

### ***You Can Use Them and Do to Them Whatever You Wish***

"Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him." The owner of the house said to them, "No, my friends, don't be so vile. Since this man is my guest, don't do this disgraceful thing. Look, here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I will bring them out to you now, and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish." -Judges 19:22-24

What a disturbing scene: A Levite from Ephraim has a concubine (a woman lawfully wedded but with a lower position than a "wife"). She is unfaithful to him and then leaves him to return to her father's home in Bethlehem. The Levite goes to get her and bring her back. On the way back, they arrive late at the city of Gibeah. No hospitality is afforded them so they settle down in the city square. Kindness is finally offered to them by an old man who is arriving late himself, and they join him in his home. Wicked men (literally "sons of Belial") storm the house demanding that the Levite be brought out so they can rape him. The old man pleads for his guest and offers his own virgin daughter and/or the Levite's concubine saying, "You can use them and do to them whatever you wish." As the story unfolds, the Levite himself throws his woman to the wolves and goes to sleep while they rape her all night and leave her for dead. It gets even more gruesome, but let's stop there.

***Their callousness cannot be fully attributed to the obvious failure in that culture to hold women in high regard***

A few observations: The old man seemed kind enough and spoke with fervency to protect his guest (singular). He says, "Don't do this disgraceful thing." What? Giving his daughter and the concubine was not disgraceful? The Levite gives his concubine over to these men and then goes off and has a good night's sleep. Her previous unfaithfulness to him cannot justify this action. Their callousness cannot be fully attributed to the obvious failure in that culture to hold women in high regard, but there can be no doubt that such disregard paved the way for the unconscionable acts of the Levite and the old man. Keep in mind, however, that the law of God did not tolerate such a thing and that the rest of the nation was incensed about what took place. The gang rape and murder of the concubine sparked such an indignation in Israel that Gibeah was besieged and the tribe of Benjamin nearly annihilated.

When the prophet Hosea wanted to describe how wicked Israel had become he said, "They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah" (9:9). How horrible it would have been to live in that corruption. It's bad enough just reading about it.

### ***The Benjamites Would Not Listen to Their Fellow Israelites***

The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you? Now surrender those wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel." But the Benjamites would not listen to their fellow Israelites. - Judges 20:12-13

The law of God, the blood of a murdered rape victim and the indignation of an entire nation cried out that the worst kind of evil be purged from the land. Israel had gathered en masse to bring retribution to the despicable men of Gibeah who had gang raped and murdered the concubine of a Levite. An army of 400,000 was ready to bring the Lord's justice against Benjamin, who had some of the best fighting men in all of Israel, but were only 25,000 strong. Before attacking, Israel sent men throughout Benjamin to get their response to the crime and to exhort them to hand over the perpetrators for execution. No dice.

***The wicked act empowered demonic entities who gave strength to Benjamin as they fought***

The Benjamites were more incensed over this intrusion into their affairs than the hideous crime that had been committed. Perhaps they thought they were noble for defending their own, but they were not. The terms of their covenant with God expressly required them to hand over the men who committed this atrocity. They refused. Atonement had to be made for this sin and the only atonement that would suffice was the blood of the murderers. It didn't matter if the villains were their own sons. To protect them meant that they were allowing evil to take root in the land. If the Benjamites did not hand over the men of Gibeah, the whole tribe would have to pay the price.

At first, Benjamin had success in fighting against the rest of Israel. Why would this be since it is clear that the Lord was against the tribe of Benjamin? Israel was inquiring of the Lord every step of the way and following his directions, and yet they suffered losses in the first two battles. After the first loss, the people came before the Lord with weeping, asking if they should really be doing this. They received confirmation but they still lost the next battle. They then gathered at Bethel with fasting, weeping and offerings, again seeking the Lord. The Lord sent them out again, and this time they had complete victory.

I believe that the wicked act at Gibeah empowered demonic entities who gave strength to Benjamin as they fought against the army of God. The final defeat of this evil stronghold in the land required fasting and intercession.

### ***Your People Will Be My People and Your God My God***

*But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God." -Ruth 1:16*

Little did Ruth know how true her words would become. Yes, Naomi's people would become her people and Naomi's God would become her God. But even more than this, the name of this foreigner from Moab would become forever etched in the annals of the history of salvation.

You may know the story. Ruth, a Moabite, marries the son of a couple from Bethlehem who have come to Moab with their two sons to find relief from a famine. Ruth's father-in-law dies, and then her husband and his brother die, leaving no men left in the family. Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, decides to return to Israel but urges Ruth and her other daughter-in-law, Orpah, to stay in Moab for the prospect of remarriage. Orpah stays, but Ruth will not be dissuaded from coming with Naomi. Naomi has become family and, besides, she has become despondent at the loss of her husband and sons. It would not be good for Ruth to leave her alone now. Ruth will forsake her native land to be with Naomi. Naomi's people will become her people, and Naomi's God will become her God.

*Little did she know*

Ruth had already come to know the name and ways of the Lord, the God of Israel. She invoked his name in her vow to never let anything but death separate her from Naomi. It is probable that her willingness to commit herself to the Lord and his people is based largely on the impression that Naomi and her family and Naomi's God have already made on her. And Ruth would in no wise come to regret her decision to leave the people and the gods of Moab for what the Lord had in store for her. Little did she know.

In making this commitment of love to her mother-in-law, Ruth is, in fact, taking refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (see 2:12). His favor is upon her. He blesses her to become the wife of one of the kindest, most upright and prosperous men in all Israel. She turns Naomi from "bitter" to "pleasant" again, and is better to Naomi than seven sons (4:15). She becomes the great-grandmother of the most notable king in the history of Israel. She becomes a progenitor to the Messiah, the Savior of the world. She gets a book of the Bible named after her. And thousands of years later, parents all over the world are still naming their children after her.

Little did she know.

### ***So Boaz Took Ruth and She Became His Wife***

*"May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel" . . . So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. -Ruth 4:11,13*

It was notably rare when Israelite society lived in close harmony with the precepts that God had given to the nation in the Sinai desert. The ideal was hard to produce because the people so often strayed from the pattern that was shown to them on the Mount. But during the time of the Judges, when so many people were doing what was right in their own eyes, the story of Ruth is a shining example of how the Law of Moses was meant to work.

First of all, when Naomi heard that the famine was over in Israel, she knew that she had a place to return. Land could always be redeemed into the hands of the relatives of the original owners, so even if Naomi's husband had sold their land, there was a system whereby one of their close relatives could "redeem" it—that is, buy it back. Besides this, at the jubilee, every fiftieth year, the land would not even have to be redeemed. Ownership would automatically revert back to the original family, so even if Ruth and Naomi found no kinsman to buy back the land, title would still return to their family at jubilee. This system (see Leviticus 25) not only prevented wholesale takeover of real estate by the wealthy, it provided continuity and stability in society. Naomi had a place to return.

***The story of Ruth is a shining example of how the Law of Moses was meant to work***

Still, when Naomi and Ruth arrived back in Bethlehem, they had no immediate means of support, but because the Law accounted for the poor through the practice of gleaning (Lv 19:9-10) they could subsist. The law provided for the poor, the alien, the widow and the fatherless. Ruth, herself an alien, could also engage in the prescribed worship of Yahweh (Nu 9:14).

Perpetuity of land ownership meant that there would always be relatives nearby, and the Lord provided a righteous "kinsman-redeemer" in the form of Boaz. The kinsman-redeemer was responsible for redeeming family members in slavery (Lv 25:47-49) and marrying the childless widow of his relative (Dt 25:5). Ruth's request for marriage to Boaz (3:9) was not only based on the fact that he had taken a liking to her, but that the law called for a relative of her deceased husband to take her as his wife. Her request was not out of line and, providentially, it was something that Boaz was pleased to do.

All this is an indication that if we are ready, willing and able to do things according to God's design, blessing will come to where we live.

### ***I Was Pouring out My Soul to the Lord***

*Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine." "Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord." -1 Samuel 1:13-15*

Two types of prayer have a way of reaching the throne room of heaven. They are what I call “the prayer of the human heart” and “the Spirit-inspired prayer.” While the Spirit helps us to pray as we really ought (Ro 8:26), the heart helps us to pray as we really are. Hannah knew how to pray from her heart.

Hannah desperately wanted a son. Her husband had another wife who was able to bear children and who constantly provoked Hannah to tears regarding her barrenness. Hannah’s husband was kindhearted, but her misery remained. In her grief, she went to the temple to pray. Because of her anguish, and because her lips were moving but no sound was coming out, Eli the priest thought she was drunk. Not so—she was pouring out her soul to the Lord.

***While the Spirit helps us to pray as we really ought, the heart helps us to pray as we really are***

Hannah was in good company in pouring out her soul to the Lord. When David’s soul was downcast, what did he do? He poured out to the Lord in song and in prayer. When Jesus’s soul was sorrowful to the point of death, where did he go? He went to Gethsemane to pour out his soul in prayer. There are really only two healthy places to take your pain: To a trusted companion or to the Lord. Other places merely mask the pain, and many result in addiction. In some cases even a companion won’t do—only the Lord can suffice. Hannah’s husband tried to understand, and comfort her, but it was only in coming to the Lord that Hannah found relief.

The heart can be deceitful and can want things outside the will of God. But it is still right to pour those things out before the Lord. The things that touch your heart are important to Father. He wants to hear about it. Your heart may not always be in alignment with the will of God, but if you come before him in Spirit and in truth, he will align your will with his and bring comfort to those places of anguish. There is no need to carry the burden when Jesus has invited you to bring it to him.

Something happened for Hannah as she poured her heart out before the Lord. It was in that place of heartfelt prayer that the Lord met her. It is the same place that he will meet us too.

### ***In Those Days the Word of the Lord Was Rare***

*The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions . . . Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. -1 Samuel 3:1,7*

This is one of the saddest phrases in all the Scriptures: *In those days the word of the Lord was rare.* If it is true that *man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord* (Dt 8:3), there was not much spiritual sustenance in Israel in those days. But that was about to change. The Lord was about to reveal himself to the boy Samuel through his word.

Because the word of the Lord was rare, neither Samuel, nor his guardian and mentor, Eli, knew what was happening when the Lord actually started to speak to Samuel. They were not expecting the Lord to speak because they were not used to him doing so—not the best arrangement when you’re God’s representative before the people, as Eli was.

***Revelation is not limited to the Bible, but must be in agreement with it***

But in our day, the word of the Lord is not rare—and I am not just talking about the fact that we have the Bible. Remember that Israel had the written word of God in those days (Eli slept next door to the ark which contained the stone tablets of the Law) but the word of the Lord was still rare. The word of the Lord that we are to live on is more than just his written word. His word comes to us in many and various ways—which are not equal to the Scriptures in authority, but can be equal in essence. His revelation is not limited to the Bible, but must be in agreement with it. Dreams, visions, revelations, and prophecy are all in operation today. Through the Spirit of Jesus, there does not have to be a famine of the word of God in our day.

The Lord would reveal himself to the boy Samuel by speaking to him. It is through his word that God reveals himself to us. How can we know him unless he speaks to us? Samuel came to know the Lord through his word (v7, 21). The Lord was with Samuel and none of his words fell to the ground. Why? Because he had the word of the Lord (v19). Consequently, all Israel recognized him as a prophet (v20).

In a day and age where the word of the Lord was rare, all Israel found out what a difference the word of the Lord can make when it came to Samuel. And in a day when the word of the Lord is not rare, it can make just as much difference in our situation.

### ***They Carried the Ark into Dagon's Temple***

*After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark... -1 Samuel 5:1-3*

The first commandment Moses learned high atop Sinai was the first commandment that many of us learned in the hallowed classroom of some church basement. It was, *You shall have no other gods before me* (Ex 20:3, Dt 5:7). The Lord will not share his glory with another, especially anything that purports itself to be God.

I don't know of any culture or society that does not have a god of some kind. We have all been given a "general revelation" that God is. The created order and an innate witness tells us so. But when it comes to the understanding of who God is, there are countless humanly and demonically contrived characterizations. The anthropocentric view that it doesn't matter to God how people characterize him, as long as they are sincere, does not fit with the understanding of Yahweh as a very personal and jealous God. He seeks to be worshiped in spirit and in truth. In order to worship him correctly, one must have a revelation of who he really is.

***"It's all right, these Philistines are sincere in their worship. If that is how they understand me, I can accept that"***

So, when the ark of the Lord is brought into the temple of the Philistine god, Dagon—do you think that this doesn't matter to the Lord? Does he say, "It's all right, these Philistines are sincere in their worship. If that is how they understand me, I can accept that?" No, the Scriptures teach that if someone is worshipping an idol, they are, in fact, worshipping a demonic entity (1Co 10:20). That becomes a slight problem, wouldn't you say?

So when the presence of the Lord is brought into the temple of Dagon, what happens? The carved image of the pagan god falls to the ground before the ark of the Lord. When the Philistines put it back up again (accidents do happen) there is no mistaking what is actually going on inside that temple. The Lord not only puts him to the canvass, he knocks his block off. Dagon winds up with no head and no hands, signifying no ability to hear or help.

Some people want to be like the Philistines and have a spare god in their temple. But the Lord will have none of it. All false gods must come down before him.

### ***But His Sons Did Not Walk in His Ways***

*When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel... But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. -1 Samuel 8:1,3*

As a young pastor, I attended a weekend retreat for ministers in my denomination. Among those in attendance were eight "retired" pastors. During one of the sharing times I was amazed and troubled as, one by one, nearly every one of the senior servants of God shared about sons and daughters who were not walking in the ways of the Lord. My heart went out to these men and wondered how it could be that so many from their generation were facing the same heartbreak?

I also find myself asking how it was that the great seer, Samuel, could have sons who turned aside from the ways of their father and of his God? As is so often the case when children go astray, there is no readily available answer to this question. The Old Testament narrative gives us no information that would lead to an explanation of the corruption of Samuel's two sons. Samuel was not the only great man of God to see his children wander. And those whose children have not strayed will, without exception, give credit to the mercy of God for covering parental flaws. Judging parents whose children leave the path of righteousness is rarely fair and never productive.

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It's not that there never is an explanation, however. Carte blanche absolution is as unproductive as undue guilt. It is fitting to take a good hard look at what might have gone wrong. Perhaps it can be fixed. There is no question, for instance, that children who are adopted, even from birth, have rejection issues that must be dealt with on a spiritual level. Otherwise, they are more susceptible to being drawn away. Another example comes from the situation I mentioned earlier regarding the retired pastors. Sometime after the retreat, I had a chance to talk to a son of one of those retired pastors. I asked him for his insight and he said, "It's simple. In that generation of pastors, there was an expectation that you give yourself first to the church and then your family. None of us liked it and many of us rebelled against it."

Whatever the reasons for Samuel's sons not following in his ways, judges were not to be appointed by family succession, but by God. This led to Israel asking for a king, which led further from God's intention for them. All of which was extremely hard on Samuel as a father in Israel.



### **Reaffirm the Kingship**

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there reaffirm the kingship." So all the people went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king in the presence of the Lord . . . and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration. -1 Samuel 11:14-15

After Saul had been anointed and declared king in Israel, there were still some outstanding questions about his leadership. As it is with all who have just been appointed to a prominent position, people were waiting to see if Saul would prove worthy of the assignment.

Despite the fact that Samuel, had affirmed Saul as God's man, there was vocal opposition to him becoming king. There were valid reasons to wonder if this was the right guy. First of all, Saul was from, of all places, Gibeah. Remember Gibeah—that abhorrent city that was destroyed because of the men who had raped and murdered a concubine (Judges 19 & 20)? Saul's tribe, Benjamin, was literally "least in all of Israel" because of being nearly wiped out over that incident in their not-so-distant history. How ironic and redemptive that God would choose a Benjamite from Gibeah to be the first King of Israel. Secondly, Saul definitely had some insecurities. After having been anointed king privately in the district of Zuph, Samuel called the nation together so that the identity of the new king could be revealed. Saul would not step forward, but was found hiding *among the baggage* (1 Sam 10:22). And, after becoming king, instead of setting up his administration, he went back to farming at Gibeah.

But then came the test. The city of Jabesh was under the threat of a cruel siege. Because Saul was the anointed of the Lord, the Spirit of God came on him in power, the troops were mobilized, and Jabesh was delivered. Saul had risen to the occasion and engendered a new confidence in his leadership. A similar thing happened in the early days of the presidency of George W. Bush. Despite counsel to the contrary, he returned to Washington during the 9-11 crisis and created confidence in his leadership.

With this new confidence that the people had in Saul, Samuel decided to reassemble the people, this time at Gilgal, to reaffirm Saul as king in the presence of the Lord. This was good for Saul, and it was good for the people. They both felt better about God's choice of king, and were now able to really celebrate that choice together. Sometimes the timing is right to reaffirm the appointment of those called to lead. It can be of great benefit to everyone.

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### **Whether by Many or by Few**

Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few." -1 Samuel 14:6

It is one thing to defeat an enemy when you have a massive army. It is quite another when it is just you and your buddy. But to the Lord there is no difference, except, perhaps, that he gets more glory by delivering the victory through the two instead of the many.

The fearsome Philistine army was gathered against Israel at Micmash. They had *three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore* (1 Sam 13:5). Saul called for the men of Israel to assemble to meet this threat, but when he counted his troops, all he had was six hundred quaking soldiers to face the mighty Philistine army. A spirit of fear had come upon the rest of Israel's elite and they fled the country or scattered to hide in caves.

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In the throws of this situation, Jonathan saw his opportunity to do something when a small detachment of Philistine soldiers went out to the pass near Micmash. He was not presuming that he should engage this detachment in battle, but something had to be done. Jonathan did not seem to be infected with the epidemic of fear that gripped the nation. He thought that perhaps the Lord would act if he took a step of faith so he "laid out a fleece" (see Judges 6:36-40) to discern whether he and his armor-bearer should attack the Philistine detachment. Was this presumption? No. They were simply aware of the fact that it was no more difficult for the Lord to save with a few as it would be with many. It is not likely that they envisioned that their action would actually result in the defeat of the entire Philistine army, which it did. By their affirmation that the Lord can just as easily deliver by just a few, they opened the door for a miraculous victory for Israel.

Sometimes we have to make the first move if God is going to send panic and an earthquake into the enemy's camp. He can and will save, even if only by a few. In fact, he usually prefers it that way, as was the case with Gideon's army and the church at Pentecost. His arm is not too short to save, no matter how many are arrayed for us or against us. After all, *nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few.*

***But Please Honor Me Before the Elders***

Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today...Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people..." -1 Samuel 15:28,30

The story of Saul is one of a high calling and potential greatness hog-tied by lingering insecurities. The sin of Saul was that he cared more about the people's approval than God's. It cost him his kingdom—and his honor.

Saul, son of Kish. Chosen and anointed of God. *There was no one like him among all the people* (1Sa 10:24). He fought valiantly against the enemies of Israel on every side (1Sa 14:47-48). He had the full backing of the Lord, the Lord's prophet and the Lord's people. How was it that he lost it all?

Some would say that it was disobedience—and they would be right. But underlying that disobedience was an immoderate concern about what others thought of him. He desired to be honored by men.

***He desired to be honored by men. This is what led him to disobey God.***

This is what led him to disobey God. The story in 1 Samuel 15 bears this out. When the prophet Samuel came to Saul to confront him for not obeying the Lord's explicit instructions to annihilate the Amalekites and all their livestock, Saul speaks first and says, "I have carried out the Lord's instructions." He is covering up. Samuel's reply is classic, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears?" Saul deflects responsibility and says, "The soldiers brought them." Supposedly, it was for the noble purpose of sacrificing to the Lord—"but we totally destroyed the rest..." "Stop!" says Samuel, and reminds the disobedient king of the Lord's instructions. Saul, wishing at this point that F. Lee Bailey was available, repeats his earlier defense. Samuel rebukes him saying, "To obey is better than sacrifice." At this Saul finally says, "I have sinned." His reason is telling: "I was afraid of the people and gave in to them." What is troublesome is that immediately after confessing, he asks Samuel to come with him to worship the Lord. Why? So that he might receive the forgiveness of heaven? No. So that he might be honored before the elders and the people because of Samuel's presence with him. After all this, his main concern is still what people think about him.

Saul wanted to be honored but, from that day, Samuel never honored Saul with his presence again. Worse yet, neither did the Spirit of God. And in the end, the honor that could have been his went to another—one who cared more about the honor of God than the praises of men.

***David Ran Quickly Toward the Battle Line***

*This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel . . . As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.* -1 Samuel 17:46,48

David was indignant. For forty days Goliath had mocked and challenged the fighting men of Israel. As the young shepherd arrived on the scene, the Philistine giant stepped out from his regiment and shouted his usual defiance. *And David heard it*, the scripture says. That's all it took. As all the Israelites ran away in fear, David, in righteous indignation, said, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God?"

Is it not remarkable that David was not the least bit intimidated by this nine-foot tall warrior whose armor weighed 125 pounds and whose spear head as much as a bowling ball? David chucks Saul's armor and goes out to meet Goliath with nothing but a sling and five smooth stones. What a sight. The fortune of the entire Israelite army rests on a boy with a slingshot against this descendant of Anak who would make Shaquille O'Neal look petite.

***What amazes me is David's aggressiveness***

What amazes me is David's aggressiveness. He counters every taunt of the warrior bully with godly contempt. If David wanted to rile the enemy, he certainly did. Perhaps he had in mind to rile his countrymen. Perhaps he was just riled himself. As Goliath moves in for the kill, David does not hesitate. He runs—not away, but directly to the battle line, sending a divinely guided missile into the forehead of the giant, knocking him out. He then kills this hero of Philistia with his own sword and cuts off his head while both armies watch in stunned amazement.

David never hesitated, doubted or flinched. How do you account for that? He had a faith and an authority, tested by experience, and fueled by a righteous indignation against the enemies of God. The writer of Hebrews says, *My righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him* (10:38). Faith never shrinks back and neither did David. He said to the giant in the hearing of all, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty."

You might think that the cards were stacked against David in a fight with Goliath. David would tell you that it was the other way around.

### ***An Evil Spirit from God Came Forcefully upon Saul***

*The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice. -1 Samuel 18:10-11*

How could an evil spirit be from God? Would God really send an evil spirit to torment someone? If so, would the purpose be redemptive or punitive? Is there other scriptural evidence to corroborate such a phenomenon? The story of Saul being tormented by an evil spirit sent by God raises many such questions. It is a hard fit with our personal theologies. Many of us are uncomfortable with the existence of evil spirits, much less the idea that the hand of God might be involved in a person being afflicted by one.

Yes—there is scriptural precedent making valid the concept that God can and will send an evil spirit to establish his purposes. This is not the same as saying the Lord entices anyone to do evil, for James says, *When tempted, no one should say, "God*

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*is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone (1:13). But both testaments in the Christian Scriptures contain elements that argue the legitimacy of the notion in question here. In Judges, God sent an "evil spirit" between Abimilech and the people of Shechem to avenge their murdering of Gideon's sons (9:23-24). The Lord sent a "lying spirit" into the mouths of the prophets (1 Kings 22:23) in order to entice the evil King Ahab to go into a battle where the Lord intended him to meet his death. We all know the story of how the Lord allowed Satan to afflict Job in order that Job's righteousness might be an example to spiritual and human beings alike. And Paul was "given" a messenger from Satan to "torment" him to keep him from becoming conceited regarding the surpassingly great spiritual revelations that he had received (2Co 12:7-9).*

For Saul, it was a case of his spiritual house being swept clean of the Holy Spirit allowing the entrance of the evil spirit. That he may have been handed over to Satan so that his prideful flesh might be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1Co 5:5) is a possibility. In any case, it is within God's power, and at infrequent times, his will, to unleash an unclean spirit to accomplish a redemptive purpose or to execute judgment on a situation that will not be redeemed.

### ***Jonathan Made a Covenant with the House of David***

*So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, "May the Lord call David's enemies to account." And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself. -1 Samuel 20:16-17*

Not many heirs to a throne would have the purity of heart to befriend and endorse the one person who could be their replacement. But right from the start, Jonathan's humility and his love for David meant that he would always be loyal to his friend, even to the point of laying down the right of succession to the throne of his father.

Jonathan's father, King Saul, was jealous of David and saw him as a threat. Saul's jealousy drove him to plot David's murder because he saw the writing was on the wall concerning David's ascent to the throne. Saul would often remind Jonathan, *"As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established"* (1Sa 20:31). Jonathan knew that—and yet he not only refused to be party to his father's plans to kill the son of Jesse, he prevented him from doing so more than once.

***The heir apparent submitted to the heir appointed***

Jonathan saw something in David that Saul himself had seen at one time. The favor of God was on David. Jonathan not only accepted that, he embraced it and counted it a privilege to be friends with David. They were kindred spirits (18:1). Jonathan took pleasure in David's company. He grew attached to David and loved him as himself (18:3). They were as close as friends could be and swore an oath of lasting friendship to each other to be honored by future generations (20:16). When they were driven apart by Saul's madness, it broke David's heart (20:41), but Jonathan searched out David in exile in order to help him find strength in God and submit himself again to his leadership (23:16). When David heard of Jonathan's death, he grieved deeply and exclaimed that Jonathan's love was even more wonderful than that of a woman (2Sa 1:26) (to try to make a case that there was a homosexual aspect to their love for each other is contemptuous).

Perhaps the most significant thing that the heir apparent did for the heir appointed is found in 1 Samuel 18:4: *Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.* What a humble and profound act of submission. How many of us would do the same?

### **David and His Men Went to Keilah**

When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," he inquired of the Lord... The Lord answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."...So David and his men went to Keilah -1 Samuel 23: 1-2,5

This story tells you a lot about David, showing him to be a true hero in Israel. To appreciate David's valor in this situation, a little background is in order. David is an exile in his own country. Half of Israel is on the lookout for him because they know the king wants him executed. The support he was used to getting from the populace and his former troops has crumbled under the heavy hand of Saul's tyranny. The top priority for Saul's army is to find David and eliminate him. So David is on the run, and virtually on his own.

He flees from Saul to inquire of the Lord through Ahimilech the Priest at Nob. From there he goes to the Philistine town of Gath, attempting to find refuge away

**Let me ask you, whose job is it to protect this town from the raiding Philistines?**

from Israel. But his reputation precedes him and he is perceived to be a threat. David feigns insanity in order to gain his release from the situation and escapes to a cave at a place called Adullam. It is at Adullam that some people finally rally around him. His brothers and his father's household come to him there. No doubt, they felt threatened under the regime of Saul and needed refuge, for they later sought protection from the King of Moab (1Sa 22:4). David's next support came from a ragtag assembly of societal rejects. The scripture says, *All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader* (1Sa 22:2). There were about four-hundred men in all.

So, the word comes to David that the Philistines are attacking Keilah and looting its threshing floors. Let me ask you, whose job is it to protect this town from the raiding Philistines? Certainly not this little group of disenfranchised vagabonds. Where is Saul and his army? They are not on the job so David asks the Lord if he can save Keilah and gets the ok. He goes back to his guys and they think he must be kidding. They are shaking as it is, and David wants to go out and fight the Philistines? But they go up to rescue the city and the Lord gives them victory. And it is not until then that Saul musters his troops—not to help the city, but to capture David.

What we have here is a man who puts his own interests and safety aside to help others in distress. A true leader who takes down-and-outers and makes them up-and-comers. A valiant hero and a champion of justice.

### **For He Is the Anointed of the Lord**

Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He said to his men, "The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord." -1 Samuel 24:5-6

David understood that it is *God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another* (Ps 75:7). He understood that it was the Lord who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay." (Dt 32:35). But most of all, he understood God given authority: *Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm* (1 Ch 16:22 KJV).

David had the perfect opportunity to practice the not so golden rule: "Do unto others before they do unto you" (from the Revised Slandered Version). The very man who was obsessed with taking David's life unwittingly comes into the cave where David and his men were hiding. As Saul is relieving himself, David's men presume that this is divine deliverance. Wouldn't David be justified in taking Saul's life at that moment? Numerous attempts on David's life had already been made by Saul. David knew that Saul's thirst for his blood was unquenchable. Saul had already been rejected by the Lord as king in Israel. David knew that he was the Lord's chosen successor. Saul's reign had become a scourge on Israel and many innocent people had suffered, including Ahimilech the priest and his family whom Saul had unmercifully massacred.

**He not only was leaving room for God's vengeance, he was leaving room for Saul's repentance**

But David somehow knew better. He not only was leaving room for God's vengeance, he was leaving room for Saul's repentance (see Romans 12:19-21). Saul's entrance into the cave where David was hiding was no coincidence. This test revealed what David genuinely valued—which was respect for those whom God had placed in authority. David was responsible to maintain that respect, even in the midst of injustice.

If it comes down to choosing to obey God or God's unjust authorities, we must choose to obey God while continuing to respect authority. David did it. As did the apostles. As did Martin Luther King Jr. As much as God loves obedience, he hates rebellion. Yes, David prayed that the Lord would avenge Saul's wrongdoing, but Saul was still king and he would not lift a hand against the one who had been anointed as such. Respect for those in authority is actually respect for God (see Romans 13:1-2). David had his own preparation for becoming king, and this was part of it.



### ***Find Me a Woman Who Is a Medium***

*He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. -1 Samuel 28:6-7*

Desperate men resort to desperate measures. This is the end of the line for Saul. The Philistines have assembled, the heavens have become brass and Saul has become decrepit in soul and spirit. He wants the word of the Lord, but can't get it. Yahweh will not answer. The die has already been cast. The Spirit of God has departed from his life. And Saul's self-serving inquiries remain unheeded.

With terror filling his desperate heart, and "Ichabod" written over his life, Saul fills up what degradation was still lacking in his soul: He consults a medium. A medium practices necromancy—that is communication with the dead. Not only was this detestable to the Lord and strictly forbidden by him (see Deuteronomy 18:11-12), Saul himself had expelled all mediums and spiritists from the land. Now here, he was not only violating the Lord's command, but testifying against himself that what he is doing is wrong. His action is such a serious offense that 1 Chronicles 10:13 says that this is one of the reasons why the Lord put him to death. It was the last straw for a man whose life had become a considerable disappointment.

***With terror filling his desperate heart, and "Ichabod" written over his life, Saul fills up what degradation was still lacking in his soul: He consults a medium***

Of course, there is the question whether the "Witch of Endor" actually was able to conjure up the spirit of Samuel. There is little doubt that demons like to impersonate both angels and persons who have died, in order to deceive. In this case though, the words of the text, the medium's reaction and the content of Samuel's message, all indicate that it was indeed Samuel who spoke with Saul.

In any case, Saul's regretful saga is ended. *"Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me"* (v19), says the dead man. It's too late. Saul has sealed his own demise. A nation is about to mourn. And mourn they should.

### ***But David Found Strength in the Lord His God***

*David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God. -1 Samuel 30:6*

Even the best of leaders can lose the confidence of their people because of circumstance. If the people are talking about "stoning" you, it may not be your fault. Find strength in the Lord and see if there is anything you can do about the situation.

During the last sixteen months of the reign of Saul in Israel, David had found refuge and favor in the Philistine city of Gath under its king, Achish. Achish had learned to trust David and his band of six-hundred fighting men—even giving them their own town, called Ziklag. There they had made a life for themselves and their families. David had become loyal to Achish who had learned to invoke the name of the Lord. David's loyalty was such that this man who had slain the great Philistine giant, Goliath, was now prepared to march with Philistines as they prepared to make war against Israel. As they set out with Achish and the Philistine army, the other rulers of the Philistines had a hard time with the picture. This legend of a man among the Hebrews who had slain his "tens of thousands" (mostly Philistines) was now going to fight against his own people? Despite Achish's attestations for David, the rulers insisted that he be sent back.

***Perhaps this is the real key to David's greatness***

David and his men returned to Ziklag to find it destroyed by fire. The Amalekites had burned it and taken the women and children captive. Had David made some kind of error in judgment? Had he let his men and their families down? Was he responsible for what had happened? Probably not. But one of the occupational hazards of being a leader is to be blamed when things go wrong, even if the indictments are unfounded.

Was David distressed? Certainly. The men weren't the only ones who were wasted emotionally and physically at the loss of their homes and their families. David had his own losses. And now David has to deal with the added stress of their talk of stoning him. This is another test of David's leadership. What does he do—what can he do—when he has no strength left?

Perhaps this is the real key to David's greatness. When he was totally spent, *David found strength in the Lord his God*. At those times of onerous setback, when we literally feel like we can't go on, we can find the same source of strength that David found. Strength that will help us not only to go on—but to go on to victory.

### ***Must the Sword Devour Forever?***

*Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?" -2 Samuel 2:26*

Whoever said, "Revenge is sweet," didn't know the whole story. Revenge is like the scroll of John's apocalyptic vision that tastes like honey in the mouth but turns sour the stomach (see Revelation 10:10). Violence begets violence and its only curtain call is bitterness. Those who live by the sword will die by the sword (see Matthew 26:52). They that sow the wind will reap the whirlwind (see Hosea 8:7). The Lord hates when a man covers himself with violence (see Malachi 2:16).

After Saul's death, Abner, the commander of Israel's army, took some of his men and went to the Benjamite city of Gibeon. There he was met by a group of men led by Joab, the commander

***Violence begets violence and  
its only curtain call is  
bitterness***

of David's small army. There was no apparent contention between the two groups at first. As they sat down opposite each other at the pool of Gibeon, Abner suggested that some of the young men put on a display of their prowess in hand-to-hand combat. Twelve young men from each side are chosen for this floorshow, but it quickly turns deadly and escalates into a violent struggle between the two groups.

What we have here is the beginning of civil war (is there such a thing?). Abner knows that it has gone too far and calls out to Joab and his men, "*Must the sword devour forever?*" A question for the ages, indeed. Human nature being what it is, the answer to that question, I'm afraid, is "yes." Even though most who will read this live in relative peace, national feuds, civil wars, military coups, gang slayings, family violence, school shootings, genocide, and the like pervade the human experience. And it all inevitably ends in bitterness.

The young men who fought hand to hand wasted their instinct for combat. There are valiant battles to be fought that do not end in bitterness. These are battles for the souls of individuals and nations that are fought with the power of the gospel, with truth, with prophetic calls to righteousness, with confrontation of evil and with prevailing prayer—battles that speed the coming of the day when the sword will no longer devour.

### ***A Prince and a Great Man***

*So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner. Then the king said to his men, "Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day?" -2 Samuel 3:37-38*

Abner must have been quite a guy. A cousin to Saul, he was the commander of his army and his right-hand-man from the beginning. Despite the time that the Lord put him in a deep sleep when David entered Saul's camp (1Sa 26:12), Abner was a trustworthy and able protector of the king and his enterprises. Even though he knew that the Lord had promised on oath to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel (3:9-10), Abner still remained loyal to the family and friends of Saul after his passing. He was highly offended when falsely accused of sleeping with Saul's concubine after the king's death. His loyalty would not allow that.

***He was like  
Robert E. Lee***

In addition to his loyalty, Abner was a man of great influence. After Saul's death it was Abner who single-handedly put Ish-Bosheth, son of Saul, on the throne of Israel. And when he decided to endorse David after Ish-Bosheth had falsely accused him, all other support for Ish-Bosheth dematerialized. The elders of Israel had, for some time, wanted to make David their king (3:17) and the main thing stopping that was the will of Abner. David welcomed Abner with a feast as Abner arrived with the deed to the kingdom of Israel in hand.

Abner could be a bit intimidating as Ish-Bosheth (3:11) and Paltiel (3:16) discovered, but he showed wisdom and discretion when required. His killing of Asahel (2:18-23) came after repeated warnings and it was Abner's reasoning with Joab that de-escalated the violence at Gibeon (2:26).

In a way, he was like Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate army in the U.S. Civil War. Though they both were on the "wrong side," they were men of ideals, highly revered by comrade and adversary alike. Abner was a better man than Joab, the commander of David's army, and would have been a great addition to David had he not been deceived and murdered by Joab. David gave Abner a state funeral, made Joab attend, wept openly and eulogized him by saying, "*Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day?*"

### ***David Danced Before the Lord with All His Might***

*David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing . . . David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.*  
-2 Samuel 6:12,14-15

If you want to see a man with the favor of God on his life, look at David. A man after God's own heart, he couldn't help dancing before the Lord with all his might, and he didn't care what anyone thought about it.

This was David's second undertaking to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem. The first attempt (2 Sa 6:3-8) was halted because they violated the biblical instruction that the ark be handled and carried by Levites only. When Uzzah lifted his hand to steady the ark as it was falling off an ox cart, he was struck dead for this act which was irreverent in the sight of the Lord. They learned their lesson and were now bringing the ark into Jerusalem in a proper manner. And as they came, David and all Israel wholeheartedly rejoiced before the Lord with dancing, shouting and the blowing of trumpets.

***Those who concern themselves with being "dignified," can produce a spirit of barrenness in themselves and in the church***

But sometimes, there is someone in the congregation who is sour on expressive worship. When David's wife, Michal, saw David leaping and dancing, she despised him in her heart. She thought his behavior was undignified—not fitting for the king. David's response to her criticism was to tell her that it was for the Lord—not her or anyone else—that he was dancing, and if she thought this was undignified, she hadn't seen anything yet. The Lord's response to her criticism was that she would never have children.

Those who are critical of unrestrained worship follow in the gait of Michal. Those who concern themselves with being "dignified," opposing demonstrative, God-honoring worship, can produce a spirit of barrenness in themselves and in the church.

David danced before the Lord with all his might. He set an example for the people, caring more about worshiping his God than what some may have thought was proper. We are in a sorry state in the church today. Where is the shouting and the blowing of trumpets? Where do we see a childlike abandon to worship the Lord in reckless dance? Where is the freedom, especially among pastors, to set the tone for this extravagant worship before the Lord? Where is the spirit of David?

### ***I Have Not Dwelt in a House***

*This is what the Lord says: "Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day...did I ever say... 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"* -2 Samuel 7:5-7

David had it in his heart to build a house for the Lord and for the ark of his presence. He said to Nathan the prophet, "*Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent*" (v2). Nathan's first response to David was that he should go ahead and do whatever it was that he had in mind because, after all, the Lord was with him. But that night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan that clarified God's will and his heart in the matter.

***It really didn't matter to the Lord if it was in a tent or in a mansion***

Basically, the Lord's message was that he didn't really care if he had a house. Had he ever asked for one or commanded that one be built? Had he ever said, "*Why have you not built me a house of cedar?*" Why would he need a house built by human hands? After all, "*Do not I fill heaven and earth?*" declares the Lord (Jer 23:24). "*Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?*" (Is 66:1)?

The presence of the Lord was never limited to the ark nor the tabernacle. But the Lord has always had a desire to dwell among his people. So it really didn't matter to the Lord if it was in a tent or in a mansion. What was important to him was that he have a place to dwell among the people (see Exodus 25:8;29:45; Leviticus 26:11-12; 1Kings 6:13; and 2 Corinthians 6:16).

But even the idea of there being a place for God to dwell with his people was not good enough. What he really was looking for was a dwelling place in his people. Yes, Solomon would build a temple for his "Name" (v13), and yes he would be enthroned in the praises of his people (see Psalm 22:3 NASB), but a time would come when the true worship of the Lord would not be "*on this mountain nor in Jerusalem*" (Jn 4:21) because God would no longer *live in temples built by hands* (Ac 17:24). The new temple, the new sanctuary, the new dwelling place of God would be his people. His people are the house of his choosing.

### ***The Thing David Had Done Displeased the Lord***

*When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord. -2 Samuel 11:26-27*

Much has been made of the story of David and Bathsheba. It has been said that a number of the Ten Commandments were broken when David coveted his neighbor's wife, committed adultery, bore false witness in a cover-up and ended up murdering her husband. How was it that David, the man after God's own heart, the man that would do everything that the Lord wanted him to do (see Acts 13:22), could take such a nosedive into sin?

The text here in the first part of 2 Samuel 11 intimates that David should not have even been in Jerusalem at the time he spied the bathing beauty from the top of his palace—that he should have been off to war with his troops. The restlessness that was evident as he had gotten up from his bed and was walking around on his roof that night could have been a case of boredom. The old adage, “Idle hands are the Devil's workshop” may have held some validity as David aimlessly wandered on his palace roof.

***David had much power and little accountability***

But still, this does not explain David's outright departure from the straight and narrow. I believe there were two other contributing factors in David's fall. First, David had much power and little accountability. He could virtually get anything he wanted with nary a question from those around him. “Go get me Uriah's wife so that I, the king, can sleep with her” “Yes sir, Right away.” Perhaps Jonathan, who was dead, should have stayed at David's side instead of fighting alongside his father. David needed someone to hold him accountable before he fell. Second, when there is failure to repent when one commandment is violated, the rest start dropping like flies. The lust led to the adultery, which led to the cover-up, which led to the murder. The slippery slope of sin just gets more slippery along the way.

At face value, if you compare David's sin with the sin of Saul, David's seems much worse. Sparing a few animals and offering an unauthorized sacrifice seems like a tremor compared to the quake of David's sin. The difference was that, unlike Saul, David woke up to how displeased the Lord was with what he did, which made him broken and contrite in spirit.

### ***Because You Despised Me***

*“Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah.” -2 Samuel 12:9-10*

David had to face some very unpleasant consequences as discipline from the Lord for his sin. He certainly didn't get off lightly. Not that the full extent of the Mosaic law was levied against him, but the penalty meted to him at the hand of the Lord was serious. Because of what David did, the Lord said, “The sword will never depart from your house.” This was evidenced, as the NIV Study Bible points out, by the fact that three of David's sons came to violent deaths. Another consequence would be that calamity would come upon him from his own household and one who was close to him would lie with his wives in broad daylight (see v11). This would be fulfilled at the rebellion of David's own son, Absalom. A third consequence was that the son born to David by Bathsheba would die.

***David showed contempt for his God in the sin he committed and the Lord took it personally***

But more unsettling to me than these consequences is the indictment against David that he despised the word of the Lord and even the Lord himself. David showed contempt for his God in the sin he committed and the Lord took it personally. Just as Esau “despised” his birthright (Ge 25:34) and Jesus was “despised” and rejected by men (Is 53:3), by his actions, David was guilty of holding the Lord his God in low esteem. In light of this, David's statement from his heart wrenching song of repentance makes sense: *Against you, you only, have I sinned* (Ps 51:4). The unsettling question is, “What does this mean for me when I deliberately reject the known will of God to satisfy the desires of my flesh?” How can the indictment against me be any different?

Is the tenor of the New Testament different from the Old in that mercy triumphs over judgment? No doubt about it. But the test for our love for God is still our obedience. Jesus said, “If you love me you will obey what I command” (Jn 14:15). *God's kindness leads us to repentance* (Ro 2:4), but as David discovered, *the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son* (Heb 12:6). David had to live with the consequence of his sin, but he could never again live with the idea that he would despise the Lord and his word.



### ***He Devises Ways So That a Banished Person May Not Remain Estranged from Him***

*Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him. -2 Samuel 14:14*

Joab sensed that the king ached for his son Absalom who had been banished from the City of David for the murder of his brother Ammon. David's head said that Absalom could not return, but his heart longed for him. Joab had a plan to help David see things in a different light.

The plan was to have a "wise woman" pose as a widow who had but two sons, one who had recently killed the other and was in hiding from those who would avenge his brother's death.

***How can words describe the genius and the mercy of the gospel of Jesus Christ?***

Her plea to the king was for him to issue an order of protection for the remaining son because without him there would be no one to carry on the family line. David, in his compassion, agreed. In so doing, he set himself up to receive the wisdom of the woman. She helped David to see that if he was willing to have mercy on her son, why not his own? Why would he not bring back his banished son? If someone happens to die, she said, it is like water spilled on the ground and there is nothing you can do about it. But it was not too late to bring back Absalom.

The climax of her appeal to David came as she spoke about the nature of God. Though we must all die eventually, it is not God's nature to take life, but to give it—so much so that if someone is estranged from him, he will purposely devise a way for that person to be brought back. If this is the nature of God, she is arguing, should not the king act likewise?

It is indeed the nature of our God to devise a way for those who have been banished from his courts to be able to come back to him. When Adam fell, the whole of humankind was banished from paradise. Estranged from the Most Holy God by our sin, we were lost and without hope in the world. And God devised a plan. How can words describe the genius and the mercy of the gospel of Jesus Christ? The perfect, sinless Son of the Living God, putting on human flesh to rescue us by his atoning death on the cross, taking upon himself the punishment for our sin so that all who believe could be brought without shame into the eternal presence of the Most High God.

The plan has been devised and implemented. There is now no reason to remain estranged from him.

### ***Leave Him Alone, Let Him Curse***

*If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?' ...Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today. -2 Samuel 16:10-12*

Shimei was a man with a grudge. A relative of King Saul, he was bitter toward David as the successor to the throne. He also falsely accused David of shedding blood in the house of Saul, perhaps thinking that David had something to do with the murder of Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth and Saul's uncle, Abner. Shimei called down curses on the king on the day that David and his household were fleeing Jerusalem at the start of Absalom's coup d'état. As Shimei pelted David with stones and showered him with dirt, David's men offered to go cut off the head of Shimei, but David would not allow it. "Leave him alone, let him curse" was his response.

***When people curse you, the best thing to probably do is to leave them alone and let them curse***

It does seem that these kinds of testings have a way of coming at the worst of times.

Talk about having a bad day. His own son was coming after his throne—and his life. David was spent emotionally and physically, but he kept his cool. The situation was not making David bitter, it was keeping him humble. Already broken from the whole incident with Bathsheba, David knew that what was happening was the fruit of his sin. He considered that it was perhaps the Lord who inspired the curses of Shimei. If not, then perhaps the Lord would see his distress and repay him for good for the cursing that he was receiving that day.

Jesus was our ultimate example: *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly* (1 Pe 2:23). Jesus said, "Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Lk 6:28) and, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me" (Mt 5:11).

When people curse you, the best thing to probably do is to leave them alone and let them curse. Let the Lord deal with it. It very well may be that he will regard your suffering and repay you with blessing for the cursing that has come your way.

**Barzillai Provided for the King**

Now Barzillai...had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. -2 Samuel 19:32

Sometimes the church does not know how to respond to wealthy people. Sometimes we coddle them and give them preferential treatment. Sometimes we avoid them because we are intimidated by them. Sometimes we shun them as necessarily worldly because of their money. None of these is any good if those who have wealth are to be blessed by the church and are to become a blessing in return.

Though we are repeatedly warned by Jesus and the apostles not to put our trust in riches, it was people of means who supported both Jesus and the apostles. And so it was with David as he was in exile. A man

***Sometimes the church does not know how to respond to wealthy people***

named Barzillai, along with two other men of wealth, had come out to David and all of his followers, troops, and relatives at Mahanaim (see 17: 27-29). What do you do when you are on the run with hundreds of people and wind up in the desert on the east side of the Jordan River? How do you provided for your company? How do you even survive? It's not like David and his people had time to make extensive preparations before fleeing Jerusalem.

Barzillai and his mates quoted a little proverb. They said, "*The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert.*" Indeed they had. How do you think these hungry, tired and thirsty people felt when the Salvation Army showed up with bedding and dishes and wheat and barely and flour and roasted grain and beans and lentils and honey and curds and meat and cheese? Hallelujah! These men of means literally saved the kingdom for David. Without these provisions, David's men would have been in no shape to fight for their king. It took benefactors of considerable means to pull it off. In this case, the only persons who could really help were the wealthy.

The Scripture says that Barzillai was *a very wealthy man*. The Lord used him to effect his perfect will. Yes, the accumulation of wealth can be idolatrous, but it doesn't have to be. In the church, everyone is important. Rich people cannot be treated with any special preference (nor should they want to be). But we need them. We need money, and God has given the wealthy the ability to earn it and, hopefully, the grace to give it. Barzillai had that grace and provided for the king in a most timely manner. May the Lord give us many Barzillai's to provide for the work of his kingdom.

**After That, God Answered Prayer in Behalf of the Land**

There was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord said, "It is on account of Saul ...it is because he put the Gibeonites to death." ... David asked the Gibeonites... "How shall I make amends so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance?"... After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land. -2 Samuel 21:1,3,14

It is not always the case—but there are times when there is an explanation for why things don't go right. Such an explanation may not be obvious, but it can be revealed by seeking the face of the Lord. And once we have the answer we then must do something about it.

Israel was in their third year of a famine and it occurred to David that he should seek the Lord to find out if there might be a possible cause. In hind sight, David should have thought of

***Atonement for this national sin was left outstanding***

doing this earlier, because when he finally sought the face of the Lord, God revealed the problem. Israel had brought a curse on themselves by violating the treaty that Joshua had made with the Gibeonites when Israel first entered the promised land. Yes, the Gibeonites had garnered the peace treaty with a ruse, but the oath of the leaders of Israel stood. Saul had breached the oath by attempting to annihilate the Gibeonites. And now, atonement for this national sin was left outstanding.

So what was David to do? He now knows the problem, but how does it get solved? It was not enough to say, "Sorry"—though that was the place to start. Repentance must include restitution, when possible. David knew that in order to make this right, he must attempt to satisfy the party that had been wronged. He goes to the remnant of Gibeonites and puts it to them. They are the ones with the legal right, so to speak, to hold this against Israel. They are the ones that must be approached with a legitimate attempt to bring satisfaction on their terms. And it was in their best interest to tender reasonable terms because they were suffering from the famine as well.

It wasn't until David had moved to make things right that God sent the rain. Yes, there are those who only suppose they have been wronged, so their claims are illegitimate. There are also those who have legitimate claims, but are unreasonable in their demands for satisfaction. But we as individuals, churches and nations must take a look at any broken promises of ours and attempt to deal with them in good faith. Until we do, we may not rightfully expect the showers of blessing that we would want.

### ***I Crushed Them Completely, and They Could Not Rise***

*“I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.” -2 Samuel 22:38-39*

How do you deal with those enemies which war against your soul? I am not talking about people who oppose you but your real enemies—the world, the flesh and the devil? How do you respond to those forces both within and outside of yourself that are marshaled against the prosperity of your spirit, soul and body? Israel’s physical enemies were a picture of our spiritual ones. The way they were to deal with those who opposed them is a depiction of how we are to deal with the spiritual forces that would restrict our advance toward possessing the manifest destiny of the will of God for our lives. The Lord instructed Israel to be ruthless with their enemies. This fact has thrown a wrench into a lot of people’s theology regarding the nature of God. Please remember that the things in the natural in the Old Testament foreshadow the spiritual realities for those who inherit salvation in Christ (see Colossians 2:17).

***You need to recognize and take seriously the spiritual battle in which you are engaged***

David was thorough in vanquishing his enemies. Because of the strength of the Lord, he was able to say, *“I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.”* This is how you should deal with the enemies of your soul. You need to recognize and take seriously the spiritual battle that in which you are engaged. You must employ the weapons of warfare which are mighty for the pulling down the philosophical mindsets of the world which are opposed to the way of Christ (see 2 Corinthians 10:4). The flesh has declared war against your soul (see 1 Peter 2:11). You must do nothing less than declare war against it and unmercifully crucify it daily. And as far as the devil and his troops are concerned, you need to be sober, vigilant and tenacious in exercising the authority of Jesus over your adversary who belongs crushed beneath your feet (see 1 Peter 5:8; Romans 16:20).

You must deal ruthlessly with whatever causes you to sin (see Matthew 18:7-9). You must pursue your spiritual enemies and crush them. You must not turn back until they are destroyed. You must crush them completely beneath your feet, making sure that they will never rise again.

### ***I Will Not Sacrifice Offerings That Cost Me Nothing***

*Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering...But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” -2 Samuel 24:22,24*

A sacrifice by definition must cost you something. If it doesn’t cost you anything, it is not a sacrifice. Abraham was asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved. It was going to cost him. As Jesus was watching the people give their offerings at the temple one day, he observed the rich putting in large amounts of money, but it was the two mites that the poor widow gave that caught his attention. Why? Because it cost her something. She gave all that she had to live on. And consider the sacrifice of our Lord, himself. Did it not cost him everything?

***A sacrifice by definition must cost you something***

A plague had come upon Israel due partly to David’s unauthorized military census and partly to the Lord’s anger toward the nation in general. Just when Jerusalem was about to be destroyed, the Lord stayed the hand of the assailing angel and instructed David to offer sacrifices at the very spot where the angel was checked—the place that would eventually become the location for the temple. Araunah, the man who owned that particular land, offered to give David everything he needed for the sacrifice—the wood, the oxen and even the land. But David said, *“No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”*

We should keep in mind that the Lord looks beyond the sacrifice to the heart. The sacrifices of Israel had become a stench to the Lord at more than one point (i.e., Isaiah 1:10-17). The Lord loves a cheerful gift, not one grudgingly given. But real sacrifices will cost us something. Some of the sacrifices the Lord is looking for are: A broken and contrite heart before him (Ps 51:17). To do what is just and right and to walk in mercy and humility (Pr 21:3, Mic 6:6-8). A continual offering of praise and worship that confesses the name of Jesus in the courts of men and of God (He 13:15). To do good and to share with others (He 13:16). To offer our very bodies to him as holy and pleasing (Ro 12:1).

Do the sacrifices that you offer to the Lord cost you anything?