

April Answers

- 1) [April 1] Israel's first civil war. It began when a **Levite** and his **concubine** decided to spend the night in the **Benjamite** city of Gibeah. The Levite turned aside from Jebus (**Jerusalem** of the Jebusites; cf. Deut 7:1), only to find that the men of Gibeah were as bad or worse than the "**foreigners**" he wanted to avoid (Judges 19:12). What happened that night teaches us that when we compromise, we begin to **Canaanize** (we begin turning into the very thing God hates). It also shows us how **quickly** a society can degenerate into moral depravity (Judges 20:28—Phinehas was still priest in those days!). Gibeah had become like **Sodom**, and years later, **Hosea** would allude to "the days of Gibeah" to expose the moral rot of his own day (cf. Hos 9:9; 10:9). How sobering to realize that when we refuse to **submit** ourselves to God, we share a stubborn and rebellious heart with the sexual perverts of Gibeah. The Levite took his concubine home and used her dismembered body to call for retribution. The Benjamites refused to give up the perpetrators, and a bloody civil war began. This teaches us that we set a **snare** for our own feet when we **pity** those God says to destroy (Deut 7:16; cf. Deut 13:12–16). At the beginning of the war, the other tribes **inquired** of God at Bethel, but it wasn't because they loved God or were committed to doing His will. They were just going through the religious **motions**. It wasn't until they lost **40,000** men that they noticed God never said He would go **with** them or **give** the Benjamites into their hand (compare Judges 20:18, 23, 28). We should take heed, for this can happen to us if we ask God to bless our plans with **success** without first giving God our **loyalty** and allegiance. Summary: The people rightly condemned the wickedness of the men of Gibeah, but *not* because they loved God and respected His law. They took action against Gibeah because **they** thought it was the right thing to do. When we do what is right in our own eyes, the result is a confusing **jumble** of virtue and vice that shames God and dead-ends in disaster.
- 2) [April 2] The **cycle** of the judges (Jdg 2–3). Joshua's generation died, and their children "did not **know** the LORD." (Jdg 2:10). The problem wasn't **ignorance**, for the next generation certainly knew *about* God and His works. The real issue was that they refused to honor and **obey** God (like Eli's sons in 1 Sam 2:12). This led to a cycle of **rebellion**, retribution, **repentance**, and restoration that Israel experienced over and over. Each generation **failed** to convince the next to love and serve God, yet this task was at the very center of the Law (Deut 6:4–9). This teaches us how crucial it is to **disciple** our families. God has made it clear that it's **our** job to train our children (not the church's or the government's). They learn the most from our example, and the **home** is the most effective place to pass on the faith to the next generation. Knowing the people would disregard His covenant, God **allowed** some of the Canaanites to remain in Israel's territory. He did this for several reasons: (1) To **punish** Israel for their apostasy (Jdg 2:3); (2) To **test** their loyalty and love for Him (Jdg 3:4); and (3) To **teach** the next generation to depend on Him to fight their battles (Jdg 3:2). This teaches us that we can't live off a **previous** generation's faith. We must demonstrate our own **personal** loyalty and commitment to God.
- 3) [April 3] The judgeship of Deborah (Jdg 4–5). Deborah, who was a **prophetess**, was judging Israel during the time of **Jabin's** tyranny. While women did on rare occasions rise to prominence in Israel, Deborah was unique in that she was the **first** and **only** woman to exercise civil authority at God's direction (Jdg 2:18). This shows us that God sometimes uses women to highlight the **refusal** of men to shoulder the responsibility of **leadership**. Indeed, the commander of Israel's forces, Barak, was presented as a man whose faith was **weak**. God told him to go and assured him of victory, but he wouldn't budge unless Deborah went with him. Deborah agreed to go, but she told Barak that the honor of victory would not be his—it would go to a **woman**. And that's exactly what happened. Sisera fled to the home of an ally, Heber, only to have Heber's wife, **Jael**, put a tent peg through his

skull. This teaches us that we should never put **conditions** on our obedience. If we do, God may give the **honor** to someone else, and we won't **achieve** all that we could have for God's glory. There can be no "**if**" in a response of obedient faith.

- 4) [April 4] The judgeship of Gideon (Jdg 6–8). The people cried out to God for help, and God sent a **prophet** to remind them that their plight was of their **own** making (Jdg 6:1–10). Then, in **mercy** (for there is no record that they repented), God commissioned Gideon, an insignificant man from a **small** family in the tribe of west **Manasseh**, as Israel's deliverer. God's choice of Gideon shows us that He uses "what is **weak** in the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor 1:26–29). God does this so that no man may **boast** before Him, for He alone is to be glorified (cf. Jdg 7:2). God greeted Gideon by saying, "The LORD is with you, O **mighty** man of valor" (Jdg 6:12), but Gideon, who was very aware of his shortcomings, completely missed the point: *If the LORD is **with** you, then you are indeed mighty.* God was trying to teach Gideon that it was not his inadequacy but God's **sufficiency** that counted. It's encouraging to see how God stayed with Gideon every step of the way, and how He patiently made **allowances** for his fleeces and his fears (Jdg 6:35–40; 7:9–11). God gave Gideon victory over the Midianites, and God used him to **punish** the wayward Israelites of the Transjordan. Their scorn of Gideon and his men was an act of **treason**, for by refusing to give aid to Gideon, they were **helping** the Midianites (cf. Jdg 5:23; Luke 11:23).

- 5) [April 5] The legacy of Gideon (Jdg 8:29–10:5). Israel turned their back on God after Gideon's **death**. This time their idolatry was revealed as the fruit of an **ungrateful** heart. They weren't thankful for the way God had delivered them from their enemies, and they didn't show kindness to Gideon's household. As Jotham said, they had dealt treacherously with the sons of the man who had risked his own life to save theirs (Jdg 9:16–18). This helps us to see wickedness and rebellion from God's **perspective**. When we refuse to obey God and insist on having our own way, we **scorn** the sacrifice of Christ and **spit** on His precious blood. Abimelech conspired with the men of **Shechem**, and with their blessing and their money, he led a team of assassins to Ophrah and killed all but one of his half-brothers. If only Gideon had never taken a **concubine** in Shechem! A life of sacrifice and service can be ruined by the legacy of a **single** sin. How important it is to obey God in all things! Jotham escaped the slaughter and called down a **curse** on Abimelech and Shechem: "Let fire come out from Abimelech and consume the men of Shechem and Beth-millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem and from Beth-millo, and consume Abimelech" (Jdg 9:20). Abimelech scoffed at Jotham's curse, and he ruled over Israel for the next **three** years (justice may seem slow at times). His wickedness, however, did not escape God's notice. Abimelech and the men of Shechem had **sown** treachery, and God made sure they both **reaped** a bloody harvest. God sent an evil **spirit** to sow discord between them (God intervenes in the affairs of men), and it wasn't long before the Shechemites went up in smoke and Jotham's curse came crashing down on Abimelech's head (literally). This teaches us that no one ever gets **away** with doing evil. Even if the wicked go to their graves in peace, God's fiery judgment will catch them in the end.

- 6) [April 6] Ruth showed true **love** for her mother-in-law Naomi by remaining faithful to her after the death of her husband. She also vowed to stay with Naomi and **worship** God alone. As God's chosen nation, Israel should have set the standard of high moral living for the other nations. Yet it was Ruth, a **Moabite**, who displayed genuine spiritual character in the days when the Israelites left God for other gods. This teaches us that God "desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Boaz treated Ruth with compassion when she and Naomi needed food, and he happily took her as his wife (see Heb 2:14–15; 1 Pet 1:18–19). God **enabled** her to bear a child who would be the forefather of **David**, Israel's greatest king. In this way Ruth was an ancestor of **Jesus**, the promised Messiah! Ruth was unaware of the role she played in God's plan to save the world, and this teaches us that there may be great things that God will accomplish through us even

after we've completed our **earthly** service. If we remain **faithful** to God, our legacy will extend far beyond our lifetime, and the rewards will outweigh any sacrifice God calls on us to make!

- 7) [April 7] The judgeship of Jephthah and the birth of Samson (Jdg 10:6–13:25). Israel once again left God for the Baals, and God sold them into the hands of the **Philistines** and the **Ammonites**. They cried out to God for help, but He refused to listen to them: “Go and cry out to the **gods** whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress” (Jdg 10:14). God’s rejection was designed to **test** their sincerity (cf. Matt 15:21–28). Would they genuinely **repent** and turn away from their idols? Sure enough, they did! The people “put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer” (Jdg 10:16 NASB). How great is God’s **mercy**! It was no coincidence that God used Jephthah to bring peace to the Transjordan. The man they had **cast** aside was the one who became their savior (cp. Jdg 10:11–14 to 11:7). Jephthah was not perfect; in fact, he is a sobering example of someone who made a **rash** vow (cf. Deut 23:21–23). His daughter, his one and **only** child, ended her life in either permanent service to the **Tabernacle** as a **living** sacrifice (cf. Num 3:12–13; Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22) or in **death** as a burnt offering. While we aren’t certain of the girl’s fate, we *are* certain that Jephthah’s mistake stands as a **warning** to us against making foolish vows (cf. Ecc 5:4–6). It also shows us that people have a tendency to make **long-term** promises in order to realize **short-term** benefits. We need to watch out for this tendency in our own lives.
- 8) [April 8] The birth of Samuel and the judgment of Eli’s house (1 Sam 1–4). Hannah was barren because God had **closed** her womb, but she did not become **bitter** or turn to other **gods** for help. Instead, she poured out her heart to God and asked Him to look on her misery. This teaches us that we should always bring our problems to God. He said, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will **sustain** you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved” (Ps 55:22). Little did Eli know as he watched Hannah’s earnest yet silent prayer, that God was about to raise up a prophet and judge whose life would be a **rebuke** to the wickedness of his own sons. God called Samuel to speak for Him, and Samuel responded in obedience. “Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and He let none of his words **fall** to the ground” (1 Sam 3:19; Josh 21:45). This shows us how much God longs for those who will say, “Speak, LORD, for your servant **hears**” (1 Sam 3:9). God warned Eli twice, once through a man of God and once through Samuel, that his house was about to be **judged**. Eli **scolded** his sons, but he did not **discipline** them or **remove** them from service. If we coddle our children and excuse their sin, we **dishonor** God and set the stage for their ultimate destruction. The ark was captured, Eli’s sons were killed, and his own neck was broken. Eli refused to honor God above his children, and his life ended in tragedy.
- 9) [April 9] The Philistines’ encounter with the ark, and the judgeship of Samson. God allowed the ark to be captured in order to teach both the **Philistines** and the **Israelites** a lesson about who He really is. The Israelites learned that God couldn’t be used like a **good-luck** charm, and the Philistines learned that God was greater than their false god **Dagon**. Both sides were shown that God can **fight** His own battles and that He will be treated as **holy** before men (cf. Num 20:12; 1 Sam 6:19–20). The judgeship of Samson is a study in **contrasts**: (a) he would not cut his hair, but he ate honey from the **carcass** of a lion, (b) he was devoted to Israel, but he **lusted** after Philistine women, (c) he had faith in God’s power (Heb 11:32), but he lived a dissolute and **decadent** life, (d) he was self-centered and vengeful, but he was willing to give his **life** to destroy the Philistines. Perhaps the story of Samson is meant to teach us more about **God** than about Samson. God stirred his spirit (Jdg 13:25), and his desire for the woman in Timnah was “of the **LORD**,” for God was seeking an occasion against the Philistines (Jdg 14:4). This shows that God can **use** even the sinful desires of a flawed individual to accomplish His purpose. The fact that God used Samson shows that God’s **blessing** does not equal His **approval**. Too often we mistakenly think that a person’s success in ministry means that God

approves of everything they say and do. How much **more** could have been achieved if Samson had been faithful to God? He died with his enemies, and once again, sin brought a tragic end to a life of great potential.

- 10) [April 10] Israel's rejection of God, and the anointing of Saul as king. The elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah and complained that his sons, whom he had appointed as judges, did not walk in his ways. They said, "Give us a **king** to judge us" (1 Sam 8:6). Their request sounded **sincere**, but their hearts were full of **rebellion** (1 Sam 12:17). God told Samuel that their rejection of his sons (and thus of Samuel himself) was actually a rejection of **God**. This teaches us that if we reject the leader God places over us, we're rejecting Him and committing **idolatry** (1 Sam 8:7–8). [*Samuel's sons were corrupt, and his decision to appoint them as judges was a mistake, but a wrong choice by God's man doesn't give us the license to reject him as our authority.*] The elders' true motives were **sinful**. Instead of obeying God's command to be salt and light to the pagan peoples around them (cf. Exod 19:6; Deut 4:5–8), they wanted to be "**like** all the nations" (1 Sam 8:5, 20). This teaches us that we should not resent the **distinctions** that separate us from the world; rather, we should **embrace** them and use them to reach the lost. God warned Israel of the consequences of demanding a king, but they insisted, and He finally gave them what they wanted. [*Far better for us to listen to God than for God to listen to us!* (1 Sam 8:7).] God chose Saul as a man to meet their **expectations**, a man who truly **looked** like a king. But did Saul have the **character** to match his grand appearance? Only time would tell.
- 11) [April 11] Saul's defeat of the Ammonites, Samuel's farewell speech and Saul's first sin. Saul passed the first **challenge** to his kingship with flying colors. The fact that he was still out working in the fields shows that he was **humble** and **hardworking**. The Spirit empowered him, gave him wisdom and helped him lead the people into battle. God gave him a decisive victory, and instead of seeking **revenge** on those who had rejected him as king, he was merciful and **forgiving**. Saul seemed to be everything a king should be. Samuel took the opportunity of the kingship renewal at **Gilgal** to warn the people not to forget God. Their request for a king had been an attempt to gain **deliverance** from their enemies without true **repentance** (1 Sam 12:12), but now that they had a king, they should **recommit** themselves to following God. This teaches us that God's will for our lives is **dynamic**. Sinful choices in the **past** need not keep us from getting back into the **center** of His will. At each decision point, we have the ability, through God's grace, to "**fear** the LORD and **serve** him and **obey** his voice" (1 Sam 12:14–15). Sadly, Saul **failed** the next challenge to his kingship. This shows us that a person's true character is only revealed under intense **pressure**. Instead of repenting, Saul **justified** himself to Samuel (1 Sam 13:12), [*he excused his sin by pointing out all the extenuating circumstances*] and his refusal to humble himself cost him the perpetuation of his kingly **dynasty**.
- 12) [April 12] Jonathan's victory, Saul's rash oath, and God's final rejection of Saul as king of Israel. Jonathan's daring attack on the Philistines was motivated by his **belief** that God's power was what mattered, not the **size** of Israel's army (1 Sam 14:6 NIV). This produced a great **expectation**: "Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf." Jonathan was convinced that God could save "by many or by **few**," and so he placed himself at God's disposal. What an inspiring example of true faith—a faith that is founded on God's **character**! Jonathan chose a specific **sign** as a way to discern God's will, and then he acted **boldly** when God confirmed his plan. In this way, Jonathan's "**perhaps**" was *part of his faith* (1 Sam 14:6 NIV). He believed in God's ability, but he didn't presume to **dictate** to God. True faith recognizes its degree of **ignorance** and bows its knee to God's sovereignty. Yet faith also retains its **excitement** at the thought of what God can do on behalf of His people (D. R. Davis, "1 Samuel," *FOBC*, p. 147). God gave Jonathan a great victory that was sadly **marred** by his father's rash actions. Saul's penchant for making oaths and vows is telling, for those who harbor **sin** in their heart often compensate with displays of **zeal** and **piety**. Moreover, Saul's foolish and self-centered

behavior foreshadowed his disobedience in the matter of the Amalekites. There it is clear that Saul placed his own **opinion** of what should be done above God's clear command. When confronted by Samuel, Saul **justified** his actions and **refused** to humble himself before God. Once again, he showed that he was more concerned about his **image** than he was about obeying God.

- 13) [April 13] David's secret anointing as king of Israel and his victory over Goliath of Gath. When God chose Saul as Israel's first king, He gave the people a king according to **their** desires. This time God chose a king for **Himself**, one who would do His **will** (cf. 1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). When Samuel saw **Eliab** he thought, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him," but God told Samuel not to judge a man's worthiness to be king on the basis of his **physical** appearance. This teaches us that **inner** character is more important than **outward** appearance. However, this *does not mean* that God doesn't care about our physical appearance. The Bible is filled with commands that relate directly to **deportment** (e.g., Exod 28:42–43; Deut 22:5; 1 Pet 3:3–5; 1 Cor 11:4–6). Rather, it means that people are more than how they **appear** on the outside, and that proper judgment always takes a person's **character** into account. Further, since our physical appearance is the only part of us that many people ever see, our outward appearance plays a significant role in our **testimony** to the world. We should dress in clothing that is **appropriate** for a Christian, with a godly sense of **shame** and self-control (cf. 1 Tim 2:9). Samuel anointed David as king, but for the moment, things remained **unchanged**—he still kept his father's sheep. This teaches us that God's **timetable** is often different than ours. We need to **wait** patiently on Him for direction. Eventually God honored David in the sight of all Israel by giving him a great victory over Goliath of Gath.
- 14) [April 14] Saul's appreciation for David turned to **jealousy** when the people began to applaud David's exploits. Under the influence of an **evil** spirit, Saul tried twice to kill David with a spear. This teaches us that jealousy is a deadly sin—it is one step short of **murder**. God helped David escape, and he continued to serve Saul and defeat his enemies. This is an inspiring example of returning **good** for evil (cf. Rom 12:17–21), and it teaches us the importance of **loving** those who mistreat us (cf. Matt 5:43–48). David's success and popularity did not make him **proud**; he remained humble, even when the entire nation praised him (1 Sam 18:16). His humility came from a deep sense of his **dependence** on God. He understood that he was prospering in all his ways because God was **with** him (1 Sam 18:14). When Saul sent men to David's house to kill him, David turned to God in **prayer** (Ps 59). He called out to God to **deliver** him and **destroy** his enemies, and he dealt with his feelings of frustration and fear by **reminding** himself of God's unfailing love and kindness. David's **praise** in Psalm 59 shows us how to transform our emotions by **focusing** our minds on God and **choosing** to trust Him in spite of negative circumstances.
- 15) [April 15] David and Jonathan's sad parting, and David's capture and escape from the Philistines in Gath. Saul and Jonathan both recognized that it was God's **will** for David to be the next king of Israel, yet their **reactions** were completely different. Saul tried to kill David (extreme **opposition**) while Jonathan helped David (cheerful **obedience**). Jonathan could have stepped aside and done nothing, but instead he actively **supported** and defended the man who would one day be king in his place. This teaches us that commitment to God's will means obeying in spite of personal **loss**. [*Are we so committed to doing God's will that we would cheerfully help someone gain a position that should have been ours?*] After leaving Jonathan, David went to Ahimelech the priest in Nob. David **deceived** Ahimelech to gain his help, and while his motive may have been good (he no doubt wanted Ahimelech to be able to honestly claim **ignorance** of the truth), his deception was **questionable** at best and **sinful** at worst. This shows us how easy it is to rely on our own **devices** instead of on God in times of need. David knew that Saul wouldn't rest until he was dead, and he decided to take refuge with Saul's enemies, the **Philistines**. The idea of David defecting was exciting at first, but then prudence prevailed ("Is this not David the **king** of the land?"), and they seized him.

David saved himself by acting insane, and Achish threw him out of Gath in disgust: ‘Do I lack **madmen** around here? Get him out!’ Once again God had delivered David from death.

- 16) [April 16] After his escape from Gath, David hid in the cave of **Adullam**. Those who were in distress, in debt or were discontent joined him, and he became captain of about **400** men. David **poured** out his heart to God at Adullam and told Him how **overwhelmed** he felt (Ps 142:1–3). This teaches us to bring our feelings of grief, anger and discouragement to God in **prayer**. Saul soon got word that people were allying with David, and he accused his servants of betraying him (1 Sam 22:6–8). Doeg, seeing an opportunity to curry favor with Saul, told him that Ahimelech had helped David in Nob. Saul sent for Ahimelech, ignored his protest of innocence, and ordered all the priests to be **executed**. Saul’s servants refused, but Doeg was only too pleased to obey. When **Abiathar** escaped and told David, David was heartsick and angry. To comfort himself, he wrote a song that contrasted the **folly** of evil with the **wisdom** of godliness (Ps 52:1–9). This psalm teaches us that it’s appropriate to call for God’s **judgment** on the wicked and to take **satisfaction** in the fact that righteousness will triumph over evil (Ps 52:5–7). David continued to evade Saul and even managed to save Keilah from the Philistines. Sadly, his only thanks was treachery and **betrayal**. When the Ziphites alerted Saul to David’s presence among them, David asked God for **vindication** and **vengeance** (Ps 54:1, 5). This teaches us to make room for God’s **wrath**. God will exalt those who wait on Him! [*Saul was so bent on destroying David that he saw an opportunity to kill him as coming from God (1 Sam 23:7)! We should take warning, for when we want something badly enough, it’s easy to start interpreting circumstances to suit our own desires rather than God’s will.*]
- 17) [April 17] David had the chance to kill Saul on two different occasions: in the cave in the wilderness of En Gedi and in the wilderness of Ziph. Both times, David’s closest friends advised him to kill Saul. The first time, David said, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD’s **anointed**” (1 Sam 24:6). Even cutting off the **hem** of Saul’s robe bothered David’s conscience, for the robe was a **symbol** of Saul’s kingship, and cutting it off was an affront to Saul’s **authority**. This teaches us that, apart from God’s direct command (cf. 2 Kgs 9:2–10), we must never raise our hand (**literally** or **figuratively**) against those whom God has put in authority over us. We must also keep our conscience **clear** (1 Sam 24:5). The second time, David said, “Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD’s anointed and be **guiltless**?” (1 Sam 26:9). God had anointed David as king, yet David refused to become king by killing Saul. This teaches us that the **means** we use to accomplish God’s work are just as important as the work itself. David’s attitude toward Nabal (“**foolish**”) was quite different, and only Abigail’s wisdom kept him from bloodguilt. Her speech is a model of how to **appeal** to a powerful person who is filled with wrath. When she was finished, David said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who **sent** you this day to meet me” (1 Sam 25:32). David perceived God’s hand behind Abigail’s words, and he was **grateful** to God for keeping him from “working salvation with my own hand” (1 Sam 25:33). How wonderful to serve a God who does all He can to keep us from sin!
- 18) [April 18] David once again sought refuge with the Philistines. His feigned attacks on Israelite territory were so convincing that Achish invited him to join the Philistines in their final showdown with Saul. When Saul realized how **large** the Philistine army was, he panicked. He sought God’s guidance and direction, but God was **silent**. Saul discovered to his dismay that “The Lord is far from the **wicked**, but he hears the prayer of the **righteous**” (Prov 15:29). In desperation, Saul sought for a **medium** who could bring Samuel up from the dead. This further **sin** showed that he was still unwilling to repent. Saul told Samuel, “**God** has turned away from me and answers me no more” (1 Sam 28:15). Yet Saul was not the victim, for Samuel made it clear that **Saul** had first turned away from God. Those who **refuse** to do what they know is right should not be surprised when God refuses to hear their cries for help. Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would soon be dead. Saul

could have **repented** then, but instead he confirmed a parable Jesus told many years later: “They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the **dead**” (Luke 16:31 NIV). God **graciously** allowed Samuel to speak to Saul one last time before the end, for God is not willing that any should perish. How tragic that Saul would throw away this precious chance to humble himself before God!

- 19) [April 19] David and Saul both faced a deadly crisis in their lives. Their reactions were completely different: David “strengthened himself in the **LORD** his God,” while Saul turned to a **medium**, and finally to **himself**. The contrast between David and Saul teaches us that when we’re overwhelmed by the challenges and difficulties of life, we should turn to God for help in time of need. No matter how hopeless the future may seem, the answer is to **trust** God and **rest** in His loving arms. Saul’s suicide was a tragic end to a man of great potential. He had all the qualities that people look for in a leader, and God personally established his kingship with a mighty victory (cf. 1 Sam 11). Yet Saul had a fatal flaw. He was **insecure** and sensitive about his **image**, and his insecurity caused him to be more concerned about himself than about following and obeying God’s will. As long as circumstances were favorable, Saul stood strong, but when **pressure** came, he gave in to temptation instead of trusting God. Then, in place of true **repentance**, Saul tried to please God with displays of **piety** and **zeal**, never understanding that true spirituality is the result of a **lifetime** of consistent obedience. Christian character is built one **decision** at a time. Like a brick, each act of obedience is small in itself, but over time those decisions pile up to form a **fortress** of courage and integrity that can withstand the attacks of the enemy.
- 20) [April 20] David became king of **Judah** while Ish-bosheth became king of **Israel**. David showed remarkable **restraint** after Saul’s death. He did not proclaim himself king; instead, he asked God what he should do next. God told him to go to **Hebron**, and he stayed there for 7½ years. This teaches us the importance of **consulting** God before we make a decision. Even if we know something is God’s will for us, we need to wait on His **timing** instead of taking matters into our own hands. The years passed by, and even though the house of Saul was at war with the house of David, David made no effort to **lead** his men into battle against his fellow Israelites. David’s attitude here is amazing. Saul hounded him for years and tried over and over to kill him, yet David was not consumed with hatred or a desire to destroy Saul’s house. This is in sharp contrast with **Joab**, who was obsessed with avenging his brother’s death. Joab murdered **Abner** the first chance he got, and his selfish act put David’s patient negotiations in jeopardy. Only David’s sincere and heartfelt **sorrow** at Abner’s death saved Israel from more bloodshed. This shows us how crucial it is to promote peace and reconciliation and leave **vengeance** in God’s capable hands. David rebuked Joab for what he had done and forced him to weep over Abner’s grave, but he did not punish his nephew according to the **law** (cf. Num 35). Are we willing to obey God’s will even when it concerns the sin of our own family or relatives?
- 21) [April 21] The murder of Ish-bosheth and David’s coronation ceremony at Hebron. This was the **third** time David was anointed king: first he was privately anointed by **Samuel** (1 Sam 16:13), then he was crowned king of **Judah** (2 Sam 2:4), and finally he was anointed king of all **Israel**. It had taken almost **20** years for God’s promise to be fulfilled, and during those years, David waited patiently on God. This teaches us the importance of **patience** in Christian ministry and the need for **preparation** before we can be successful in the tasks God has given us. God’s promises are worth waiting for, even when His timetable doesn’t match our **expectations** or desires. David’s success as king was due in no small part to the **mighty** men who supported him. Within his army were two elite groups: the “**Three**” and the “**Thirty**” (2 Sam 23; 1 Chr 11). These men showed **bravery** in battle as well as **wisdom** in leadership. This should motivate us to seek out strong believers who will hold us **accountable** and help us be successful in our Christian walk. David **inspired** his men to achieve the impossible and fulfill their true potential. His example is a model for us to follow in our homes, our

churches, and our communities.

- 22) [April 22] The Philistines tried to kill David after he became king. David **sought** God's guidance in each battle, **obeyed** God's instructions, and gave God the **glory** for the victory (2 Sam 5:19–25). This is an excellent example of how we should fight our own battles. David's decision to capture **Jerusalem** showed political and military wisdom. The fortress of Zion was located in neutral territory on the border of Benjamin and Judah, and it was still occupied by the **Jebusites**, a Canaanite tribe that had never been expelled (Jdg 1:21). By making Jerusalem the capital of Israel, David avoided giving **preeminence** to any tribe, which was very important given the recent civil war. This teaches us that a wise leader understands his people's feelings and makes prudent decisions to **bring** people together. God gave David great honor and success, and he recognized that God had prospered him, not for his own sake, but for the sake of **Israel** (2 Sam 5:12). This reminds us to always use our **position** and **success** to further the cause of God's kingdom. David also showed his love for God's name by trying to bring the **ark** to Jerusalem. He consulted with his advisers but he neglected to consult God's **law** (1 Chr 13:1–4; cf. 1 Chr 15:13). This led to humiliation and death, for God had told Israel exactly how the ark should be moved (Num 4:5–15). David learned an important lesson from this disaster, and he was careful to follow God's law the next time he tried to move the ark.
- 23) [April 23] David brings the ark to Jerusalem. David asked the Levites to prepare a musical procession that would be a worthy accompaniment to this great occasion. The cymbals, harps, lyres, trumpets and singing **elevated** the people's hearts and minds, **focused** their attention on God, and helped them **express** their feelings of joy and praise. It also helped seal this moment in their **memory** for years to come. This teaches us that it's good to begin a task by **praising** God, for it will inspire us to give Him our best. David was right there in the middle of the procession, "dancing before the LORD with all his **might**" (2 Sam 6:14). He was not **worried** about what people would think of him, and he did not allow his position as king to keep him from whole-hearted celebration. In contrast, Michal was so disgusted by his undignified behavior that she could not rejoice in the ark's return. She looked out the window and saw David, but she did not see **God**. How tragic that her pride caused her to miss out on God's glorious presence. One of the songs that was sung at this joyous event was Psalm 105. This psalm is a celebration of God's "wondrous **works**" for Israel, from the sojourn in Egypt to the conquest. It teaches us that true praise delights to **remember** what God has done and rejoices to **tell** others of His mighty deeds. The psalm ends with a call for obedience: "And he gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the people's toil, that they might **keep** his statutes and **observe** his laws" (Ps 105:44–45). This reminds us that we serve God out of **gratitude** for all that He has done for us!
- 24) [April 24] Psalms for returning the ark to Jerusalem. In Psalm 96, the writer proclaimed God's glory and strength, and he called on the **nations** to come and worship God. This teaches us that the desire to **witness** naturally flows from a heart that is full of appreciation for God's blessings. As we **reflect** on God's goodness to us, we will find ourselves wanting to tell others about Him! In Psalm 106, the writer remembered Israel's ingratitude and **rebellion** from the Exodus until the present time. The fact that the people turned away from God and worshiped idols after all the great miracles they had seen teaches us that we're very susceptible to **forgetting** God and giving in to the pressures of the world (Ps 106:13, 21). We must **meditate** on what God has done for us so we won't be drawn away by temptation. The writer went on to say that God allowed Israel's enemies to oppress them in order to **discipline** them for sin (Ps 106:40–41). This teaches us that we can expect to be **rebuked** when we stray from God's will. When this happens, we should **welcome** His discipline and **repent** and **rededicate** ourselves to a life of covenant faithfulness. The psalm ends with praise for God's lovingkindness, for He always keep His promises. David returned home to **bless** his family, only to be met by Michal's caustic **contempt**. It's easy to condemn her harsh words, but how many times have

we squandered a blessing because we were upset over some perceived offense by our spiritual authority?

- 25) [April 25] David's war with the Ammonites and his adultery with Bathsheba. When Nahash of Ammon died, David reached out to Hanun in a gesture of kindness and friendship. Hanun listened to bad advice and believed the **worst** of David's ambassadors. He humiliated them and sent them away in shame. This shows us how easy it is to be **suspicious** of people and to question their motives. While we should be cautious and **wise** in our dealings with others, we should not assume their motives are **evil**. When Hanun realized his blunder, he refused to **admit** his mistake and spent an enormous sum of **money** preparing for war. This teaches us that it **costs** more to cover up an error than to admit it honestly. Rather than **compound** a mistake by being stubborn and defensive, we should seek forgiveness and reconciliation as soon as we realize our offense. After defeating Hanun's hired army of Arameans (Syrians), Joab besieged the Ammonite capital city of **Rabbah**. David remained in Jerusalem during the siege, and one evening, as he was walking on the palace roof, he saw a **very** beautiful woman taking a bath. Instead of **turning** away and resisting temptation, David **watched** her and then **inquired** about who she was. This teaches us the importance of **fleeing** temptation. We can't keep ourselves from being tempted, but we can refuse to **act** on those desires (2 Tim 2:22; Jam 1:14–15). David never dreamed that he would **murder** one of his own mighty men, yet that's what happened when he tried to **hide** his sin rather than confessing and repenting. Is there any sin in our lives that we've been trying to hide from God?
- 26) [April 26] Nathan confronts David for his sin. The story begins with the words, "And the LORD **sent** Nathan to David" (2 Sam 12:1a). These are words of **grace**, for God seeks us out when we turn away from Him. How marvelous is grace that **pursues** us in our sin! Nathan approached David with tact and **wisdom**, and the method he used is an excellent example of how to **confront** someone in authority. His story struck David to the heart, for when we see our sin from God's **perspective**, we realize how twisted and hideous our self-centeredness really is. Unlike Saul, David repented in sorrow and **sincerity**. His prayer in Psalm 51 is a **model** of true repentance, a repentance that is founded on God's **character** (Exod 34:6–7). God forgave David, but He also told him that his son would die and the **sword** would not depart from his house. David sowed adultery and murder in secret, and he would reap the same "before **all** Israel" (2 Sam 12:12). This reminds us that God will not be **mocked**, "For whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Gal 6:7). We can be forgiven, but we cannot escape the **consequences** of our actions. They will affect not only us, but also those under our authority. David spent an entire **week** fasting and praying and laying on the ground before God, begging Him to spare his child's life. But when the child was dead, he "went into the house of the LORD and **worshipped**" (2 Sam 12:20). Do we accept God's answer of 'No' with **humility** and reverence? Do we come and worship God even when we don't get what we want?
- 27) [April 27] David's victory over all his enemies. In the west, David defeated the Philistines and won key battles in the cities of Gob and Gath. In the east, David conquered the Moabites and forced them to pay tribute. In the north, David subdued Hadadezer and the Syrians and captured many articles of gold and silver. In the south, David destroyed the Edomites in the Valley of Salt and put garrisons throughout Edom. The author of 2 Samuel summarized David's success this way: "The LORD **gave** victory to David wherever he went" (2 Sam 8:14). This teaches us that the key to victory is found in God's enabling **power**. If we remain dedicated and loyal to God, He will give us the grace we need to conquer our foes! Psalm 60 reveals that David experienced **setbacks** during his battles. Instead of panicking and giving up, David brought his frustration and discouragement to God. He called out, "Save us and help us with your right hand, that those you **love** may be delivered" (Ps 60:5 NIV). He also recognized the true source of his success: "With **God** we shall do valiantly; it is he who will tread down our foes" (Ps 60:12). When every enemy had been subdued, David wrote a song of

praise, thanking God for delivering him from all his troubles (Ps 18). This teaches us that the proper way to celebrate our achievements is to **honor** and glorify God. It's interesting that God gave David the very things He told Israel's kings not to multiply for themselves: **horses**, **silver** and **gold** (cf. 1 Chr 18:4, 10). David's reaction is telling. He **hamstrung** the horses and **dedicated** the silver and gold to God. How tightly do we cling to the things God gives us?

- 28) [April 28] The Davidic Covenant. After God gave David **rest** from **all** his enemies, David became concerned that the ark, the symbol of God's presence, sat in a **tent** while he lived in a beautiful palace. David's desire to build a temple was pleasing to God, but God told him '**No**.' This teaches us that there will be times when we want to do something good for God, but the **timing** is wrong or **we** may not be the one God wants to perform the task. David's willingness to **submit** to God's will is an excellent example of showing deference to His direction. David **accepted** his part in God's plan and did not try to go **beyond** it. Although God turned down David's request, He did not reject David himself. In fact, God took the occasion to establish a **covenant** with him. David wanted to build God a house (a **temple**), and instead, God promised to build David a house (a **dynasty**). Not only that, God also promised that his house would last **forever**! David's earthly dynasty ended four centuries later, but **Jesus**, a direct descendant of David, is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise (Acts 2:22–36). Jesus will reign for eternity. He reigns now in our **hearts**, and one day He will reign here on **earth** (Luke 1:30–33; Rev 20:4). David rejoiced in God's promise and was humbled at the thought of how God had taken him from following **sheep** to being the **leader** of your people. This teaches us that the proper response to God's blessing is humility and **praise**.
- 29) [April 29] The three year famine in Israel, and Absalom's murder of his older brother Amnon. The famine occurred as **judgment** on the land for "Saul and his bloody house, because he put the Gibeonites to **death**" (2 Sam 21:1 NASB; cf. Num 35:33). The Gibeonites were servants of Israel by covenant agreement (Josh 9:16–20), but Saul in "his **zeal**" violated that covenant. This teaches us that it's never right to do **wrong**, even to get a chance to do **right**. The fact that David willingly gave seven of Saul's descendants to be executed as payment for this crime indicates that they had likely been **complicit** in this treacherous act (cf. Deut 24:16; 2 Sam 21:14). Amnon, David's firstborn son, was desperately "in **love**" with his half-sister Tamar (Absalom's full sister). With the help of his cousin **Jonadab**, he hatched a scheme to have her. This shows that if you can't wait, what you feel is *not* love—it's **lust**. Once Amnon violated her, he hated her and threw her out in disgrace (making it look as if **she** had made a shameful proposition to *him*). Absalom acted as though nothing had happened, but he was secretly seething with **hatred**. When the time was right, he murdered Amnon in revenge. The judgment prophesied by the prophet Nathan was finally coming to pass in David's house (2 Sam 12:10). David was "very angry" about what happened to Tamar, yet he did **nothing**. Solomon, who experienced these tragic events firsthand, later observed that when we refuse to discipline our children, we **hate** them (Prov 13:24) and set the stage for their ultimate **destruction** (Prov 19:18 NIV).
- 30) [April 30] Absalom's rebellion. Joab realized that David still loved Absalom in spite of the murder of Amnon, and he used a clever **ploy** to convince David to allow Absalom to return. Unlike Nathan, whose story appealed to David's **conscience** over his feelings, Joab's story appealed to David's **feelings** over his conscience. David knew something should be done about Absalom, but he lacked the **courage** and resolve to do it. Joab, rather than urging David to do the right thing, became an accomplice to David's **weakness** and indecision. This teaches us how important it is to surround ourselves with friends who will hold us **accountable** to the truth. Absalom was permitted to return to Jerusalem, but he was not allowed into David's presence. For **two** years Absalom waited, and finally, sensing the time was right, he put a **fire** under Joab (literally) and was reconciled with his father. David embraced him in forgiveness, but Absalom's heart was not **repentant**. Indeed, David

was welcoming a deadly serpent into his home. Within **four** years, Absalom had stolen the hearts of the people and David was once again running for his life. This shows us that true reconciliation must be based on genuine repentance, for anything less is a prelude to **disaster**.