day extend to the entire world through the strength and victory of Israel’s king. The establishment of David’s dynasty was the hope of the entire world. And for this reason, David had only one request of God. In 2 Samuel 7:29 he prayed, “Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you.”

***Further Accomplishments (8:1–9:13).*** Having reported how God blessed David in Jerusalem in his initial accomplishments and the establishment of his dynasty, our author’s account closes, in 8:1–9:13, with God’s blessings in David’s further accomplishments. The record of David’s further accomplishments breaks down into two parts. The first part, in 8:1-14, gives a summary of David’s additional victories. These verses consist of a number of reports that take us in every direction from Jerusalem. They deal with David’s victories over the Philistines in the west, the Moabites in the east, the people beyond the Sea of Galilee in the north, and the Edomites in the south. Our author again highlighted David’s devotion to the worship of God during these wars. According to verse 11, when he gained plunder from his enemies, “David dedicated [it] to the Lord, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued.”

To draw even more attention to God’s blessings to David, our author remarked in verses 6, 14 that “the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.” In verses 2, 6 and 14, he also noted that God increased David’s rule when many of these enemies became his servants. And according to verses 2, 7, 8 and 11, God also blessed David with great wealth.

After this summary of David’s victories, our author then turned to the second part of David’s further accomplishments: the administration of his kingdom in 8:15–9:13. This section first summarizes how David fulfilled Moses’ commands for the exercise of royal authority in 8:15-18. As our author put it in verse 15, “David administered justice and equity to all his people.”

To illustrate one way David ruled with justice and equity, our author wrote about David’s treatment of Mephibosheth in 9:1-13. Mephibosheth was Saul’s grandson through Jonathan. So, this story recollects David’s kindness toward Saul’s supporters and the house of Saul while David ruled in Hebron. It also reminds us of the oath of loyalty David and Jonathan swore to one another in 1 Samuel 20:42. This story begins with David initiating the action by asking in 9:1, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” And David showed great “kindness,” or “faithfulness” — *chesed* (חֶסֶד) in Hebrew — as the king of Israel. Mephibosheth was severely disabled, and at this time, disabled people were often treated shamefully. But David demonstrated the kind of king he was by graciously welcoming Mephibosheth to live in his royal palace in a position of honor.

We’ve explored the structure and content of David’s earlier years of blessings. Now, we should make a few comments on the Christian application of these chapters. How do God’s blessings in this portion of David’s reign apply to our lives today?

## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

When we delve into the details of the events that took place during David's earlier years of God's blessings, it's easy to feel that these chapters have little to do with us. On the surface, David's circumstances seem very different from anything we experience today. Few of us live in Hebron; few of us live in Jerusalem; and all of us live in a different era. Still, the Holy Spirit inspired these Scriptures to teach God's people throughout the ages. So what are we to learn from these chapters as followers of Christ?

As always, there are many ways to think through the Christian application of this section, far more than time will allow in this lesson. But, as in our previous lesson, two of our author's emphases enable us to draw lines of connection between David's earlier years of blessings and our lives in Christ. We'll look first at our author's emphasis on God's covenants, and then at his emphasis on God's kingdom. Let's start with God's covenants.

### God's Covenants

As we've seen, these chapters repeatedly draw attention to the dynamics of God's covenants at this stage in David's life. God continued to show his benevolence to David and to Israel through David. And, because our author idealized David in this portion of his reign, he reported only how David fulfilled God's standards of loyalty, especially Moses' regulations for worship and for the rule of kings. The greatest blessing of all in this portion of our book was the covenant God made with David. In this covenant, God promised David an enduring dynasty.

These elements provided the original audience with insights into their interactions with God as they lived in the age of God's covenant with David. They revealed the kinds of divine benevolence God had shown to the house of David and to every Israelite in their day. These elements pointed to the kinds of loyalty God required of Israel and Israel's kings and the blessings that would come if they would render faithful service to God.

As followers of Christ, we must be careful to apply the dynamics of God's covenant at this point in David's life in the light of New Testament teachings. In the first place, David's earlier years of blessing should turn our hearts toward God's benevolence in Christ. We should honor Christ for his perfect loyalty to God and acknowledge the everlasting blessings Christ received from the Father because of his faithfulness. But in the second place, David's faithful devotion to worship and his rule of justice and equity point to ways in which even we are to keep covenant with God in Christ. David received many blessings because of his faithfulness. And we can rest assured that, in Christ, the Holy Spirit will bless us for our faithful service as well, according to God's wisdom.

Now, as valuable as it is to focus on how the dynamics of God's covenants unfolded in this portion of David's life, our Christian application of these chapters should also draw our attention to God's kingdom in Christ.

## God's Kingdom

When we look at the Old Testament, we see that the Old Testament has at least a double emphasis concerning the kingdom of God. On the one hand, the Old Testament teaches that God has always been king. In this sense, he is the eternal King. He was king in the past, he is king in the present, and he will always be king. But in another sense, the other emphasis we have in the Old Testament is the message that God will one day come to rule the earth. And that is due to the fact that when God created the world, he had a purpose in mind. He wanted the world to serve as his palace. He wanted to bring his kingdom of heaven to earth... Jesus has the same teaching. He tells us in the "Our Father," the prayer that he taught us to pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come." He doesn't say, "Take us *into* your kingdom," but he says, "Your kingdom *come*." That means that our Lord Jesus in his ministry had the same priority as his Father, that is to say bringing his kingdom of heaven to earth. This long historical process finds its final phase precisely in the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

— Dr. David Correa, translation

In this portion of the book of Samuel, God advanced his kingdom through David in a number of important ways:

- All of the Israelites became one under David's rule;
- David defeated God's enemies and established Jerusalem as the capital of God's kingdom on earth;
- David expanded the boundaries of God's reign beyond the kingdom of Saul and, in doing so, incorporated more Gentiles into God's kingdom;
- David ruled with justice and equity; and
- Israel gained the stability of a promising, permanent royal dynasty.

The author of Samuel highlighted these advances of God's kingdom to give his original audience hope — hope that God would accomplish even greater things in the future through the righteous rule of David's house.

Along these lines, the New Testament emphasis on the kingdom of God points to Jesus as the perfectly righteous son of David who will bring David's accomplishments to their fullness. Yet, as we've mentioned throughout this series, Christ fulfills this role in three stages: in the inauguration of his kingdom during his first advent; in the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history; and in the consummation of his kingdom when he returns in glory.

For this reason, the stories of David's earlier years of blessings should turn our hearts toward the greater things Jesus accomplished in the inauguration of his kingdom. As David made God's people one, Jesus united a faithful remnant from the north and south of Israel under his rule. As David defeated his enemies, Jesus decisively defeated

evil in his death, resurrection and ascension. As David reigned in Jerusalem, Jesus did his greatest work in the city of David and took his rightful place on David's throne in heaven. In addition, Jesus commissioned his apostles to expand the boundaries of God's kingdom beyond David's kingdom. Through this expansion Jesus opened the way for many Gentiles to come to faith in him. And as the last great son of David, Jesus began his eternal reign of perfect justice and equity.

Beyond this, these chapters call on us to consider how Christ has superseded David's accomplishments in the continuation of his kingdom. Throughout the history of the church, Jesus has drawn more and more people to himself. He continues to pour out judgments on his enemies and blessings of salvation on all who trust in him. For more than two thousand years, Jesus has expanded God's kingdom further and further. And he reigns with unmatched justice and equity for his followers throughout the world.

Lastly, as David's accomplishments turned the original audience toward the future, they now turn our hearts toward what Christ will accomplish at the consummation of our age. When Christ returns, he will unite all of his people under his righteous rule. He will utterly defeat all of God's spiritual and physical enemies and pour out everlasting blessings on those in his kingdom. The New Jerusalem will descend as the centerpiece of the new creation, as the boundaries of God's kingdom expand to fill the whole world. And Jesus will reign throughout the world forever with universal justice and equity.

So, when we follow the teachings of the New Testament, we can see the relevance of David's earlier years of blessings for us. These years anticipated the greater wonders of what Christ would accomplish for the kingdom of God in his first advent. They make us more fully aware of what Christ has continued to do even up to our own day. And they help us look forward to what he will do at his glorious return.

So far, we've seen how the author of Samuel began his account of King David's reign with David's earlier years of astonishing blessings from God. Now, let's turn to the later years of curses David received from God in 2 Samuel 10–20.

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## LATER CURSES

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When God made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, he promised to treat David and his family differently than he had treated Saul. You'll recall that, in the end, God utterly rejected Saul and his descendants from the throne of Israel. But in his covenant with David, God reassured David that he would *never* utterly reject his family as Israel's permanent dynasty. Still, just as he had with Saul, God swore to discipline David and his descendants with curses if they violated the covenant.

At this point in our book, the author of Samuel focused on how David and his royal offspring fell under God's curses in some terrible ways. And these kinds of troubles continued into the days of the original audience. But the author of Samuel also indicated that even as God cursed David, he preserved him and his royal lineage. It was through David's dynasty that God would advance his kingdom toward its glorious worldwide destiny.

We'll look into David's later years of curses from God in our usual way. We'll first investigate the original meaning of these chapters by examining their structure and content. Then we'll turn to their Christian application. Let's begin with the structure and content of David's later curses from God.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

To provide an orientation toward this portion of our book, we should give a preview of what we're about to see. Once again, our author's outlooks on God's kingdom and his covenants undergird these chapters. But here, our author treated both themes in ways that we haven't seen before in the book of Samuel.

On the one side, the author of Samuel openly admitted that God's kingdom faced serious setbacks in these years of David's reign. The rapid succession of grand accomplishments during David's early years ceased, and a time of trouble ensued. But despite these setbacks, our author was careful to explain that God's kingdom through the house of David did not come to an end. Rather, he indicated how God mercifully sustained David and his house as Israel's permanent dynasty.

On the other side, we're also about to see that the mixed conditions of David's kingdom in these chapters resulted from the dynamics of God's covenants. As in earlier chapters, divine benevolence continued to characterize every facet of God's interaction with his people. God also continued to require grateful human loyalty according to the standards of Moses' law. But these chapters reveal that David and his house flagrantly violated the standards of Moses' law. As a result, God's curses fell not only on David and his house, but also on the entire nation of Israel. Even so, the author of Samuel didn't simply report God's curses. He also illustrated how David humbly repented of his sins, and God mercifully blessed him by sustaining his kingdom.

**In his rise to power, King David came up as a young man who was anointed and who loved the Lord, showed it by all sorts of ways in which he wrote songs and so on. And one of the things that stood out is he really was a man after God's own heart. And as he continued to grow in that, that kept being tested by Saul's resistance to his anointing and all the things that went on with that through his life, and he remained faithful. When it comes into 2 Samuel, when he is established as the king, again, he's loyal and faithful to the Lord, but he doesn't stay focused sometimes on what the Lord has given him to do and what it would mean to be genuine before the Lord... Things degenerated; now, he remained faithful to the Lord, he kept going back to the Lord. One of the things, though, we learn from David's life for us is that even a man after God's own heart can commit some of the worst possible sinful acts. And we need to keep that in mind and remember that we need to take heed lest we fall.**

— Dr. Richard E. Averbeck



The structure and content of David's later years of curses divides into two main parts. First, we'll look into the initial troubles in David's kingdom in 10:1–12:31. Second, we'll consider the extended troubles that came upon David's kingdom in 13:1–20:26. Let's turn first to our author's record of David's initial troubles during these years.

## **Initial Troubles (2 Samuel 10:1–12:31)**

It's common for followers of Christ to summarize David's initial troubles simply as the story of David's sin with Bathsheba. And our author dealt directly with David and Bathsheba in 11:2–12:25. But to discern our author's purposes here, we should note that he embedded his account of David and Bathsheba within the framework of a larger narrative about David's victory over an Ammonite-led rebellion.

***Initial Victory (2 Samuel 10:1–11:1).*** The first portion of this larger, overarching narrative appears in 10:1–11:1 with David's initial victory over the Ammonite-led rebellion. This account begins with David's kindly response to news that the king of the Ammonites — who was subservient to David at this time — had died. In 10:2, David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of [the deceased king], as his father dealt loyally with me." Here we see another example of David's just and equitable administration. But, rather than welcoming David's kindness, the Ammonites falsely accused David's messengers of being spies and sent them back to David in dishonor.

Now, the Ammonites knew that they'd violated their submission to David, so they formed an alliance with a large number of Syrians to make war against Israel. David's general, Joab, soundly defeated this coalition. The Syrians surrendered to David. And the Ammonites fled to their fortified city of Rabbah. David's initial victory then ended with the notice that, when spring arrived, David sent Joab to lay siege to the Ammonite city of Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem.

***Final Victory (2 Samuel 12:26–31).*** The author of Samuel completed this larger narrative framework by turning to David's final victory over the Ammonite rebellion in 12:26–31. After some time, Joab had captured the royal fortress of Rabbah and was about to take the city. He called for David to join him so that David could rightly claim the victory for himself. David and Joab justly completed an extensive defeat of the Ammonites. Then David and his army returned to Jerusalem in victory.

This larger narrative framework fits together so seamlessly that our author may have drawn it from one of his existing written sources. But he transformed this positive victory narrative by inserting the story of David and Bathsheba into the middle of it. This embedded narrative, in 11:2–12:25, introduces a critical fact. Although God gave David victory over the Ammonites during this time, he also brought curses against David and his house because of David's sin, and David's kingdom began to suffer one setback after another. Still, as this narrative also reveals, God continued to sustain David's dynasty in response to David's sincere repentance.

***David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:2–12:25).*** This familiar story breaks down into three episodes. The first episode begins with David's sin in 11:2–27. It follows the notice

in 11:1 that David had sent others into battle for him, just as Saul had done on several occasions earlier in our book. While safe from battle, David spied Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, a faithful warrior in David's army. Throughout this story, Bathsheba is depicted as passive and submissive. David, however, is shown to deliberately abuse his royal authority time and again. First, he commanded Bathsheba to come to him, and he lay with her. Then, when Bathsheba learned that she was pregnant, David sent orders for Uriah to return from battle in an attempt to cover his sin. When this ploy didn't work, David commanded Joab to ensure Uriah's death in battle.

Now, according to the cultural norms of other nations in that day, what David had done was within his rights as king. In addition, David maintained proper standards of etiquette by having Bathsheba go through a customary period of mourning following Uriah's death. Only then did he bring her into his royal court as his wife.

It was possible that the original audience of Samuel might excuse what David had done as acceptable behavior for a king. But our author made it clear that this was not at all how God felt about David's actions. To counter any effort to minimize what David had done, the author of Samuel closed this episode with a crucial comment in 11:27. He wrote, "But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord."

**David's sin with Bathsheba is really the hinge on which David's narrative hangs. Before that you see the making of a kingdom; after this you see the unmaking of a family. And the reason why this is so tragic is, first of all, David is slipping in terms of his understanding of kingship. Around the ancient world, a king was absolute. So if he wanted his neighbor's wife, he took her; "what's the big deal?" And David is slipping back into that understanding — "I can do whatever I want to regardless of what the true King of the nation wants." So, it's at that point that the real point of this story begins to appear. But then, of course, it's not merely that he takes Bathsheba. It is that he compounds it in terms of his bringing Uriah home to try to cover this up. It's so interesting that when we sin, our first instinct is not to confess and repent. Our first instinct is to cover it up. And that's what David was doing. And then, of course, when Uriah turned out to be more honorable than his king — he would not go home to spend the night with his wife — then David decides to kill him. So, we see all the way through here, this attempt by David to play the part of an absolute king who can do whatever he wants to with his neighbor's wife and with his neighbor, and God is saying, "No." One of the things that strikes me about that account is the narrator is just so matter of fact: He did this. He did this. He did that. And then that very last sentence: "But the thing that David had done displeased Yahweh." There's the clicker on it all. And that's what he's done. He has usurped the place of God and decided he will decide what's right and wrong for him.**

— Dr. John Oswalt

In the second episode in the account of David and Bathsheba, the author of Samuel turned to Nathan's prophetic judgment in 12:1-14. Here he clarified the severity of David's offence. The content of Nathan's speech was so significant that the author of Samuel reported it in some detail.

Nathan's speech began with a prophetic parable in 12:1-7. Many interpreters have rightly suggested that this parable represented a form of ancient legal litigation. In this parable, Nathan presented David with a hypothetical legal case: A wealthy man who had many flocks and herds fed a guest by slaughtering a poor man's one and only, dearly-beloved lamb. David was enraged at the thought of this injustice and insisted that such a man deserved to die. He declared that the rich man should pay back fourfold because he had no pity on the poor man. And at that moment, in the first half of 12:7, Nathan directly confronted David saying, "You are the man!"

Following his prophetic parable, Nathan addressed David further with words he received from God's heavenly court. From the second part of verse 7-9 we find Nathan's prophetic accusation that David had violated his covenant with God. Nathan reviewed how God had been benevolent by making David king over all of Israel. But David failed to respond to God's benevolence with grateful loyalty and, instead, violated the law of Moses.

Then, in verses 10-14 we find a prophetic sentencing in which Nathan declared the consequences of David's disloyalty. Two kinds of curses would come on David and his family. In verse 10, Nathan declared that David's royal family would be corrupted by continuous violence. And in verse 11, Nathan announced that David's royal family would turn in rebellion against him.

It's certainly true that David violated the law of Moses by committing adultery, by scheming, and by arranging for Uriah's death to cover his sin. But these sins were particularly egregious in David's case because they represented a flagrant abuse of his royal authority. As we saw in our preceding lesson, Saul came under God's judgment primarily because he violated Moses' restrictions on royal authority. And Nathan's prophecy revealed that David's actions were similarly abhorrent to God.

As tragic as these curses were, the author of Samuel was quick to point out why God didn't utterly reject David and his royal lineage. Unlike Saul, who made excuses and only feigned repentance when Samuel confronted him, David immediately admitted his guilt, and God responded with mercy. As we read in 2 Samuel 12:13-14:

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die" (2 Samuel 12:13-14).

David humbled himself. And as a result, Nathan responded with a word of merciful judgment. He told David, "You shall not die." But disciplinary curses would still come because David had "utterly scorned the Lord." As Nathan put it in verse 14, "The child who is born to you shall die."

The third and final episode in the narrative of David and Bathsheba, shows us the immediate fulfillment of Nathan's words, in 12:15-25. In this episode we learn that David's son with Bathsheba did in fact die. But David continued to show his sincere

repentance before God. Before his son's death, David prayed earnestly for his child in the hopes that God might relent and not permit him to die. But once the child had passed, David humbly accepted God's judgment.

As a result, the author of Samuel closed this account with a brief vignette, in verses 24, 25, in which Bathsheba gave birth to a second son. This event was our author's subtle but astonishing reminder of the mercy God showed to David because of his repentance. David's second son was none other than Solomon.

Of course, the original audience of Samuel knew that Solomon had greatly furthered God's kingdom in Israel. He'd built the temple in Jerusalem, extended the kingdom into new lands and brought Israel unprecedented wealth and power. And Solomon became the ancestor of every royal son of David who ruled over Israel in the future. But the fact that Solomon was Bathsheba's son raised a serious question in the minds of at least some in the original audience. How could the son of Bathsheba be the one through whom God's kingdom in Israel would continue?

Our author answered this question in verse 24 by noting that "the Lord loved him." And according to verse 25, God sent word through the prophet Nathan who "called his name Jedidiah," meaning "beloved of Yahweh." Nathan's prophetic word demonstrated that, despite all the troubles that came to David's house, Israel's hope for future blessings still rested in David's descendants from Solomon's royal lineage.

Following David's initial troubles, the author of Samuel turned to the extended troubles that came upon David's kingdom in 13:1–20:26.

## **Extended Troubles (2 Samuel 13:1–20:26)**

To understand the significance of these chapters, we must be familiar with their main characters. Of course, David and Joab played a major role. But these chapters also focus on David's sons. 2 Samuel 3:2, 3 tells us that David's first three sons were Amnon, Chileab and Absalom. As David's firstborn son, Amnon was the heir apparent to David's throne. The Scriptures tell us nothing about David's second son Chileab. It's likely that he died at a young age. As a result, David's third son, Absalom was second in line for the throne after Amnon. In these chapters, we learn how Nathan's prophecy of judgment was fulfilled in connection with the first and second heirs of David's throne.

This record of David's extended troubles divides into five major steps. After first setting the stage, our author introduced each subsequent step with a temporal notation, indicating the number of years that had passed.

*Amnon's Rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22).* The first step of David's extended troubles details the shocking story of Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar in 13:1-22. This episode begins with David's firstborn son consumed with lust for Tamar, Absalom's sister. Amnon fooled David into having Tamar come alone to him in his bedroom. He then forced himself on her, and afterward harshly rejected her. The emotional impacts of this event reflect the crisis it brought to David's house. In 13:20 we read, "Tamar lived, a desolate woman." Verse 21 tells us that "King David ... was very angry." And verse 22 reports that "Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar."

***Absalom's Revenge and Flight (2 Samuel 13:23-37).*** The second step of David's extended troubles takes place two years after Tamar's rape. It describes Absalom's revenge and flight in 13:23-37. Absalom deceitfully pressed David into allowing Amnon and his other brothers to come away from Jerusalem with him to shear sheep. While there, Absalom's servants murdered Amnon, and Absalom fled for his life. To indicate how terrible conditions were for David at this time, 13:36, 37 reports that "The king ... and all his servants wept very bitterly... And David mourned for his son day after day."

***Absalom's Return (2 Samuel 13:38-14:27).*** The third step of David's extended troubles focuses on Absalom's return to Jerusalem, in 13:38-14:27. After three years, David's grief had diminished, and he longed to see Absalom. Knowing David's desire, Joab fooled David into allowing Absalom to return to Jerusalem. Joab called for a "wise woman" — or a "cunning woman" as it may be translated — to go before David and pretend to seek protection for her son who had killed his brother. After gaining David's sympathy, she flattered David by telling him that he could do no wrong in his royal judgments. And by this lie, she convinced David to allow Absalom to return. Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but he wasn't allowed to enter the king's presence. So, Absalom's frustration grew. Interestingly, the author of Samuel emphasized the discord between father and son by noting, in 14:25, that "in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom." Like Saul a generation earlier, Absalom's outstanding physical appearance would lead to even more trouble in the kingdom of Israel.

***Absalom's Rise in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 14:28-15:6).*** This brings us to the fourth step, in 14:28-15:6, where we read about Absalom's rise in Jerusalem two years later. Absalom eagerly desired to be acknowledged as the heir to David's throne. So, he finally convinced Joab to gain permission for him to see the king. When Absalom arrived, he feigned humility before David. David then foolishly offered reconciliation and, with a kiss, acknowledged Absalom as his rightful heir. Afterward, Absalom acquired a chariot, horses, and fifty men to run before him. But he still wasn't satisfied. He dishonestly intervened in court cases for those who were waiting to see David, and he gained many loyal followers by unjustly granting them favors. As we read at the end of this step in 15:6, "So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel."

***Absalom's Rebellion and Defeat (2 Samuel 15:7-20:26).*** The last step of David's extended troubles is a lengthy account of Absalom's rebellion and defeat, in 15:7-20:26. Four years after Absalom's rise in Jerusalem, Absalom tricked David once again and, under false pretenses, gained permission to leave Jerusalem for Hebron. There, the people declared Absalom king over Israel.

Upon hearing of Absalom's rebellion, David fled from Jerusalem. Many in Jerusalem pledged loyalty to David and fled with him. But others — including Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor — joined the rebellion. David wisely left some of his followers in key positions in Jerusalem, including his confidant Hushai. David also commanded the priests Zadok and Abiathar to remain in Jerusalem with the ark of God.

As David fled from Jerusalem, Ziba, a servant of Mephibosheth, joined him. But Shimei, a Benjaminite from the house of Saul, mocked and cursed David as he left

Jerusalem. David didn't strike out against Shimei as his men urged. Instead, he acknowledged his own condition before God in 16:11 saying, "Leave [Shimei] alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to."

Meanwhile, Absalom entered Jerusalem and claimed David's throne. Following Ahithophel's counsel, Absalom took David's concubines to himself. Ahithophel also counseled Absalom to attack David immediately, but Hushai, David's faithful counselor, fooled Absalom into delaying his attack. Zadok and Abiathar sent messengers to warn David, and David was able to escape and prepare for battle.

After fierce fighting, David's army prevailed over Absalom's forces. But although David had given orders to deal gently with Absalom, Joab saw his opportunity and killed him. Here, the author of Samuel emphasized once again how God had cursed David's kingdom. Rather than celebrating his victory, David was heartbroken and cried out in 18:33, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

**A couple of things you just note about Absalom. He was a son that had ambition here, clearly. He was a son, by the way, who was also pretty ruthless. When Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar, it's Absalom who takes vengeance for that. And he does so in a pretty sneaky way here, inviting him to a good time and then, in essence, really taking revenge in that regard. He does the same thing with regard to David here, meeting at the gates with the leaders and elders and other influential people, currying favor with them, already trying to put the idea of his prominence as king ... seeking to establish himself as this new king. And you might say, at that point in time, it almost appears as if Absalom is going to win... But one thing does strike me. When, in fact, tide does change, and David's forces begin to win, and they actually find Absalom here — who ... gets his hair caught in a tree and he's hanging there, and then he is killed by one of David's men — there's a really telling point in that account where David weeps for him and cries for him. And I think that tells something about the nature of their relationship... I think that shows the struggle of, and I think very realistically, of how in a household a son and father could be both together and yet so estranged from one another and eventually become enemies. And yet, never ultimately, at least not on the part of David's side. So, his rise to power comes to a false end, and though David, even while he's being driven out, he's being cursed by people who are loyal to Absalom, and yet David has this sort of sense that God is going to see him through even this difficult time. And we of course know what happened to Absalom in the end.**

— Dr. Oliver L. Trimiew, Jr.

After Absalom's rebellion was defeated, David finally returned to Jerusalem. The author of Samuel illustrated the resulting condition of David's kingdom in several ways.

By God's mercy, David's kingdom continued, but David never experienced the grand blessings that characterized the early years of his reign. The people of Judah supported him. David made peace with the Benjaminites, Shimei, and Mephibosheth — who had stayed behind in Jerusalem. The Gileadites also supported David. But there was ongoing trouble between Judah and the tribes of northern Israel. And David had to crush a serious rebellion from Sheba, a Benjaminite.

In the end, God blessed David by sustaining him and his house. But the author of Samuel made it clear that David's sin had led his kingdom under God's curses. Israel needed a righteous son of David to rule, one who was more righteous than David. Only then would the curses of God give way to the grand blessings promised to David's kingdom.

Now that we've considered the structure and content of David's later years of curses, we're in a position to discuss the Christian application of these chapters. What does this part of David's reign have to do with *us*?

### CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

Followers of Christ love to discover how God's blessings on his people in the Old Testament apply to their lives. But these chapters of the book of Samuel don't concentrate on God's blessings. Instead, they tell us how God disciplined David with covenant curses. As much as we may not naturally want to know how God's curses in David's life apply to us, they still do. God loves us so much that he doesn't ignore our sins. He disciplines those whom he loves in Christ so that we may grow in faith and righteousness.

As we think through the Christian application of David's later years of curses, we'll look once again at two main emphases that link these accounts to our lives in Christ. We'll first consider the emphasis on God's covenants and then the focus on God's kingdom. Let's start with God's covenants.

### God's Covenants

As we've seen, the dynamics of God's covenants played a significant role in this portion of our book. But in these chapters, the author of Samuel focused less on God's benevolence to David and more on how David failed to remain loyal to God. Our author also emphasized how God disciplined David with curses, including the death of his first son with Bathsheba and the terrible trials that befell David's kingdom through his sons Amnon and Absalom. Yet, despite these severe curses, God still responded to David's sincere humility and repentance with the blessing of sustaining his kingdom.

Now, as followers of Christ, we have to be careful to apply these covenant dynamics properly by drawing from the New Testament. In the first place, the account of David's later years of curses sets up a striking contrast between David and our great King Jesus. David and his sons failed to remain loyal to God and brought troubles to themselves and to God's people. But Jesus was perfectly loyal, continues to be perfectly

loyal, and will always be perfectly loyal to God. Christ's righteous fulfillment of God's every requirement assures us that, ultimately, everyone who is in Christ will receive eternal blessings from the Father.

But in the second place, we all know that the church of Christ today is far from perfect. Every Christian in the world fails to live up to God's standards of loyalty, just as David did. And, as passages like Hebrews 12:3-17 teach us, we all face the discipline of God in this life, as God sees fit. Now, for those who call themselves Christ's followers but never actually have come to saving faith, the troubles of this life will eventually lead to eternal curses from God. But for those who truly have repented and placed their faith in Christ, our perseverance through God's discipline will be rewarded with everlasting blessings from God when Christ returns.

So, much like ancient Israelites were to reject David's failures and imitate his sincere repentance, we are to do the same. We are to avoid the failures of David and his sons and, when we fail, turn to God in humble repentance. And much like God mercifully sustained David's inheritance in God's kingdom, God will mercifully sustain the inheritance of true believers in his kingdom as well.

We've seen how our Christian application of this portion of Samuel should focus on the dynamics of God's covenants in this stage of David's life. But we also need to be mindful of how God's kingdom in these chapters applies to us.

## God's Kingdom

In the New Testament, the theme of God's kingdom exalts Jesus as the son of David who overcomes the failures of David and his house. But in the last days, Christ doesn't overcome the failures of his people all at once. As we've already mentioned, he accomplishes this work in three stages: in the inauguration of his kingdom during his first advent; in the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history; and in the consummation of his kingdom when he returns in glory.

In this light, the stories of David's later years of curses help us recognize Jesus' victories in the inauguration of his kingdom. In his earthly ministry, Christ's righteous service culminated in his death on the cross. By dying, he paid the price for the failures of David, his house and every other true believer throughout the ages. Because of this, Christ received the reward of resurrection and ascension for his faithful service through the power of the Spirit. And everyone who comes to Christ is raised up to newness of life through the power of the Spirit. In Christ, we are set on a path to life eternal.

Even more than this, these chapters point us toward the ways Christ serves in perfect righteousness during the continuation of his kingdom. Throughout the history of the church, Jesus reigns at the right hand of the Father. And moment by moment, he carries out the will of the Father from his throne in heaven. For more than two thousand years, Jesus has reversed the failures of David and his house. He also has expanded God's kingdom further and further by spreading God's rule all over the world through the proclamation of the gospel.

And of course, when we consider the curses that came upon David and his house in his later years, we long for Christ's return at the consummation of our age. When Christ returns, he will utterly defeat every spiritual and physical enemy of God. He will



perfect each of his followers. And he will pour out everlasting blessings on everyone in his worldwide kingdom. On that day, the failures of God's people will only be a faint memory. And we will honor Christ as the one who overcame and granted everyone who trusts in him the immeasurable joy of the new creation.

Having explored the reign of King David in his earlier years of blessings and later years of curses, we should turn to the third major portion of our author's record in 2 Samuel 21–24 — the ongoing benefits that Israel could receive through David's house.

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## ONGOING BENEFITS

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As we've seen throughout this series, the author of Samuel wrote to encourage his original audience when they faced trials largely due to the disobedience of David's house. Their kingdom had divided, enemies had defeated them, and many of God's people had gone into exile. And let's face it, the stories about David's years of curses didn't offer Israel much hope for things to be better. But the author of Samuel wanted to reassure his audience about their future. So, rather than ending his book on a negative note, he pieced together a number of events that took place at different times in David's reign to show the kinds of blessings that a righteous king from David's house could still bring to God's people.

We'll look into the ongoing benefits of David's house in the same way that we've explored other portions of David's reign. First, we'll comment on the structure and content of this portion of Samuel. And then we'll turn to its Christian application. Let's begin with the structure and content of these closing chapters.

## STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

As we have in earlier sections, we'll first summarize these chapters in terms of God's kingdom and God's covenants. On the one side, the closing chapters of our book illustrate and reiterate some of the ways in which God's kingdom in Israel advanced at different times during David's reign. In these chapters, David brought relief from God's curses on the nation; God gave David great victories; and, in his own inspired words, David clarified once again that God had ordained his house as the instrument through which the kingdom would advance.

On the other side, the author of Samuel also explained the ongoing benefits of David and his dynasty in terms of the dynamics of God's covenants. These chapters illustrate how God gave divine benevolence to Israel at various times during David's reign. They demonstrate how God required loyalty from David and his descendants. And they point out how disobedience and obedience led to the consequences of curses and blessings. By pointing out these covenant dynamics throughout David's reign, our author made his point clear: The hope of blessings for every generation of God's people will come through the righteous rule of David's house.

It's not difficult to discern the structure and content of this part of our book. These chapters divide into six main sections:

- a story about Israel's relief from God's curse caused by *Saul's* sin in 2 Samuel 21:1-14;
- accounts of David's victorious warriors in 2 Samuel 21:15-22;
- David's dynastic song in 22:1-51;
- David's dynastic last words in 23:1-7;
- a list of David's victorious warriors and some of their heroic deeds in 23:8-38; and
- a story about Israel's relief from God's curse caused by *David's* sin in 24:1-25.

We should make some general comments about this arrangement. To begin with, the events reported in these chapters are not in chronological order. Interpreters differ on details, but a number of them have rightly dated the first account of Israel's relief from God's curse in David's later years. The first mention of events involving David's victorious warriors probably took place during David's earlier years of blessing. David's dynastic song is explicitly dated, in 22:1, to the time when "the Lord delivered [David] from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul" — very early in his reign. David's dynastic last words are called his "last words" to indicate that they were spoken near the end of his life. The second record of David's victorious warriors refers to events that took place at many different points throughout his reign. And when we compare the second example of Israel's relief from God's curse with its parallel in 1 Chronicles 21, we see that it refers to events that took place near the end of David's earlier years of blessing.

It's clear that, rather than arranging these chapters chronologically, our author arranged them topically to form a chiasm. As we see in many portions of Scripture, these chapters were purposefully structured so that later sections paralleled or echoed the topics of earlier sections.

**The reason that the final chapters of 2 Samuel appear to be out of chronological order is because they're out of chronological order. That's the short answer... We have, as well, in Genesis 37 and 38, a similar thing, where Genesis 38 will tell us of the sin of Judah with Tamar; 37 tells us the selling of Joseph into Egypt. And those appear to be out of order, and of course, the critic would say a clumsy editor put this together. But it's the skill of the writer to show why was it that Joseph needed to go into Egypt? It was because the brothers were losing their sense of family, they were losing their sense of the worship of God, and they needed to be sequestered in a place that would not permit them to mingle with the other nations... You have a similar thing at the end of the book of Judges where you have episodes concerning sexuality, gross sexuality and perversion, and you also have gross idolatry. And we know that those are out of chronological order as well, probably because the author wanted to show that these episodes of sexual immorality and of idolatry were characteristic of**

**the entire period, first going through the various judges and the ups and downs of the kingdom at that time, but then wanting to show that it was characteristic of the entire period of time to have these perversions going on. I would argue we have a similar thing going on in the book of 2 Samuel.**

— Dr. Chip McDaniel

As our outline suggests, the theme of relief from God’s curse appears twice. A focus on military matters appears in both records of David’s victorious warriors. And David’s dynastic song is associated with David’s dynastic last words because David focused on his dynasty in both of these passages. The repetition of topics in this chiasmic arrangement helps us grasp our author’s main interests in these chapters: The first and last sections suggest relief from the curses God had placed on Israel. The second and fifth sections draw attention to the blessings of victory over enemies. And the third and fourth sections indicate that God’s tremendous favor toward David extended to his dynasty.

These themes addressed issues that were crucial for the original audience of Samuel as they faced the challenges of the divided kingdom or the Babylonian exile. The original audience needed relief from God’s curses. They needed victory over their enemies. And they needed a king whom God favored. These events in David’s reign assured the original audience that these kinds of ongoing benefits could be theirs through the righteous rule of David’s house.

We’ll explore this chiasmic arrangement from the inside out, beginning with the two sections that report David’s own words: his dynastic song in 22:1-51 and his dynastic last words in 23:1-7.

## **Dynastic Song (2 Samuel 22:1-51)**

On the one side, David’s dynastic song, in 22:1-51, is a version of Psalm 18 — a psalm celebrating David’s deliverance from Saul. Like Psalm 18, David’s dynastic song begins with his praise for the Lord in verses 1-4. It then describes the Lord’s deliverance of David in verses 5-20. In verses 21-29, it gives the reasons for David’s deliverance. It returns to a description of the Lord’s deliverance in verses 30-46. And in verses 47-50, it turns to more praise for the Lord.

Now, as glorious as it was that God delivered David, 2 Samuel 22:51 adds a crucial postscript that helps us understand our author’s reason for including this song. As we read there:

**Great salvation he brings to his king, and shows steadfast love to his anointed, to David and his offspring forever (2 Samuel 22:51).**

This postscript harkens back to Hannah’s expression of confidence in what God would do through Israel’s king in the future. You’ll recall that in 1 Samuel 2:10, Hannah praised God, saying:

[The Lord] will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed (1 Samuel 2:10).

Similar to Hannah’s praise, David sang that God brings “great salvation” — or “deliverance” as it may be translated — “to his king.” And God “shows steadfast love to his anointed.” But these words went beyond Hannah’s praise by *naming* the blessed king and anointed one. It was “David,” and not just David himself, but also “his offspring.” And just as God’s covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7 indicated, this hope extends to David’s dynasty “forever.”

**God did choose David’s line to be a permanent dynasty over Israel and of course in its latter history in Judah. And what the Scripture says about that is that even from the beginning it was already chosen, God had already chosen Judah to be the tribe where it was going to be... The rulers were going to come from Judah... And what it says about David is that David was “a man after God’s own heart.” That’s why he chose him. And then Scriptures also said that David’s heart was fully after the Lord. He was *fully* dedicated to the Lord in every way... If you notice, every king after David, he’s basically compared to David, and they’ll say, “He did right in the eyes God, but he didn’t fully follow after the Lord, like their father David did.” So, David is the great example of what a king should be, and again, it’s because of David’s heart toward the Lord. He was fully obedient toward God, and so this is why his house was chosen forever.**

— Dr. Russell T. Fuller

## Dynastic Last Words (2 Samuel 23:1-7)

The author of Samuel reinforced this focus on God’s favor toward David and his house in David’s dynastic last words in 23:1-7. To emphasize that David’s speech bore divine authority, verse 1 speaks twice of this passage as “the oracle” of David, using the Hebrew word *ne’um* (נְאֻם). Biblical authors used this same term on a number of occasions to indicate the divine origin of Old Testament prophecy. We also see an emphasis on the divine origin of David’s last words in verse 2, where David said:

The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue (2 Samuel 23:2).

Our author stressed the inspiration of God’s Spirit to dispel any doubts about the reliability of David’s last words.

So what did God say through David in this speech? Well, in verses 3, 4, David announced that a king who “rules justly” and “in the fear of God” will bring tremendous blessings to his people. Then, in verse 5, David went on to apply this general principle of

righteous kingship to himself and to his dynasty. David knew that his house was special in the eyes of God. God had established an “everlasting covenant” with him in 2 Samuel 7. So, in his last words, David indicated that when his royal house ruled justly and in the fear of God, it would bring tremendous blessings to Israel. Finally, in verses 6, 7, David warned those who doubted God’s covenant with him not to lose hope in his house. He said:

Worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away ... they are utterly consumed with fire (2 Samuel 23:6-7).

Here the author of Samuel reiterated the call he extended to his original audience time and again. They were to place their hopes for the future in the house of David. God had ordained David’s house as Israel’s permanent dynasty by an everlasting covenant. There was no hope for the kingdom of God in Israel apart from this royal family.

With this focus on the centrality of David’s dynasty in mind, let’s turn to the second and fifth sections of David’s ongoing benefits: the accounts of David’s victorious warriors in 21:15-22 and his victorious warriors in 23:8-38. Together, these two sections highlight one of the great benefits that the righteous rule of David’s dynasty offered to Israel: victory over God’s enemies.

### **Victorious Warriors (2 Samuel 21:15-22)**

The first record of David’s victorious warriors in 21:15-22 quickly summarizes how God had blessed Israel with victories in four different battles against the Philistines. Each of these vignettes points out that David’s warriors killed “giants,” or great Philistine warriors, as they supported the establishment of David’s reign. Verses 15-17 offers a crucial perspective on all of these accounts. Here we read:

David grew weary ... Then David’s men swore to him, “You shall no longer go out with us to battle, lest you quench the lamp of Israel” (2 Samuel 21:15-17).

As we see here, even when David himself “grew weary,” God’s kingdom did not fail. Instead, David’s faithful warriors continued to sustain and expand David’s rule.

It isn’t difficult to understand why the author of Samuel included these battle reports at this point in his book. In his day, the house of David was weak, much like David had grown weak in his later years. But even in David’s weakness, God had blessed Israel with great victories. And the same could be true for Israel in every generation. If Israel’s warriors devoted themselves to the cause of David’s kingdom, they too would defeat great enemies.

## Victorious Warriors (2 Samuel 23:8-38)

The second record of David's victorious warriors in 23:8-38 echoes similar themes. In this section, the author of Samuel mentioned some thirty-six of David's great warriors by name. First, he described "the three mighty men" and some of their heroic deeds. Then we learn of "the thirty chief men" who fought alongside and for David. These men accomplished great feats of battle, for instance, in verse 8 Josheb-basshebeth "wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time." In verse 10, Eleazar "rose and struck down the Philistines ... And the Lord brought about a great victory that day." According to verses 11, 12, Shammah defended a plot of ground from the Philistines after the Israelites had fled. In verse 18, Abishai "wielded his spear against three hundred men." And in verses 20, 21, Benaiah struck down two soldiers of Moab, killed a lion, and defeated an Egyptian. Many of these men came to hold positions of authority later in David's kingdom.

Our author designed both records of David's great warriors to offer his original audience hope. During the divided monarchy and the Babylonian exile, Israel's enemies often seemed invincible. But much like these great warriors in David's day, Israel was not to give up hope in God's favor toward David. Rather, they were to trust God to raise up mighty warriors again for the house of David.

This brings us to the first and last sections of our author's focus on the ongoing benefits that God offered through David's house. Let's look at these two accounts of Israel's relief from God's curse in 21:1-14 and in 24:1-25.

## Relief from God's Curse (2 Samuel 21:1-14)

The first example of Israel's relief from God's curse is the well-known story of a famine that occurred during David's reign in 21:1-14. Verse 1 sets the stage by explaining that there was a famine in the land. As the famine continued, David prayed for insight. God revealed to him that Saul and his house had brought the famine on Israel because they had put the Gibeonites to death in defiance of Israel's treaty with them. Now, there's no biblical record of this event, but it was a serious violation of Saul's royal authority. In Joshua 9:15-18, the tribes of Israel had sworn to receive and protect the Gibeonites. But Saul violated this treaty, and because of his violation, God sent the curse of a famine against his people.

Chapter 21:2-6 then describes how David sought a way to make atonement to the Gibeonites, as was appropriate according to the law of Moses. At first, the Gibeonites humbly refused to ask for any atonement. Yet, at David's insistence, the Gibeonites called for the house of Saul to pay for this crime. They asked that seven of Saul's sons be given to them for execution, and David agreed to these terms.

In verses 7-9, the author of Samuel first explained that David did not turn over Mephibosheth because of his oath to Jonathan. Then our author recorded the names of the seven sons that David gave to the Gibeonites, and he described how the Gibeonites executed them.

This story closes with the end of the famine in verses 10-14. David continued to show himself honorable by demonstrating mercy to the house of Saul. He buried the bodies of Saul's sons along with the bones of Saul and Jonathan in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father. And, as a result of David's just and honorable actions, the second half of verse 14 says, "After that God responded to the plea for the land." The prayers on behalf of the nation were answered, and the famine came to an end.

Had the author of Samuel placed this story in another context, it could have had any number of implications for his audience. But in the context of the ongoing benefits of David's reign, it highlights David's role in bringing relief from a divine curse caused by Saul and his house. In this narrative, the author of Samuel affirmed that relief from the divine curse that Saul's family brought to Israel came through David's righteous rule. The implication of this event for the original audience was obvious. In their day, God's kingdom could still be free from God's curses *through* the righteous rule of David's dynasty.

### Relief from God's Curse (2 Samuel 24:1-25)

The parallel example of Israel's relief from God's curse appears in 24:1-25, the closing chapter of our book. This is the well-known story of David's census and God's subsequent curse on Israel. This account is similar to the story we've just seen in that it reports how David brought relief from God's curse against his people. But it is different in one very important way: This time, judgment came upon Israel because of David's own sin.

This final narrative begins in verses 1-9 with the account of David's census. Now, according to verse 1, God incited David to count his fighting men. But as the parallel in 1 Chronicles 21:1 explains, God did this through the instrumentality of Satan. We can't be sure exactly why taking this census was so sinful, but in all likelihood, David ordered this census to assess the strength of his army. This action indicated that David was no longer fully relying on God for Israel's protection. Whatever the case, David's general Joab objected, but David insisted, and Joab complied.

The narrative then reports David's repentance and God's judgment in verses 10-17. After taking the census, David realized his sin and acknowledged his guilt before God. Through the prophet Gad, the Lord offered David a choice of disciplines. Counting on God's great mercy, David asked that he fall into God's hands and not into the hands of men. But when the judgment of severe pestilence came upon Israel, nearly 70,000 people died. And as the angel of the Lord approached Jerusalem to destroy its people, David humbled himself even further. In 24:17, David said:

Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house (2 Samuel 24:17).

David fully acknowledged his guilt and called for God to turn his judgment from the people to David and his family.

The prophet Gad responded to David's sincere repentance, in verses 18-25, by ordering David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah. This was the same threshing floor where, decades later, Solomon would build the temple. David purchased the land and faithfully offered sacrifices on behalf of himself and the nation. The story then concludes in verse 25 with these words: "So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel."

The author of Samuel purposefully closed this story in this way to highlight the parallel with his earlier narrative in chapter 21. Both accounts of Israel's relief from God's curse close by reporting that God heard the pleas of his people on behalf of the land. And in both cases, God stopped his curses because of David's actions.

In this light, it's not difficult to understand why the author of Samuel ended his book with this story. His original audience lived in a time of severe judgment on the land of Israel. But here our author revealed how his original audience could find relief from God's curses — even curses brought upon them by David and his family. God highly favored David. And they were to rely on God's favor toward David by acknowledging that forgiveness and relief from God's judgment would come only through David's house.

With the structure and content of the ongoing benefits of David's reign in mind, we're ready to explore the Christian application of these chapters. What should we learn today from the closing chapters in the book of Samuel?

## CHRISTIAN APPLICATION

As we've seen, the author of Samuel ended his book with the ongoing blessings of David's reign. These blessings encouraged Israel to hope, even during trials brought on by the failures of David and his royal descendants. As Christians, we also need encouragement, but there's a crucial difference. Unlike the original audience of Samuel, we serve the great Messiah, Jesus, who has never failed to fulfill the will of God in any way. Of course, the perfect reign of Christ hasn't yet come in its fullness. We still face hardships because of sin. For these reasons, the closing chapters of the book of Samuel have much to offer us as well.

We'll approach Christian application of this portion of Samuel in ways that parallel our earlier discussions in this lesson. First, we'll discuss God's covenants, and second, we'll turn to God's kingdom. How did our author emphasize God's covenants in this portion of his book?

### God's Covenants

In a variety of ways, each episode that points to David's ongoing benefits draws attention to all of the dynamics of God's covenants. All six episodes point toward ways in which God continued to show benevolence to David and to Israel. In each one, our author held forth God's standards for grateful loyalty. And each episode touches on how God brought curses to Israel for disobedience and blessings for obedience.



As always, we must be careful to follow the teachings of the New Testament as we apply these perspectives on the dynamics of God's covenants. Our hearts must first turn to Christ himself. Every benevolence of God toward David and Israel in these chapters points us toward God's greater benevolences in Christ. Every act of loyalty reminds us of how superior Christ's perfect loyalty is. When these chapters point to the curses and blessings that fell on David and Israel, they call on us to acknowledge the everlasting curses and blessings that Christ brings.

But as important as it is to focus on Christ himself, we are also to apply the ongoing benefits of David's reign to our own lives. When we read of how God brought curses on the land because of Saul and David's sins, we're reminded that God brings temporary discipline to his church. And like David, we must respond by turning in humble repentance and faith in Christ.

When we learn of the victories of David's warriors, we're granted confidence in the struggles against evil that we face as God's people. And much like David affirmed God's ongoing favor toward him and his house, despite his own failures, we too can have confidence in God. God will not utterly forsake any man, woman or child who is in Christ because of the new covenant in Christ.

**Saul, in his best moments, defeats the Philistines and that encourages Israel to hope in the king. But we know, of course, Saul was tremendously unfaithful, and so God takes the kingdom from Saul, and by this he's saying, "I want you to transfer your hope and confidence from King Saul to King David and his line." ... We also see that God delivers all of Israel through many of David's mighty exploits as long as he has been faithful to the covenant of God with Moses. And see, so that's the key: place your hope and confidence in a man who is faithful to the covenant of God with Moses. Now, we know, of course, David sinned terribly and violated that covenant himself, so the readers are questioning, "Can we hope in David or his descendants to deliver us?" ... And so, the books of Samuel heavily emphasize the everlasting covenant that God graciously made with David and his descendants: one day there will be a faithful, righteous ruler who will be completely faithful to the covenant with Moses, so place your hope in that descendant of David to come. Now, we know he has come in the person of Christ who was sinless, who obeyed the law completely. That's the one who we today place our hope and confidence in.**

— Dr. Andrew Parlee

With the dynamics of God's covenants in this portion of David's life in mind, we should also keep in view how Christian application requires us to focus on the unfolding of God's kingdom in Christ.

## God's Kingdom

In these chapters, the author of Samuel made it clear that, because of his favor toward David and his house, God's kingdom in Israel would not fail. And in much the same way, because Jesus is the perfectly righteous son of David, who fulfills all that God promised to David, we know as Christ's followers that God's kingdom will not fail. Yet, as we've seen, Christ fulfills these hopes in three stages: in the inauguration of his kingdom during his first advent, in the continuation of his kingdom throughout church history, and in the consummation of his kingdom when he returns in glory.

First, these last chapters of Samuel turn our hearts toward everything Jesus accomplished in the inauguration of his kingdom. God's favor toward David's house began to be fulfilled in Christ. As David's warriors defeated their enemies, Jesus decisively defeated evil in his death, resurrection and ascension. And, as David rescued Israel from God's curses, Jesus secured the rescue of his followers from God's eternal curses.

Second, these chapters also call on us to consider how, throughout the continuation of his kingdom, Christ has superseded all that David accomplished. God's favor toward David and his house is fulfilled by Christ's expanding kingdom. The accomplishments of David's warriors are fulfilled by Jesus' ever-growing victory over the enemies of God throughout our age. And David's role in relieving God's curses on the land of Israel is fulfilled in greater ways every day as Jesus intercedes on our behalf before the throne of God.

And third, as God's continuing blessings on David's house pointed the original audience toward the future of God's kingdom, they also point us toward what Christ will accomplish at the consummation of our age. When Christ returns, he will display God's faithfulness to the house of David. He will finally defeat all of God's spiritual and physical enemies, and will pour out everlasting blessings on all who have believed in him. And, as David brought relief from God's curses on the land, Jesus will deliver the entire creation from God's curses forever when he returns in glory and all things are made new.

## CONCLUSION

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In this lesson on King David, we've followed David's kingship from his earlier years of blessings in both Hebron and Jerusalem, to his later years of curses, when his sin with Bathsheba led to initial and extended troubles for his kingdom. Yet, despite these curses, we've also seen that the author of Samuel ended his book with accounts of David's dynastic words, victorious warriors and relief from God's curses that illustrated the ongoing benefits offered to Israel through the righteous rule of David's house.

The record of David's reign in the book of Samuel offered crucial guidance for the people of Israel as they faced the failures of their kingdom. Although David and his descendants failed and brought God's discipline on the people of Israel, the faithful were still to put their hopes in God's promises to David. You and I also face challenges today

because we continue to fall short of God's requirements of loyal service. But the wonderful story of David's reign reminds us of something we must never forget. God's promises to the house of David are fulfilled in our great King Jesus. God is ready to bless us and to discipline us in Christ. But we can be sure of this: God will sustain his faithful people until Christ returns and we inherit the glorious kingdom of God in the new heavens and new earth.

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