

Hannah — I Samuel 1-2:1-11, Luke 2:27-31



Gerbrand van den Eeckhout, Hannah presenting her son Samuel to the priest Eli

Hannah foreshadows Christ's mother Mary. Both women had children when it seemed unlikely that they could. The story encourages me that God hears our prayers and understands our longing to have children. It also encourages me that a parent can influence their child's faith and willingness to serve God.

When Hannah's sincere and persistent prayers were answered she acknowledged that God had given her what she prayed for, and she dedicated her child to God for life. Both Hannah and Mary took their sons to the temple in dedication, an example for every Christian parent.

Like Mary, Hannah was a poet, and similarities stand out as we compare their poems line by line. In her poem Hannah offers a prophecy of Christ's resurrection that God brings death and life, brings down to the grave and raises up. Both women show fierceness, affirming God's approval of strong women.

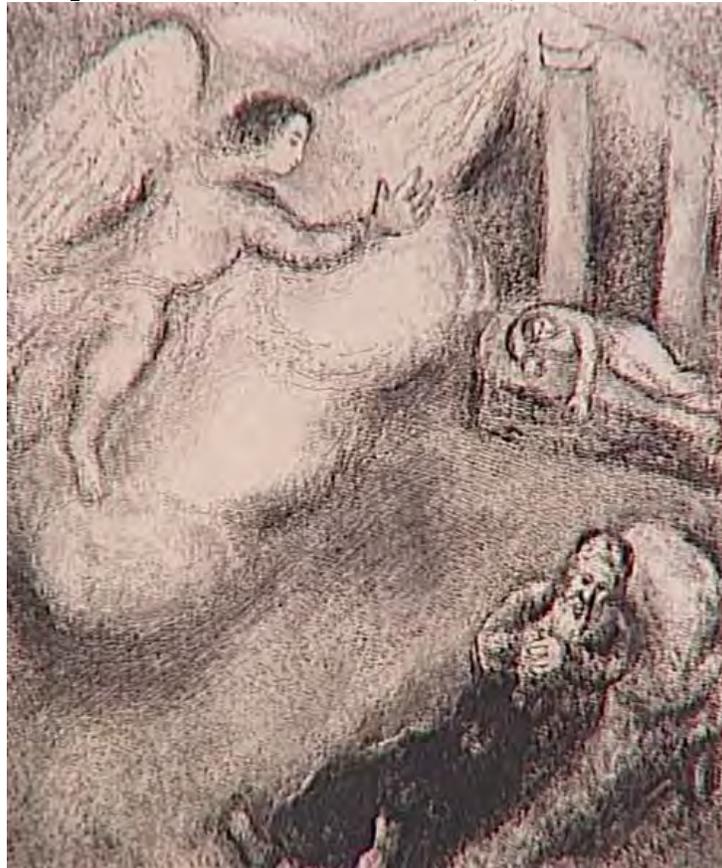
Mary's poem, the Magnificat, has become a treasured part of Christian worship with many beautiful musical settings. This inspiring affirmation of faith thus

spans not only the thousand years from Hannah to Mary, but two thousand more to our day.

Many of us have had Hannah's experience of praying out of sorrow and anguish, reduced to tears by some longing in our lives. Eli offered the reassuring hope that God would answer her request, and we need people in our lives who share their hope with us. The great hope is that, as for Hannah, God will remember our plea and we will be able to encourage others with the answer.

Do I humbly bring my deepest heartfelt requests repeatedly to God?

God Speaks— I Samuel 2:12-36, 3, Matthew 13:23



Marc Chagall, Eli and Samuel

Christ emphasized hearing God's word and letting it change us. In Samuel we have the story of a small child who heard from God and went on to become one of the greatest prophets.

The example that a small child could hear from God made this my favorite childhood Bible story. It planted the idea that God can speak to our hearts today and it intrigued me that Samuel at first did not know it was God's voice. It made

me want to learn how to hear God myself. Fortunately, the prophetic gift is available to all of us since Christ came, and Paul encouraged us to request it. As a result of the work of the Spirit in his life everything Samuel said was wise and helpful.

The content of God's message to Samuel was a warning to Eli, the high priest of his day. He is a tragic figure in whom the human failures of priests are highlighted, and he is an example where God's message did not take root and produce good fruit. Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas (note: not the same Phinehas from Numbers, Joshua and Judges), were scoundrels who took the best meat for their food, sometimes even snatching it before the sacrifice, and they grew fat. They seduced young women at the temple, and their fleshliness showed contempt for God.

Eli reproached them, but took no disciplinary so was at fault as well. A prophet had already warned Eli that because they thought lightly of God they would all die on the same day. Instead he would raise up a faithful priest, looking ahead to faithful Christ. There was no repentance so in the message to Samuel warned their sins could not be forgiven through sacrifices. Eli listened to the message and accepted it.

In this contrast between the lives of those who truly hear God's word and those who don't we see the choice we need to make. Scripture, other people, prayer, our experiences, and gentle inward thoughts all serve as the medium for hearing God's voice. Christ was the voice of God to us on earth, so there is particular wisdom for us in the gospels which will train us to discern his voice. "My sheep hear my voice," he told us.

Do I listen for God's voice to me at all times?

The Ark of the Covenant — I Samuel 4-6, Hebrews 4:16



Julius Schnorr von Karolsfeld, Death of Eli

The Ark of the Covenant represents Christ's presence with His people. Several times the Ark is referred to as God's throne. When the people moved, it followed the lead team of Judah and two tribes. Entering the land, the Ark went first and waited mid-river as it went dry until all the people had crossed. Located at first in Gilgal, it was then moved to Bethel, then to Shiloh. Talmudic tradition says it remained in Shiloh for 369 years until this story of its capture.

Eli's sons carried the Ark to the battleground which was captured, and as prophesied, the two sons were killed. When he heard the news, Eli, 98 years old, blind, and fat, fell backwards and broke his neck. His daughter-in-law gave birth traumatically and named her son "Where is the glory?" because the Ark was gone.

Philistines became afraid of this sign of God's presence. Their idol fell before it twice, and illness broke out wherever it was taken. They sent it back and it was placed on a rock. The author points out that the rock is still there, reminding us that Christ is also prefigured as a rock, as well as the sacrifices made there. That

the Ark was protected as a sign of God's holiness was emphasized by the death of 70 people who casually looked into it.

The power of God's presence is not to be trifled with, and we have been given his Holy Spirit and carry God's presence with us. Today we are his ark in the world. We can live with unusual confidence and hope because of this.

Do I live with a sense that I carry God's presence in the world?

Samuel — I Samuel 7, John 10:27

Parallel comments are made regarding the childhoods of Samuel and Christ that they grew taller, and gained favor with God and with the people. Both waited patiently for public ministry. Tradition is that Samuel was a teenager when the Ark was captured. He continued in ministry for twenty years before calling the people to action when in his thirties. Similarly, Jesus lived humbly under the authority of others until the start of his ministry when he was about thirty years old. Samson never succeeded in liberating the people from the Philistines, but God miraculously did so under Samuel.

In preparation for this liberation they destroyed their idols, poured out water from a well, and fasted. Christ as living water was with them. When the Philistines mobilized the people were afraid and asked Samuel to keep pleading with the Lord, and he offered sacrifices. Christ as sacrifice was with them. As they were attacked, God's thundering voice won the battle. Christ as spoken word was with them. As a memorial Samuel placed a stone named "help" to remind them of God's help. Christ was with them as a rock.

The Psalms and the New Testament highlight Samuel along with Moses as two of the greatest spiritual heroes, and at this point Samuel became Israel's judge. For us, too, Christ is living water, the sacrifice, the word, a rock, the one who brings victory, and the one who puts us in the ministry he has for us.

Am I listening for God's instructions so that I can be most effective for him?

Samuel Anoints a King — I Samuel 8-9, John 1:22-23



Marc Chagall, The Anointing of Saul

In anointing a king, Samuel bore a resemblance to John the Baptist who announced Christ as Messiah. Transition from prophetic leadership to kingship was painful for Samuel. God told him to do as the people asked because it was not Samuel being rejected, it was God. Before this, God was king, and earthly leaders were his assistants. Now they wanted to be like other nations, and God allowed it, reminding us that he gives us free choices.

The man selected, Saul, seemed wonderful and godly, but soon started to make serious mistakes. God took the throne from him and later from his descendants. Samuel's dialogue with God gave him predictive capacity for upcoming events. When Saul was to become king, Samuel gave him three signs to encourage him this was God's call, which parallel things Christ told his disciples.

Samuel

Donkeys would be found
Men with meat, bread, wine
 would give him bread
The Spirit of God would come on him

Christ

Disciples told where to find a donkey
A man would share his home
 for their Passover supper
Disciples should wait for the Spirit

making him a new man

at Pentecost

For us, now that Christ has come, being anointed with the Holy Spirit is something that is available to all. Requesting prayer from a person who demonstrates spiritual power is a good way to receive God's gifts.

Am I full of the Holy Spirit, living with spiritual insight and power?

Saul Crowned as King — I Samuel 10-12, I Corinthians 4:20



Morgan Bible, A Plea for Help, Marshalling Forces

After Samuel anointed Saul, he was publicly identified and acknowledged as king, the Spirit of God came on him, and he became a different person with a new heart. He received the scroll of the king's duties, and he had companions whose hearts were touched by God. We can see parallels to Christ's baptism and the disciples who began to follow him. They also serve to remind us that God's spirit comes on us and changes our hearts.

Some of Saul's people were under threat of becoming servants to the king of Ammon and were to be blinded in one eye. Saul responded with righteous anger, cut up an ox, and sent pieces by messenger throughout Israel. A force of 330,000 gathered, the campaign was successful, and he was formally crowned. In a touching postscript many years later, when Saul was killed in battle and his body and that of his sons hung on a wall, the grateful people he had rescued traveled all night to get the bodies, burned them, and respectfully buried their bones.

In Samuel's farewell address he defended the integrity of his ministry and reproached the people for having asked for a king. He called for a thunderstorm to verify their request was wrong. Nevertheless, he promised that God would not abandon them. Samuel promised that he would not sin by ceasing to pray for them and teach them. He encouraged them to remember all the wonderful things God had done for them. In fact, he will transfigure kingship into an important preparation for Christ.

Once again we are reminded of the recurrent scriptural theme that God forgives even when we fail him. We are reassured he will not abandon us. We know, looking ahead, that Israel will fail, that the people will not follow God. But we are still reading these scriptures because God never abandoned his people despite that failure, and he sent Christ to love and redeem us all.

Do I trust God's unfailing love for me?

Saul as King — I Samuel 13-15, John 11:53



Gustave Doré, The Death of Agag

Saul disobeyed and lost his position, even after being called and having begun well. Knowing God rejected him created his spiritual depression and jealousy and led to

opposing David. He thus foreshadowed Christ's opponents: Herod when he was an infant, and Pilate/Herod/Pharisees at his crucifixion. Herod pursued Christ and Saul pursued David, both fearing they could be replaced as king.

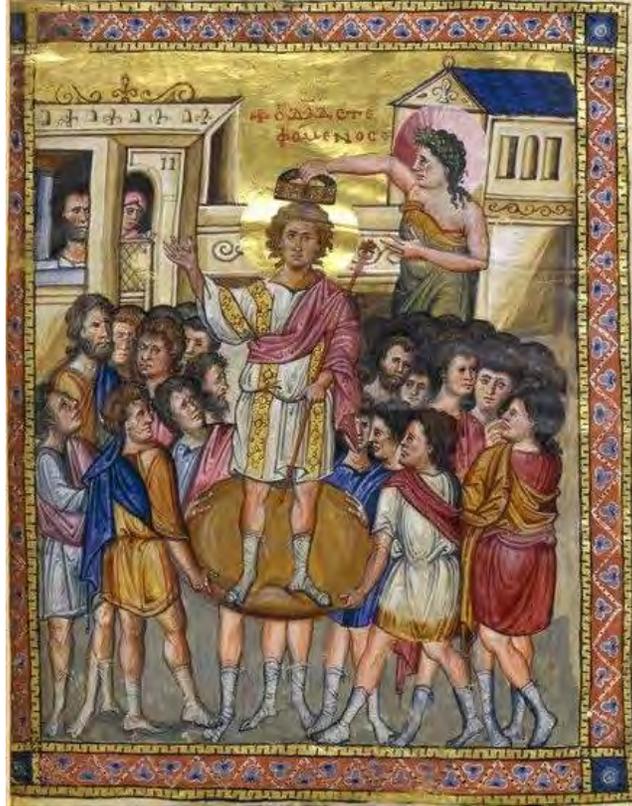
Saul repeatedly showed a lack of faith: he offered sacrifices out of fear, made a foolish vow, and took unauthorized loot. Daniel wrote that God "removes kings and sets up other kings" (Daniel 2:21), and in the Magnificat, Mary said: "He has brought down princes from their thrones and exalted the humble." (Luke 1:52) Saul is the first instance of this pattern.

Jonathan's bravery and dependence on God contrast with Saul. "The Lord will help us defeat them" he said, and between him, an earthquake, Philistines killing one another, and reinvigorated Israelites, the battle was won. Inadvertently breaking his father's vow not to eat, his life was spared by intervention from all the people who praised his role in the victory.

Through Samuel God commanded Saul to exterminate the Amalekites, which were descended from Esau's grandson. Amalekites had attacked as Israel journeyed toward Mount Sinai and ruthlessly killed the feeble, faint, and weary, and for this offense of cruelty God determined to destroy them as a people. Saul proposed religious observance to resolve the problem, but Samuel said obedience is better than sacrifice, a theme Psalms, the prophets, and Christ reinforce.

Do I trust God's wisdom in placing rulers over us and in removing them as well?

David anointed — I Samuel 16, Luke 1:69-70



Paris Psalter, Coronation of David

David, anointed to be king, is an image of Christ, the anointed one, Messiah. Selected by God through Samuel above all his older brothers, and above all from the tribe of Judah, he had a heart for God that prepared him for his role. David is another example of God's gracious choice of younger sons over the cultural norm of older sons. Similarly, Christ's background was one of obscurity.

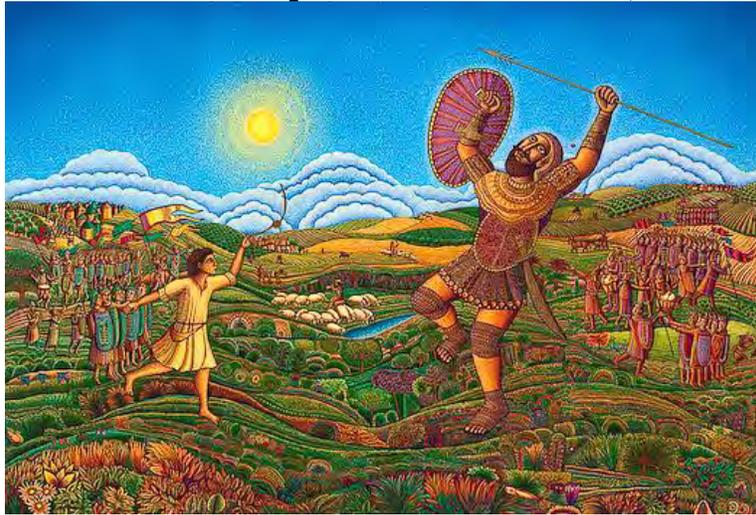
Anointed with oil, God's Spirit came on him. Similarly, when Christ returned from the temptation, filled with the Holy Spirit's power, he announced that Isaiah's prophecy of the Spirit upon the Messiah was fulfilled in him. It is because Samuel anointed this ancestor of Christ that Peter could say that starting with Samuel, all the prophets had looked forward to the time of Christ. He was not only the ancestor of Christ, he foreshadowed Christ's kingship most strongly of all the kings that were to come.

God's Spirit left Saul when David was anointed. In its place came depression, a tormenting spirit of conviction. One way of understanding this comes from Saint Ignatius. He wrote that when we are in sin, any depression and anxiety we feel comes from God for the purpose of bringing us to repentance. When we are living in obedience, depression and anxiety come from the enemy trying to defeat us. In Saul's case, his depression became characteristic of the rest of his life.

God told Samuel that he judged by the heart, not outward appearance, and so had chosen David. The heart is the inner combination of emotions, thoughts, decisions, perceptions, and attitudes, including toward God, that make up our character. We need to spend solitary time to cultivate a healthy heart, a heart that is in tune with God and his purposes for us. We get a glimpse of how this looks by reading the Psalms, David's poetry that explores that inner world. It absolutely matters more than the outward appearance.

Am I open to receiving a new and unexpected calling from Christ?

David Rescues God's People — I Samuel 17-18, Colossians 2:15



John August Swanson, David and Goliath

David came forward to confront the giant Goliath when no one else from the people was willing or able to do that, paralleling Christ's many confrontations with evil. The result in both cases was freedom for oppressed people. In David we see that acting in God's name has greater power than any human or spiritual force against us, and we can claim that same power today.

David's services as a musician had made him stand out to Saul, and he had been going back and forth between the court and tending sheep. David's extra bravery and success made Saul wonder if he was from a notable warrior family. The real secret was his anointing with the Holy Spirit.

After killing Goliath, David and Prince Jonathan became friends, and he stayed permanently at the palace. Saul gave him a military command, and he was popular with soldiers, officers, and the public. The public acclaim, however, turned Saul against him, made him jealous and afraid of being usurped. Twice Saul threw spears at him and he demoted David to a lesser rank, but David continued to be successful "for the Lord was with him."

Princess Michal fell in love with him and Saul allowed the marriage, secretly hoping the bride price of dead Philistines would kill David. David's success filled Saul with fear.

For us, too, it is the anointing of God's Spirit that makes possible a level of success that may intimidate people who are not doing the right thing. If we become part of challenging them, it is God's Spirit in us that will make us successful, not our own cleverness or ability. But the fundamental lesson of the story is that, analogous to David's defeat of Goliath, Christ fights for us, liberating us from whatever is oppressing us.

Do I have confidence that God can free me from whatever is oppressing me?

Jonathan — I Samuel 19-20, John 15:14



Rembrandt van Rijn, Jonathan comforted David

Jonathan foreshadows Christ as the perfect friend. He overcame the jealousy and failures of his father Saul, and maintained a loving, close relationship with David

whom he knew God had called to replace him. When Jonathan made a pact with David, the text says he “loved him as his own soul,” and gave him the royal robe, sword, bow and belt he was wearing. This makes Jonathan a picture of Christ who as the King’s son, takes us to his heart and “loves us as his own soul,” makes a new covenant with us, and clothes us with his own righteousness.

Jonathan was a brave and daring warrior without jealousy, a warm and loyal friend, and a peacemaker. He interceded for his friend David with his father Saul and succeeded in making peace. He also served as a protector by speaking well of David. When Saul once more pursued David, Jonathan stood up for him to the point of endangering his own life. When Jonathan died in battle, having forgiven his father and engaged in the fight beside him, David’s mourning included this praise: “Your friendship was a miracle-wonder, love far exceeding anything I’ve known or ever hope to know.” His character and actions are like Christ and serve as an example for us.

I ask myself if I know how to be a good friend. Do my friends know they are loved? Can they depend on me? Do I stand up for them when that is needed? Do I value them as they should be valued? Jonathan’s example teaches us that we can treat others with God’s faithful love.

Does my faithful friendship reflect the loving friendship of Christ?

David Flees from Saul — I Samuel 21, Psalm 56, Matthew 5:3



Arent de Gelder, Ahimelech Giving Goliath's Sword to David

David on the run from Saul became poor and a wanderer, just as Christ chose poverty and homelessness as he lived on earth. Unfortunately, Saul's jealousy could not be contained, and David fled. In this difficult time, he could have thought, "I will never be king," or "Since Saul is trying to kill me, I have a right to kill him," or "What am I doing wasting my life, running around in the wilderness?" or "This life hardly seems appropriate for a future king." Nevertheless, his actions and prayers in the Psalms show a heart of confidence in God.

Having lived in the palace, married a princess, and been a popular commander, he lost it all: his home, his fame, his popularity, and his princess. He instantly became a poor man. He was so poor he had to beg for bread for himself and the young man with him from the priests, and took the special tabernacle bread. When he asked for a sword, he was given Goliath's high quality sword which had been preserved after his victory.

He went to the Philistine King, but quickly felt unsafe there and feigned madness to get away. The Psalm he wrote after this (Psalm 56) shows his heart when in this difficult and stressful situation of loss: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you." "I trust in God, so why should I be afraid?" "You have collected all my tears in your

bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” “God is on my side.” His example challenges me to think about how I respond to loss in my life.

Do I trust God even in the midst of my losses?

Suffering — I Samuel 22, Psalm 52, Matthew 5:4



David's Valiant Men by James Tissot

James Tissot, David's Valiant Men

David's own suffering, the sufferings of those who chose to join him, and the unjust murder of the priests who had helped him, reminds us of Christ's suffering and his compassion for the suffering of others. In David's time of weakness, we see an attractive faith and character which contrasts with his errors once he became strong. The malcontents who joined him in the wilderness were forged into a group of valiant and brave warriors who stayed with him through his life.

Doeg, who saw the priests help David, reported this to Saul, with the result that 85 priests were killed along with their families. Abiathar fled to David and joined the malcontents who had already gathered around him. David's Psalm (52) accuses Doeg: "You call yourself a hero, do you?" "Why boast about this crime of yours?" "You love to say things that hurt others." "But God will strike you down."

In this story, Doeg serves as an image of the many people throughout history who have massacred others. I felt David's cry for justice at the perpetrators of massacres in Guatemala. For many years I prayed that some kind of justice would be done, and when a series of trials resulted in sentences for perpetrators of serious human rights violations, it felt like an answer to this prayer.

Do I suffer with those who suffer and cry out for justice?

Betrayal — I Samuel 23, Psalm 63, Psalm 54, Matthew 5:10



James Tissot, David in the wilderness of Ziph

The betrayals David experienced parallel the betrayals Christ experienced. Even though David protected the people of Keilah from the Philistines, they planned to betray him to Saul. Once more David fled to the wilderness. We see in this story the principle that God can give us concrete, practical guidance in our difficulties.

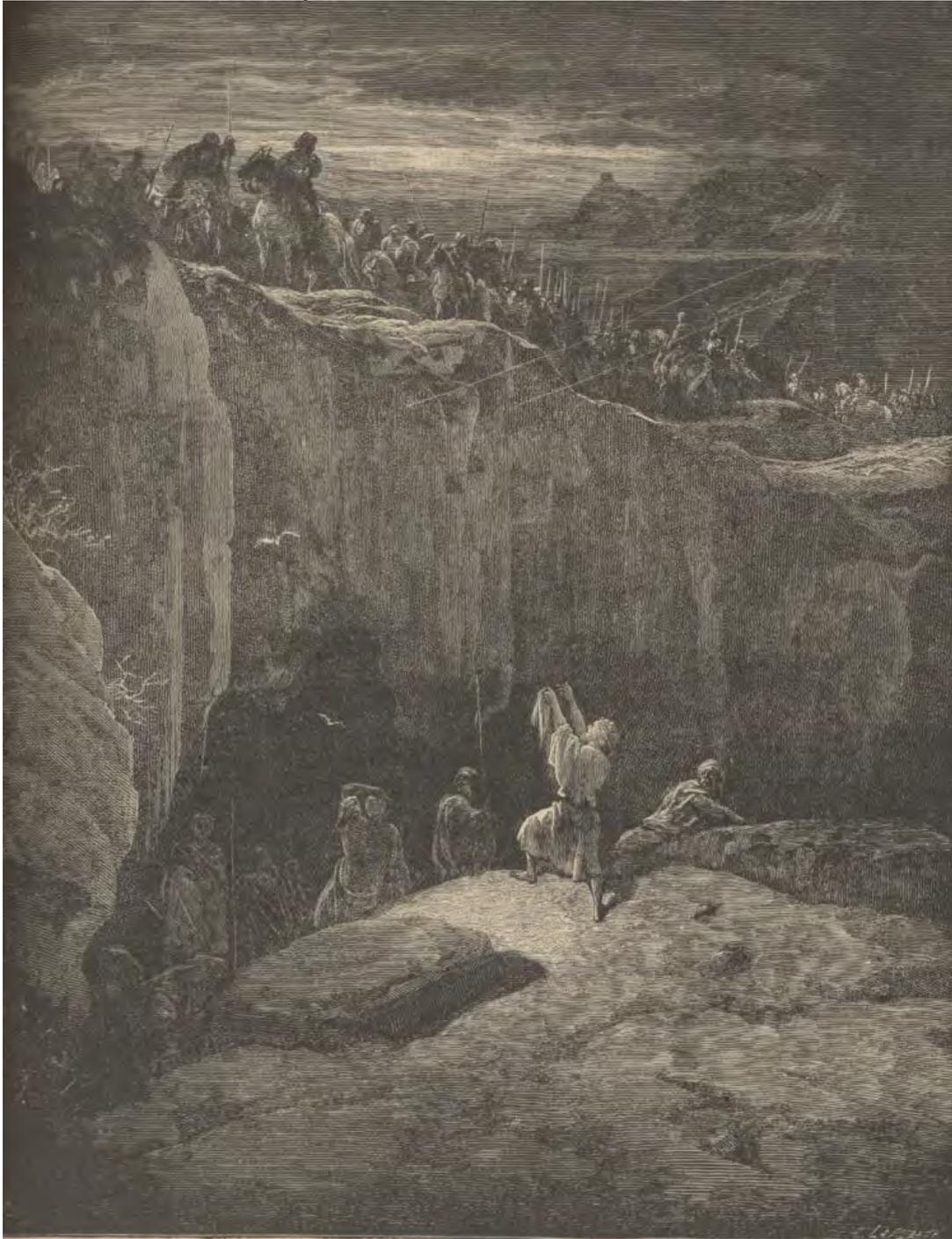
David's response to being in the wilderness (Psalm 63) turned the dryness of the landscape into a prayer of longing for God: "I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water." While in the Judean wilderness, Jonathan came to him and affirmed, "You are going to be the next King of Israel," and they renewed their covenant of friendship.

Another betrayal by the men of Ziph exposed his hiding place to Saul. David went even further into the wilderness. His response to the betrayal, (Psalm 54) was to plea for help: rescue me, defend me, and may my enemies' plans for ever be turned against them.

Christ offered forgiveness of those who had betrayed him and put him to death. He said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing." We are to do the same. At the same time, it is notable that in the midst of his suffering he is full of joy. Psalm 63 is predominantly praise. Gratitude, no matter the circumstances, is something David teaches us.

Do I forgive anyone who betrays me?

Mercy — I Samuel 24, Psalm 57, Matthew 5:7



Gustave Dore, David Sparing Saul

David's mercy to Saul prefigures Christ's call to show mercy. David was in a cave and Saul came in, but rather than killing him, David cut a piece of his robe. When Saul left, David shouted to him, bowed to him, and plead his case. David said, "I will never harm you" and asked that God would judge between them. Saul

responded, saying, “You are a better man than I am!” “Who else would let his enemy get away?” And most tellingly, “I realize you are surely going to be king.” David’s story reassures us that God judges between human opponents, vindicating us if we are in the right.

David hid in a cave in chapter 22, and here once again. David writes of this (Psalm 57): “I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until this violent storm is past.” He expressed his faith in “God who will fulfill his purpose for me.” His heart of worship is repeated twice in saying: “Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the earth.”

I know I am called to show mercy toward anyone who wrongs me. I am never to stand in judgment, but to do what David did and ask God to do the judging. Christ’s call in his Sermon on the Mount is to “judge not that you be not judged”, something David learned through the Holy Spirit. If I try to fix things with my anger, I make them worse, but if I commit the situation to God, good changes can take place.

Do I err on the side of offering mercy to others?

Abigail — I Samuel 25, Matthew 5:9



Peter Paul Rubens, David meeting Abigail

Christ is the source of wisdom and peacemaking that Abigail demonstrates. The story shows her in the role of a wise mediator in a conflict, the same role Christ

takes in our conflicts. Abigail's example teaches us that God can use us to prevent tragedies if we listen and obey.

A contrast is set up between wisdom and foolishness comparing Abigail and Nabal. We are told that his name means "fool." Unlike the good shepherd, wealthy, with 3000 sheep and 1000 goats, he did not see himself as their protector and appreciate what David and his men had done. Instead, he was selfishly committed to preserving his own wealth. The image of the poor shepherd is used to depict unfaithful ministers, and it is often the case that the sign of this unfaithfulness is a self-centered preoccupation with wealth. When David perceived that lack of appreciation, he became angry. Instead of forgiving, he was determined to show he was right, and destroy his enemy.

Abigail, knowing her husband was in the wrong, wisely decided to offer amends. Humbly, appealing for forgiveness, she focused on David's call from God to ask him to forgive. She took responsibility for something she did not do, and David was grateful for the wake-up call. When Nabal heard, the shock resulted in his death. David rewarded Abigail for her wisdom with an offer of marriage. Abigail said she would be happy to marry David and become a footwasher for his servants. Christ also washed his disciples' feet. Now I cannot think of Abigail with seeing how her servant's heart prefigured Christ.

Christ calls us to be peacemakers in conflict situations. Abigail's story puts flesh and blood on how that might look in a very difficult situation. My own conflicts have taught me that to be like Abigail, quick to say "I'm sorry", works best.

Is mine the heart of a servant and of a peacemaker?

David Spares Saul — I Samuel 26, Matthew 5:5

John Singer Sargent, David in Saul's Camp

David's rejection by the nation foreshadows Christ's rejection by the Jewish leaders of his day. Because David believed God had anointed him as king and it was God's responsibility to fulfill his plan and promises, he could relax and let things go wrong for a while, knowing they would eventually be set to right.

Once more the men of Ziph betrayed him. David could have killed Saul when he slipped into his camp and found him asleep, but because of his respect for God's anointed, David did not. David took Saul's spear and water bottle to prove how close he had come, and Saul was humbled. "I have sinned. Come back home, my son, and I will no longer try to harm you, for you valued my life today. I have been a fool and very, very wrong." He predicted "you will do heroic deeds and be a great conqueror." David's lament was, "You have driven me from my home, so I can no longer live among the Lord's people to worship as I should ... Must I die on foreign soil?"

David's example shows he did not interpret having enemies as evidence he was displeasing God, he just stayed out of their way. Christ's call to love and bless our

enemies can happen even when needed boundaries protect us from harm. Enemies do not have to be a problem, and if we are patient and trust God as David did, the problem can be made right.

Do I rely on God's help when dealing with any opponents?

David Undercover — I Samuel 27, 29, 30, Matthew 5:9



James Tissot, Women of Ziklag taken in to captivity

David was rejected and went into exile, living among the Philistines. Christ also was taken into exile in Egypt as an infant. David left Israel to avoid Saul, just as Christ withdrew from those wanting to kill him (for example, after he had preached in Nazareth). It did work: Saul stopped hunting David for the last year and four months of his life.

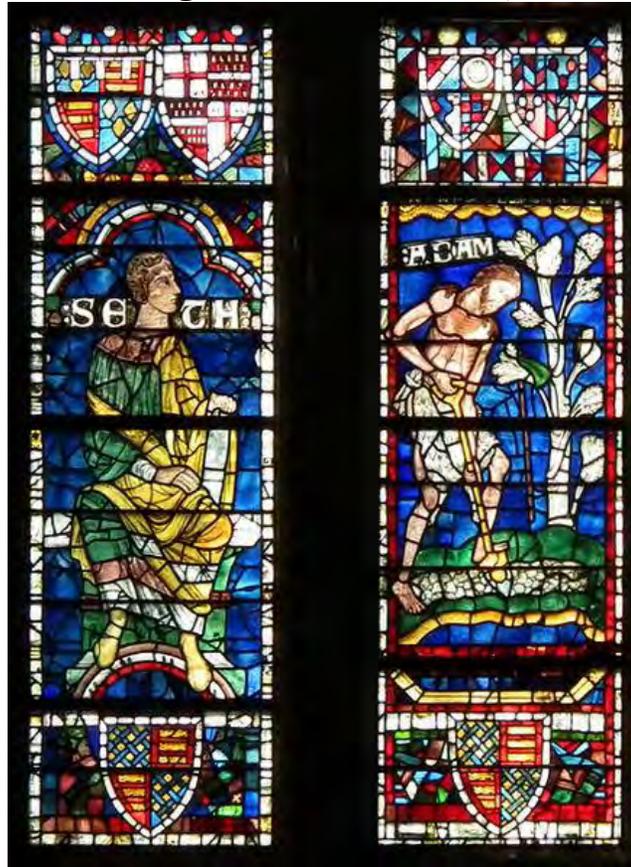
Years before, David had killed Goliath, and killed many Philistines to gain a dowry for getting his wife Michal. When first fleeing Saul, he went on his own to Gath and pretended to be a madman to save his life. Now, returning with a group of 600 warriors, he was welcomed by the Philistine king. Saul quit his pursuit, having successfully evicted his rival from the community of faith in Israel.

The context created a situation of moral compromise. He kept the confidence of the King of Philistia by lying to him, and by massacring villages completely so they could not expose his lies. Fortunately, he did not gain the confidence of the King's officers who thereby prevented him from having to go into battle against his own people. Instead he had to rescue the families of his 600 men from Amalekite raiders who took them captive.

Christ was killed by his enemies when he willingly went toward where they were in Jerusalem, knowing this would be the outcome. Rather than inflict harm, his strategy was to receive harm and transfigure it. This model of allowing ourselves to “be wronged” goes against our competitive culture, but Christ’s challenge is there for us.

Do I take rejection gracefully?

Family of the King — I Chronicles 1-9, Matthew 27:11



Canterbury Cathedral

When Saul died and David's reign began, two different but parallel accounts carry the story until the return from the exile. In II Samuel and I and II Kings we continue with intrigue and human failings. In contrast, I and II Chronicles give an overview from Adam to the return from exile with an emphasis on David's life, the construction of the temple, and the kings of Judah which is the kingly line of Christ. I have chosen to combine the parallel passages, while recognizing that the books have different purposes.

I Chronicles presents the story of David, starting with his coronation after Saul's death, the capture of Jerusalem, moving the ark, purchasing the location for the

Temple, organizing Temple service, and preparing his son Solomon to build the Temple. These chapters before David's story give a genealogy starting with Adam, and narrow to those who return from the Babylonian exile ready to rebuild the Temple and restore the vibrant worship from David's time.

This book prepares the news that a king is coming by tracing the line of the kings of Judah. In the Hebrew scriptures the two books of Chronicles come at the end, thereby serving as a summary of the whole story preparing for Messiah. Admittedly dull reading, each name is an important link from creation to Christ, and a reminder that every person matters. Even if only a name on a list for us, God knew them and their lives and they are honored by their presence in the sacred text.

Do I recognize that every person's life and story matters?

The Death of Saul — I Samuel 28, 31, I Chronicles 10, John 19:28-30



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, The Suicide of Saul

Christ's death and Saul's death stand in contrast. Christ knew his death was prophesied, knew when he would die, and his death was full of purpose. In contrast, Saul had lived disobediently, dreaded death, and his death was full of tragedy. Christ laid down his life; Saul committed suicide. The respect with which Christ's body was buried contrasts with the disrespect shown to Saul's body.

When Saul consulted a witch, asking her to call up dead Samuel, he engaged in necromancy, something the Law condemned. Saul had obeyed the Law in removing such practitioners of magic, but was desperate because “God is departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams...” Samuel said God had become his enemy, removed his kingdom, and that he would die.

Wounded by the enemy, Saul pled with his armor bearer to kill him, was refused, and so fell on his own sword. The armor bearer followed in a poignant suicide. I Chronicles 10 gives us the horrifying post-script. The Philistines came and found his body, cut off his head, proclaimed his death to their idols and the people, placed his armor in Dagon’s temple, and placed his and Jonathan’s bodies on the wall. The commentator says he should not have sought a medium instead of the Lord, and so died for his unfaithfulness.

We can face death boldly, following the example of Christ, doing so without fear, and knowing that our death can be meaningful. It can be a time of blessing others, leaving helpful and nourishing memories for those who follow us. We do not need to face death as a tragedy?

Am I facing death with peace and positive anticipation?

David’s Lament — II Samuel 1, John 11:32-35



St. Peter's Church in Cambridgeshire, King David Laments

Christ's grief in the face of the death of his friend Lazarus, and David's grief in the face of Saul and Jonathan's death reminds us that the depths of our grief are also tenderly understood by God.

Any of us who have lost a deeply loved friend or family member can resonate with David's lament for Jonathan. Any of us who have lost an intimate person with whom our relationship has been conflicted can identify with his lament for Saul.

David is like Christ in truly demonstrating love for his enemies. When Saul died and David learned of this, David expressed affection and respect for Saul who had pursued him and tried to kill him, as well as Jonathan whom he had loved and who he had protected. Three times he repeated "How the mighty heroes have fallen!"

The "Dead March" Handel composed for his oratorio on Saul has been used for solemn funerals of heads of state ever since. Comparing it to the elegy of David for his slain rival, perhaps this is fitting.

As I look back on my losses, I am struck that as time goes by it is the most tender parts of the relationship that still stand out, and cause me to remember others with

appreciation and affection. Reaching that acceptance takes time and we need to accompany our grieving friends with kindness and patience.

Do I accept grief and loss as part of life?

Innocent blood — II Samuel 2-3, Matthew 27:24



Morgan Bible?, Joab, Abner, David

Christ's death was acknowledged by Pilate as a case of shedding innocent blood. David judged the actions of his commander Joab as meriting judgment because he shed innocent blood in a time of peace.

After Saul and Jonathan's death, David moved to Hebron where Judah, his own tribe, crowned him King. Despite his outreach, Israel remained loyal to a son of Saul, Ishbosheth. Civil war was threatening, and Joab led David's troops, and Abner led those of Ishbosheth. In an earlier encounter, Abner unwillingly killed Joab's brother Asahel. Later Abner was offended by Ishbosheth and joined David's side. Joab still held a grudge however, and killed Abner.

Though he verbally complained and championed Abner as an innocent victim, David felt too politically weak to oppose Joab, a relationship complicated by family ties.

Joab was David's cousin, son of Aunt Zeruiah and brother of Abishai and Azahel, other top commanders. Amasa was another cousin, son of Aunt Abigail. These men and 400 other malcontents joined David when he fled from Saul, and were part of the David's mighty men.

At David's death, he asked his son Solomon to carry out the judgment. This story helps us see that though David was a warrior, he lived by an honor code of who could be fought and who could be killed and who could not. For us the standards have been raised even higher by the call to love our enemies. In Revelation Christ is presented as a warrior, but the imagery firmly places his triumph over evil in his words ("a sword came from his mouth") and in his sacrifice ("a lamb who had been slain.") Words and suffering are our weapons.

Do I abhor the shedding of innocent blood and do my part to protect people?

The Shepherd King — II Samuel 4-5, I Chronicles 11-12, Luke 23:3, John 10:14



Dante Gabriel Rossetti, King David

David was crowned as King of Israel when he was 30 years old, the same age at which Christ began to announce His Kingdom. David of all the kings is the one who best bears the image of Christ and of whom it is said that Christ was his son. He is a towering figure in the scriptures, his name occurring more than any other figure. In the Gospels his name occurs 32 times, 11 of those referring to the "son of David" who is, of course, the Messiah, Christ.

With the murder of Ishbosheth (which David condemned and punished), the way was open for him to become king of the whole nation, not just his own tribe of

Judah. The people acknowledged him as having been promised by God as the shepherd of Israel. This identity tied him even more to Christ who called himself both shepherd and king.

His first acts included conquering Jerusalem which had remained unconquered for nearly 500 years, renaming it the City of David and moving his capital there. He built his palace, married additional women, and had more children. He defeated his old enemies the Philistines by carefully asking for guidance on his strategy. These victories began a process that would allow his kingdom to be at peace.

I Chronicles is the good-parts version of David's life. In this version, we skip all of David's years of agonized waiting, the civil war after Saul's death, and go directly from Saul's death to David's coronation by Israel. David receives full credit for his faith and righteousness, and his sins are gently overlooked. None of his compromised moments appear. Instead, we hear of the growing list of heroic warriors who came to his side, culminating with an army of more than 300,000 that were there for his coronation.

There is a lesson for us in this. Are we able to set aside the failures and sins of the past and celebrate all the great things God has done in our lives? If I am praying for another person should I be focusing on their sin, or on the grace and victory in their lives? Here we see the gift of focusing on what is good.

Am I able to focus on and appreciate the "good parts version" of the lives of others?

The Ark's Power — II Samuel 6, I Chronicles 13-14, Mark 5:30



Morgan Bible, David dances in the Presence of the Ark

God's presence became centered in God's city with God's king when David moved the Ark to Jerusalem. In Christ, God's presence also went to God's city and he became king through his death and resurrection.

Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom under David, became the spiritual center, the center of Christ's ministry, and where he died and rose again. We first heard of Jerusalem with Melchizedek, the king and priest. Mentioned in Joshua as they entered the land, the name occurs 1027 times in scripture, with the final occurrences showing that it looks forward to the perfect City of God at the end of time.

The Ark, as we have seen before, carried God's presence. They had forgotten this and forgotten that it was only to be carried by particular dedicated priests. Their sloppiness in carrying it on an oxcart and the inadvertent near accident led Uzzah to touch it. It is almost as though it was electrically charged and Uzzah died from the shock. David then reviewed the law to see that the Levites must carry the Ark and prepared a more appropriate move which included celebration and music and he led the procession with dance.

Christ was the Ark of God, carrying God's power and presence in the world, a power that could be felt as he touched people in healing rather than death. He has given

us the same privilege of carrying his presence and power into the world wherever we are.

A simple wooden box
Became more than a box
Adorning it with golden angels
Placing treasures inside—
God anointed it with power.
It was dangerous.

I am a simple wooden box
Made more than that
Adorned with glory
With centuries of wisdom inside—
God anoints me with power.
Life flows out.

Am I continually conscious that I am in Christ and Christ is in me?

Sacred Music—I Chronicles 15, 16, Matthew 26:30



Sieger Köder, David

Music was part of Christ's celebration of the Passover meal, and music is an integral part of worship. While Moses sang when they left Egypt and Miriam played a tambourine, and while Moses sang shortly before his death, it is David we credit with establishing music so centrally in worship.

In these chapters we see the start of the process when the Ark was moved and temple worship began to be established. We now have choirs, and cymbals, lyres, harps, trumpets, and horns. This mighty surge of celebratory praise begun here has continued through centuries of creativity.

The first part of David's Psalm composed for the occasion is repeated in Psalm 105. After the first 15 verses they diverge with the version in I Chronicles surging into praise, while the Psalm continues in a historical vein.

This gift of beautiful music that David made so central to worship continues for us. Classics composed by the greats of western music, a rich treasury of historic hymns, and contemporary praise music mean we can draw on great variety as we sing or listen to worship.

What music draws my heart to worship?

The Covenant with David — II Samuel 7, I Chronicles 17, Revelation 19:16



Guilard de Moulins, Biblia Historiale, Tree of Jesse

The everlasting throne promised to David is fulfilled in Christ. Having brought the Ark to Jerusalem, it was in this context that David desired to build a temple. At first the prophet Nathan agreed, but returned saying God had never thought it necessary to have a building, a tent was enough. Instead, God wanted to build David a house, to give him an eternal kingly dynasty.

David's prayer of response shows the depths of his faith. We have the benefit of hindsight, knowing that the promise was fulfilled in Christ, his lineage that of kings. Though different in Matthew and Luke (possibly a difference between Joseph and Mary's lineage), both trace back to Zerubbabel, the last named king, and back to David. Joseph was addressed by the angel as a son of David. Mary was told by the angel that he would have the throne of his ancestor David.

This story is repeated word for word in I Chronicles 17. The everlasting throne with an everlasting king who is David's son is an important prophesy of Christ, and reinforces the kingdom theme. We see this remarkable promise fulfilled in the unbroken line of kings of Judah, a lineage that continues to Christ, the eternal king.

The final words of David's prayer are a model of how to pray for our own families, asking him to keep his eye on them always and give them eternal blessings. We have been adopted into this royal family, and we are now kings and priests, raised into the heavenly places with Christ. Our royal identity is one we need to hold on to in the rough and tumble and difficulties of our daily lives. We are no longer ordinary. We have an eternal life ahead of us, and that eternal life has entered us and is part of who we are now. We do not just live in God's kingdom, we are part of his royal family.

Have I embraced my identity as one of God's royal children?

David as Warrior King — II Samuel 8, I Chronicles 18, Psalm 60, Revelation 19:11-16



James Tissot, Moabites taken prisoner

Christ's triumph over all enemies results in the peaceable kingdom. For David, once he received the promise of an everlasting kingdom, he set about conquering Israel's long-time enemies and bringing peace. Opponents of Israel since Moses' time — Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia and Amalek—were finally defeated. These victories were a turning point in Israel's history and resulted in peace during David's and Solomon's reigns.

The text says David was fair to everyone, but this comes after the story of his laying out a rope to measure two-thirds of the Moabites to be killed, crippling chariot horses, and destroying 18,000 Edomites. We cringe at the distinctions between how he treated his own people versus his enemies. Today these actions would invite a war crimes tribunal and protests from animal rights activists. There was a consequence; he was not allowed to build the temple because of being a man of war.

Before feeling self-righteous about David's wars, it is important to look at ourselves. In our own Civil War only about 150 years ago, over a million soldiers were killed, wounded or missing. Weapons had become more sophisticated and destructive, but medicine was primitive, leading to horrendous suffering, and deserters were subject

to barbaric tortures. Statistics for World War I are 17 million dead and 20 million wounded. For World War II over 60 million were killed. David's wars seem small in comparison.

Today we claim to have higher standards, having ratified the Geneva Conventions, but in actuality we constantly fall below those standards and struggle with the high incidence of civilian deaths, issues of torture, and the destructive nature of bombing. Horror and disappointment at the destruction of war are legitimate Christian responses since we have a call to commit to the hard work of peacemaking. We cannot just read this story and say that David was a man of his time, without recognizing similar crimes in our time. What we can affirm is that Christ, the Prince of Peace, came to challenge all cruelty.

Am I committed to challenging cruelty?

David's Tenderness and Triumph — II Samuel 9-10, I Chronicles 19, Philippians 2:9-11



Morgan Bible, Mephibosheth kneels before David

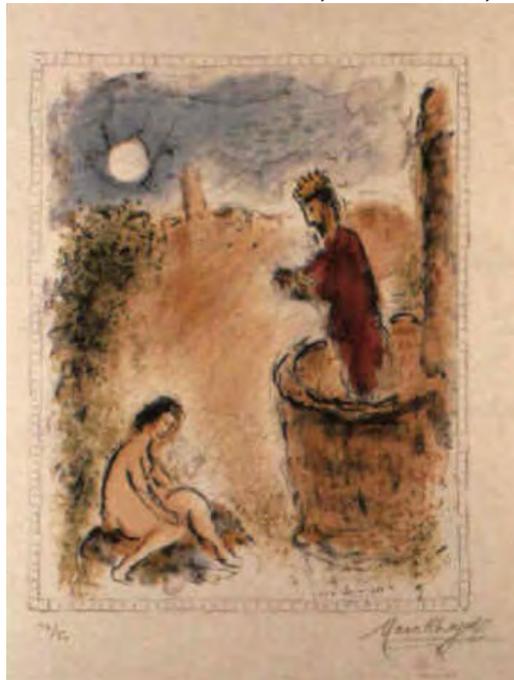
David's triumph over enemies foreshadows the day when every knee will bow to Christ. David went from a fugitive taking refuge with Israel's traditional enemies to becoming a king who defeated all the surrounding nations. They became his vassals, without power to fight back. Just as at the end of time all will bow to Christ whether they believed in him or not, so all the surrounding nations bowed to David.

Between the battles, there is the tender story of David's compassion and loyalty as he reached out to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, and welcomed him into his palace. Like crippled Mephibosheth, we also are crippled by sin, living far from God, and without any claim to come close. Christ, welcomes us out of his great kindness, just as David welcomed Mephibosheth out of great kindness. Christ brings us close to live with him as his own children, just as David did for Mephibosheth. David further gave him the astonishing abundance of all of his grandfather Saul's property, just as Christ provides every spiritual blessing for us.

We look forward to a time when the Messianic promise of complete victory will be realized and we will live in a permanent state of peace. For us, there is now possible a life of overwhelming victory that comes from our faith. We also have a place at Christ's table, seated with him in heavenly realms. We are provided for abundantly since when we seek Christ's kingdom everything we need is given to us. These are the new spiritual realities that are foreshadowed by David's victory and David's hospitality. It changes our self-image to grasp that the Eucharistic table is that of the king and we are welcome there.

Do I come to the king's table in the Lord's supper with gratitude and reverence?

Bathsheba — II Samuel 11-12, Psalm 51, John 8:4-11



Marc Chagall, David and Bathsheba

Bathsheba became a forgiven woman, analogous to the adulterous woman Christ forgave, and analogous to each one of us who have received Christ's forgiveness. She

began as a foolish woman who invited the king's attention by bathing on her roof within his view. After her husband's contrived death, she married David. A beautiful but complicit woman, she added to the discord in David's already dysfunctional family, harming his rule and reputation.

David repented and grieved the promised judgment of their son's death. Bathsheba must also have repented, because their next child was a sign of grace. David comforted his wife, Solomon was conceived, and God particularly loved him. David promised Bathsheba that Solomon would succeed him as king. As David was dying, she collaborated with Nathan the prophet to make sure Solomon became king rather than another son, a spoiled child David had never reprimanded, who had claimed the throne. Bathsheba became an ancestress of Christ and is acknowledged in Matthew 1, along with her late husband.

This story comforts us if we have made bad sexual choices or if anyone in our friends and family have created relational messes. Overwhelming redemption is possible. David's humble penitence, his brokenness in recognizing his sin is expressed in Psalm 51. Murder and adultery are great evils, and he acknowledges that. He asked that his sins be washed away and purified and the stains removed. All of this is possible because of Christ. David's example shows us that no matter what we have done, we can humbly repent and ask for restoration.

Have I repented of past sins and make the best reparations I can?

A parable to change the heart — II Samuel 12, Matthew 13:11-12



Rembrandt van Rijn, Nathan Admonishes David

Prophets used parables to appeal for repentance just as Christ did. David, a Spirit-filled man obedient to God, was brought to repentance by a story that got his attention and helped him see his behavior in a new light. Nathan the prophet told him about a greedy rich man who stole a poor man's little pet lamb. After getting angry and having the analogy to his own behavior pointed out, David confessed his sin.

God warned David of the consequences of his sin: there would be violence in his family, his own family would rebel, his wives would be publicly violated, and his child would die. In God's mercy he would not die because God had forgiven him. But all these terrible things did happen in David's life as described in the next eight chapters.

David gives us an admirable example of response to not getting the answer to prayer he wanted. While hanging in the balance, he humbly plead with God. When the answer was no, he humbly accepted that this was best. David knew it was a consequence of his sin, but even if that is not our situation regarding a particular prayer, realizing God's will is good can be our default. Christ taught us to pray for

God's will and the kingdom. We do not know what will best bring the kingdom and need to trust his wisdom.

James offers us another possibility when our prayers are unanswered. He cautions us that there are times we don't get what we ask for because our motives are selfish. That is a signal to readjust humbly to God's wisdom and like David, accept reality, resume our normal lives, and worship God. Another reason for unanswered prayer can be that we are holding unforgiveness or not loving others.

Do I accept God's wisdom in my prayers answered or delayed or given another answer?

Consequences — II Samuel 13-14, Hebrews 12:7



Marc Chagall, David and Absalom

Christians are told to be grateful for God's wise discipline for us his children. Christ spoke of God as his loving father, giving us the model for ideal fatherhood; children were commanded to honor their father. In David we are given the example of a father who was unwise, who failed to discipline and experienced terrible consequences as a result. Perhaps David knew he had lost moral authority because of his own adultery and his own murder. Rather than strong authority and strong love, he modeled permissiveness and emotional distance. And the results were tragic. His children failed to give him his due honor.

David's son Ammon raped his half-sister Tamar, and though David was angry, nothing was done. Tamar's brother Absalom was angry enough to arrange for the murder of Ammon and then escaped to avoid consequences. When David was unwilling to condone his son Absalom's murder of his brother, and refused to allow him to return to Jerusalem, Joab asked a wise woman to tell a story to change the king's mind. He allowed him back, but did not speak to him for two years.

Finally, Absalom made Joab intercede for him by burning his fields. And though David received him and embraced him, there was no real repentance in his heart as his subsequent insurgency against his father shows. He remained a proud man.

We can be grateful for God's discipline as a sign of his love, as a sign we are his children, and as a way of making us holy. Sometimes his discipline takes the form of disappointments or setbacks, but our best strategy is to humbly accept these difficulties and let them change us.

Do I achieve a good balance between love and discipline in my life and for others?

The Rejected King — II Samuel 15-16, Psalm 3, John 13:21



Marc Chagall, David Ascending the Mount of Olives

As David was rejected and in danger from Absalom's rebellion, he left Jerusalem crying and went toward the Mount of Olives. Similarly, Christ on the night of his betrayal set out for the same place. One can see a parallel to Judas' betrayal of Christ in Absalom's betrayal of David. David loved rebellious Absalom, and he humbly left his capital and trusted God to restore his kingdom.

David's heart shows in the prayer written for this occasion, Psalm 3.

- God is my shield
- God is my glory and the one who lifts me up
- God heals me when I cry
- God sustains me so I can sleep and wake
- I'm not afraid of my opponents
- God saves me and defeats my enemies
- God gives blessing and salvation

David models a level of trust in God when confronted by an opponent trying to do damage, or even a situation that we find overwhelming and too challenging. Perhaps his example is particularly helpful for anyone suffering with a troubled child. Like David, one can recognize ones' own errors that contributed to the problem, but this is not David's focus. Instead, he put his attention on God and his actions on our behalf. David was confident that no trouble, not even one of our making, is too much for God to come to our rescue.

Once again, David challenges me. Can I make these statements of faith when I am in the middle of truly difficult situations? Can I be like Christ who still loved his betrayer, and David who still loved his son?

Is love for all, even the hurtful, the mark of my life?

Absalom's Death — II Samuel 17-18, Hebrews 12:9



Marc Chagall, David mourns Absalom

God compares his love for us to that of a father grieving over his wayward children. In this story we see David's grief over Absalom's death despite every cruel, rebellious, devious, shaming, deceitful and arrogant thing Absalom had done. In this case, Absalom's rebellion ended in death by hanging from a tree, a death not dissimilar to Judas, Christ's betrayer. Surely Christ also felt deep grief over the loss of someone in whom he had invested several years of teaching.

A parent's grief over a troubled child is deep. We so want good things for our children that we feel their distress. We repent of anything we have done to contribute to their problems. As Christian parents, we devote ourselves to prayer. David's combination of deep love for his son, and yet willingness to accept what had happened and let go serve as a model to us not only of God's love, but of how our love should be for troubled people in our lives.

In the next chapter David was called on to set aside that deep personal grief for the sake of his people who had come to his rescue, but who felt guilty and sad in the face of Absalom's death. David had the emotional maturity to recognize that his feelings about his son were not the only important part of the picture.

For us, perhaps grief rather than anger is also the right response when we feel let down by someone in whom we have invested love and care and concern. Christ himself comforts us in that grief and disappointment.

Do I have the emotional maturity to accept a painful situation with someone I love with patience?

David's Care of Mephibosheth — II Samuel 19, Matthew 9:36



Morgan Bible, David Flees Jerusalem

David's care of Mephibosheth reflects Christ's care of us as vulnerable people who are taken into his household without any merit of our own. When David fled from Absalom, Ziba, the steward in charge of Mephibosheth's land, lied to David, saying Mephibosheth was disloyal, and in consequence, David gave Ziba all the land.

When David returned to Jerusalem, he reconciled with Mephibosheth who assured him he cared more about being back at the King's table rather than his property. He saw his place there as an undeserved honor, since he merited death as a descendant of David's enemy. What mattered to him most was his place at the king's table.

For us, too, it is not God's blessings that are most important, it is God's presence and the privilege of the Eucharistic meal. Like Mephibosheth, we are lame and helpless, unable to fend for ourselves, and vulnerable to our spiritual enemy. The grace and reconciliation he received foreshadow our own.

His lameness, not his fault but a result of a childhood accident, limited him in such a way that he was dependant and thereby easily victimized. Yet this dependency also brought him close to the loving heart of David. In the same way, our spiritual disabilities can make us victims, but they can also bring us into a depth of relationship with God that could never have happened but for our limitations.

Do I recognize the depths of my dependance on Christ?

Rebellion—II Samuel 20, Luke 23:21



Morgan Bible, Joab Kills Amasa

David's political weakness reminds us of Christ's time of weakness in his passion. Having already been through the rebellion fomented by his son Absalom, David's nephew Amasa had supported Absalom, and David tried to regain the support of his own tribe of Judah by offering him the job as commander of his troops, replacing Joab.

Meanwhile Israel, which had seemed supportive, was instigated to rebellion. David sent Amasa to mobilize troops against the leader Sheba, but when he acted too

slowly, had to send Abishai. Abishai's brother Joab went along and killed Amasa as soon as they found him. They put down the rebellion with the help of a woman who persuaded the people to betray Sheba. At this point of political weakness, David made Joab his commander once more despite the murder. His personal isolation in accepting collaboration from someone he disapproved of must have been painful.

We see a time of weakness in Christ during his passion when Judas betrayed him, his disciples abandoned him, Peter denied him, and the crowd insisted he be crucified. We are reminded that Christ experienced the range of suffering that we can see in our own lives in his passion. That he became weak and understands our weakness gives us confidence he is with us in those hard experiences.

Do I know that Christ is with me in my weakness?

The Last Battle — II Samuel 21, I Chronicles 20, Mark 12:35-37



Morgan Leaf, Winchester Bible, Frontispiece for I Samuel with Life of David

David's last battle made him triumphant over all his enemies. Christ used David's prophecy of God putting his enemies under his feet and said it applied to the Messiah. Christ's last battle was the cross. He completely overcame his great spiritual enemy who is now under his feet. It is in the light of his triumph that we are part of the skirmishes that remain.

After fighting Philistines much of his adult life, these people who had plagued Israel in the times of Samson, Samuel and Saul, were conquered. In a reprise of his early conflict with Goliath, David once more fought a Philistine giant. He was nearly killed, but was rescued by one of his men, and this became his last battle. A total of

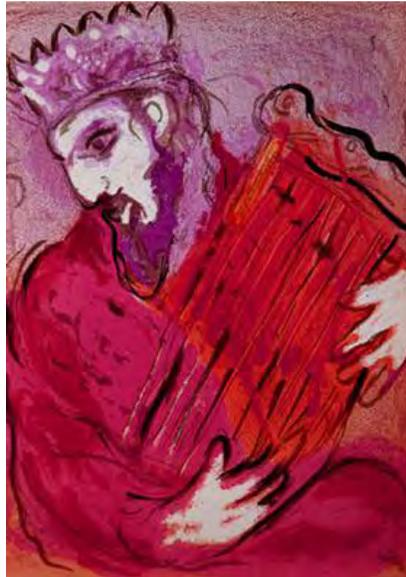
four giants were killed, and the Philistines only reappeared in the time of Hezekiah to be defeated once again.

A tragic judgment on Saul's sons for the sins of their father in breaking an ancient treaty once more showed David's struggle to find the balance between compassion and justice. He authorized these deaths to protect the rest of his people from a famine, but gave Saul's sons a compassionate burial.

We notice that once again I Chronicles has skipped all the tragedy of David's life: his sin with Bathsheba, the rebellion of Absalom, his departure from Jerusalem. The story only focuses on his victories, serving as a reminder that sins can be forgiven and washed away, and God takes broken things and makes them whole.

Do I live conscious of Christ's triumph?

God is my Rock — II Samuel 22, 23:1-7, Psalm 18, Matthew 7:24



Marc Chagall, David with the harp

Christ is our rock, as David sang. At the end of David's life, he called God Rock five times in this poem. In his dying words he addressed God as the Rock of Israel.

The poem is repeated in full in Psalm 18. Psalms uses the image that God is our rock 22 times, and the Hebrew scriptures an additional 19 times. The rock was part of the wilderness wanderings, and Moses' song used it at the end of Deuteronomy. David's years fleeing Saul are the background to this poem, and God his Rock countered his insecurity.

We recall the rock on which the ark rested, the rock of help after the victory over the Philistines,

At a time in my life when I felt deeply insecure, I read this passage and the word rock leapt out, providing needed reassurance. Christ told us to build our lives on the rock and that would enable us to endure any storm and remain confident and firm. The imagery brings a deep level of comfort to which we can return when we see instability in any aspect of our lives. The calming centering prayer that knows Christ is there changes everything.

Do I know Christ as my deepest source of stability?

Bethlehem — II Samuel 23, Luke 2:4-6



John August Swanson, Shepherds

The prophecy that Christ would be born in Bethlehem was fulfilled because as descendants of David, Mary and Joseph went to their ancestral home to meet the

requirements of a census. Just as Christ's lineage mattered, his birthplace mattered.

David's nostalgia for home during the time he was on the run from Saul created a tender story. The Philistines occupied Bethlehem, and three friends went behind enemy lines to obtain well-water from his home. Rather than drink this water, so sacrificially obtained, he poured it out as an offering.

Today Bethlehem's main source of income is tourism from several million annual visitors. In addition to the site of Christ's birth, there is Rachel's tomb, and perhaps David's tomb in the church of Saint David. Near Manger Square there are three cisterns excavated in the rock, said to be where David's water came from.

The story of Christ's birth in Bethlehem is even more significant when we realize that this is where Passover lamb's were raised. David's life as a shepherd evolved into care for the particularly important sheelp. Only five and a half miles from Jerusalem, the shepherds were cared for lambs to be sacrificed in Bethlehem. All of us treasure Bethlehem today because it was the site of Christ's birth and feel a tender attachment to this important place.

What places in my life give me a sense of security?

Innocent Victims — II Samuel 24, I Chronicles 21-22, Matthew 27:19



Pieter de Grebber, King David in Prayer

Innocent victims foreshadow Christ who died that others might live. David's sin and pride in making an unauthorized census resulted in a choice between seven years of famine, three months of defeat in war, or three days of plague. He chose the latter because he had more confidence in God's mercy than that of people. As a result, 70,000 people died. When David saw the angel of death he pleaded for the people saying that he was the one in the wrong, not them. He was told to build an altar and carry out a sacrifice near Jerusalem and the disaster ended.

The texts give us four somewhat different interpretations of the census: God's anger against Israel caused David to harm the people, God told him to count the people, David confessed these actions as sin, and in the Chronicles account the motivator of the census was said to be Satan. The first three interpretations seem contradictory, even though they are in the same chapter of II Samuel. It reminds me of James' warning that we should not accuse God of being the tempter, because he does not tempt anyone.

The site he purchased was where Abraham and Isaac went to sacrifice, and eventually became the temple site. Judgment was replaced by mercy in this place: for Isaac, for the people in David's time, and when the temple was built, each story prefiguring Christ. These surprising details alert me to plot, foreshadowing, and symbolism in scripture that reach their climax in the cross and resurrection.

Having chosen a site, he now knew that his task was to prepare all that he could so that Solomon could build a place of worship. He prepared by gathering materials, and by giving his son instructions. This terrible mistake in his life that led to loss of life was now to be redeemed by making a place central to the worship of God for the whole earth.

David amazes me. After such a tragic failure, he quickly reaffirms that his relationship with God and worship of God are what matter most. He moves from repentance and humility to praise and service almost instantly. He throws all his energies into preparing for the construction of the Temple, a great and beautiful place of worship as now the redemptive purpose of his life.

After repentance, do I quickly return to praise?

Each person matters—I Chronicles 23-27, Colossians 3:23



Jan de Bray, David plays the harp

In David's kingdom the people who worked for that kingdom were not anonymous. Each person matters and these chapters acknowledge leaders by name. Similarly, we of Christ's kingdom matter today and are not anonymous. The work we do for

God is valued, no matter how humble. We can compare this not only to Christ's disciples and other named followers in Acts, but to all those friends and companions to whom Paul refers in his letters.

Levites to serve in the Temple were divided between supervisors, officials and judges, gatekeepers, and musicians. Each morning and evening they joined together to serve as a choir of praise. Priests, Levites, musicians, and gatekeepers were chosen by a lottery to keep things neutral and fair. Troops served in monthly rotations. The chapters describe a modern-sounding organization with well ordered structures. It reads like an archival history of a particularly important time in preparing for Temple worship.

Clearly, these five chapters do not have the same importance as five chapters in the gospels, and understandably, no pastor is likely to select them for a sermon. But today our churches also depend on many doing service analogous to each of these positions. All those faithful deacons who organize food for the sick, put out snacks after the service, and clean up and wash the dishes really do matter. Their work is not in vain. Ordinary service for our church puts us in the company of these pioneers of David's time.

Am I willing to do my small part to serve God in humble ways?

David's preparation for the Temple — I Chronicles 28-29 Matthew 13:44-45



Rudolf Bostic, King David

David's preparations for the temple parallel Christ's gifts to us. Once David knew that his son, Solomon, a man of peace, should build the temple, he energetically prepared place, materials, and an architectural plan. David received instructions

similar to those Moses received for the tabernacle. David set up Solomon for success in this important venture.

David gathered gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, precious stones, costly jewels, fine stone and marble for the project. He donated his personal treasure of gold and silver. David's gifts signified how much he valued making a place of worship.

Once again Chronicles gives the positive view and omits all the palace intrigue we learn about in I Kings that led to Solomon's coronation. Instead, the transition is presented as carefully prepared, full of joyous celebration, and attentive to all the power-players. Doubtless both stories are true, just focused on different parts of reality at different points in time.

David's final prayer is a profound affirmation of his love for and trust in God. In light of all the ups and downs of his life, his sins, his suffering, and his triumphs, David has the deep, mature faith we aspire to. He praises God's greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty. He affirms that all of heaven and earth belong to God, as does his kingdom, all gifts of riches and honor, and anything people can give back to God. His prayer can be our prayer.

Despite my own faltering and failures, can I pray like David?