

2 Samuel

¹ After the death of Saul, David returned from attacking the Amalekites. He stayed in Ziklag for two days. ² Then on the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp. His clothes were torn and he had dust on his head. When he approached David, he bowed before him, and fell to the ground in respect.

³ "Where have you come from?" David asked him.

"I got away from the Israelite camp," he replied.

⁴ "Tell me what happened," David asked.

"The army ran away from the battle," the man replied. "Many of them died, and Saul and his son Jonathan also died."

⁵ "How do you know Saul and Jonathan died?" David asked the man giving the report.

⁶ "I just happened to be there on Mount Gilboa," he replied. "I saw Saul, leaning on his spear, with the enemy chariots and the charioteers advancing on him. ⁷ He turned around and saw me. He called out and I replied, 'I'm here to help!'

⁸ He asked me, 'Who are you?'

I told him, 'I'm an Amalekite.'

⁹ Then he told me, 'Please come over here and kill me! I'm in terrible agony but life is still hanging on.'

¹⁰ So I went over him and killed him, because I knew that wounded as he was he couldn't last long. I took the crown from his head and his bracelet from his arm, and I've brought them here to you, my lord."

¹¹ David grabbed hold of his clothes and ripped them,* as did his men. ¹² They mourned and cried and fasted until the evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord, the Israelites, that had been killed by the sword.

¹³ David asked man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I'm the son of a foreigner," he replied "I'm an Amalekite."

¹⁴ "Why weren't you worried about killing the Lord's anointed one?" David asked.

¹⁵ David called over one of his men and said, "Go ahead, kill him!" So the man cut the Amalekite down and killed him.

¹⁶ David had told the Amalekite, "Your death is your own fault because you testified against yourself when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed one.' "

¹⁷ Then David sang this lament for Saul and his son Jonathan. ¹⁸ He ordered it to be taught to the people of Judah. It is called "the Bow" and is recorded in the Book of the Just:

¹⁹ "Israel, the glorious one lies dead on your mountains. How the mighty have fallen! ²⁰ Don't announce it in the town of Gath, don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon, so that the Philistine women won't rejoice, so that the heathen women

* **1:11** A sign of extreme emotion, usually grief.

won't celebrate. ²¹ Mountains of Gilboa, may no dew or rain fall on you! May you have no fields that produce offerings of grain. For it was there that the shield of the mighty was defiled; Saul's shield, no longer cared for with olive oil.[†] ²² Jonathan with his bow did not retreat from attacking the enemy; Saul with his sword did not return empty-handed from shedding blood. ²³ During their lives, Saul and Jonathan were much loved and very pleasant, and death did not divide them. They were faster than eagles, stronger than lions. ²⁴ Women of Israel, mourn for Saul, who gave you fine scarlet clothes decorated with gold ornaments. ²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies dead on your mountains. ²⁶ I weep so much for you, my brother Jonathan! You were so very dear to me! Your love for me was so wonderful, greater than the love women have! ²⁷ How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war are gone!"

2

¹ Sometime after this, David asked the Lord, "Should I go to one of the towns of Judah?"

"Yes, do it," the Lord replied.

"Which one should I go to?" David asked.

"Go to Hebron," said the Lord.

² So David moved there with his two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, Nabal's

[†] **1:21** Saul's shield would be ritually defiled by blood, and would no longer be looked after by regular applications of olive oil.

widow from Carmel. ³ He also brought the men who were with him, along with their families, and they settled in the villages near Hebron. ⁴ Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king of the people of Judah. When David found out that it was the men from Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, ⁵ he sent messengers to them, saying, “May the Lord bless you, because you demonstrated your loyal love to Saul your master, and you buried him properly. ⁶ Now may the Lord show you loyal love and trustworthiness, and I will also be good to you because of what you did for Saul. ⁷ So be strong and be brave, for even though Saul your master is dead, the people of Judah have anointed me as their king.”

⁸ However, Abner, son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ishbosheth,* son of Saul, to Mahanaim. ⁹ There he set up Ishbosheth as king over Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin, in fact over all Israel.

¹⁰ Ishbosheth, son of Saul, was forty when he became king over Israel, and he reigned for two years. However, the people of Judah were on David's side. ¹¹ David ruled in Hebron as king

* **2:8** Ishbosheth. It is very unlikely that he was called this to his face. He is identified as “Eshbaal” in 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 1 Chronicles 9:39, which means “man of Baal.” However, the writer of this account here found it intolerable that the name of the king should include reference to the pagan god “Baal,” and so altered the name to Ishbosheth, meaning “man of shame.”

over the people of Judah for seven years and six months.

¹² One day Abner and Ishbosheth's men left Mahanaim and went to the town of Gibeon.

¹³ Joab, son of Zeruiah, and David's men set off and met them at the pool of Gibeon, where they all sat down, facing each other across the pool.

¹⁴ Abner said to Joab, "Why not let's have some of the men fight in hand to hand combat before us."

"Fine," Joab agreed.

¹⁵ So twelve men came forward from each side—twelve for Benjamin and Ishbosheth, and twelve for David. ¹⁶ Each man grabbed his opponent's head and drove his sword into his opponent's side so that they all fell down dead together. That's why this place in Gibeon is called the Field of Sword-edges.

¹⁷ The battle that followed was hard-fought, but eventually Abner and his men were defeated by David's men.

¹⁸ The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel was a fast runner, like a gazelle racing across the open countryside.

¹⁹ He chased after Abner with single-minded determination.† ²⁰ Abner looked back and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?"

"Yes, it's me," Asahel replied.

²¹ Abner told him, "Leave me alone! Go and fight somebody else and take his weapons for

† **2:19** "Single-minded determination": literally, "not turning to the right or to the left."

yourself!” But Asahel refused to stop chasing him.

²² Abner warned Asahel again. “Stop chasing me!” he shouted. “Why do you want me to kill you? How could I ever face your brother Joab?”

²³ But Asahel wouldn't stop chasing him, so Abner drove the handle[‡] of his spear into his belly. It came out the back, and he fell down dead right there. Everyone who passed by stopped at the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

²⁴ But Joab and Abishai[§] set off to chase after Abner. By the time the sun went down they had got as far as the hill of Ammah near Giah, on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. ²⁵ Abner's men from the tribe of Benjamin rallied to him there, forming a tight group around him standing at the top of the hill.

²⁶ Abner shouted to Joab: “Do we have to keep killing each other forever? Don't you realize that if we go on it'll only get worse? How long are you going to wait before you order your men to stop chasing their brothers?”

²⁷ “As God lives,” Joab replied, “if you had not said anything, my men would have continued chasing their brothers until the morning.”

²⁸ Joab blew the horn so all the men stopped—they didn't continue chasing or fighting the Israelites.

[‡] **2:23** The handle was often sharpened to a point so that it could be stuck into the ground. **§ 2:24** Joab and Abishai were Asahel's brothers.

²⁹ All through the night Abner and his men marched through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, and continued all morning until they arrived back at Mahanaim.

³⁰ When Joab got back from chasing Abner, he gathered all the men together. Nineteen of David's men were missing in addition to Asahel.

³¹ However, they had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men from the tribe of Benjamin.

³² They took Asahel's body and buried him in his father's tomb in Bethlehem. Then they marched all through the night and reached Hebron at dawn.

3

¹ There was a long war between those on the side of Saul and those on the side of David. David's side grew stronger, while Saul's side grew weaker.

² David's sons born at Hebron were: Amnon (firstborn), by Ahinoam from Jezreel; ³ Chileab (second), by Abigail, Nabal's widow from Carmel; Absalom (third), by Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; ⁴ Adonijah (fourth), by Haggith; Shephatiah (fifth), by Abital; ⁵ Ithream (sixth), by David's wife Eglah. These were the sons born to David at Hebron.

⁶ Abner had been strengthening his position among the supporters of Saul's dynasty during the war between those on the side of Saul and those on the side of David. ⁷ Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah. One day Ishbosheth accused Abner, saying "Why have you been sleeping with my father's concubine?"

⁸ Abner got extremely angry at Ishbosheth accusation. “Am I a dog's head siding with Judah?” he replied. “Right up to the present day I have been loyal to your dynasty—to your father Saul, and to his brothers and friends. I haven't betrayed you to David. But now you dare to accuse me of sinning with this woman!” ⁹ So now may God punish me severely if I don't help David achieve what the Lord has promised him. ¹⁰ I will hand over the kingdom from Saul's dynasty, and help set up David's rule over Israel and Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.” ¹¹ Ishbosheth didn't dare to say anything else to Abner because he was frightened of him.

¹² Then Abner sent messengers to speak for him to David, saying, “Who does the country belong to anyway? Make an agreement with me, and you can be sure I'll be on your side to have all of Israel follow you.”

¹³ “Fine,” David replied, “I'll make an agreement with you. But I have one condition: I won't see you unless you bring Saul's daughter Michal when you come.”

¹⁴ Then David sent messengers tell Ishbosheth, son of Saul, “Give me back my wife Michal—I paid a dowry for her of one hundred Philistine foreskins.”

¹⁵ Ishbosheth sent for her and took her away from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish. ¹⁶ Her husband followed her to the town of Bahurim, crying as he went. Then Abner ordered him, “Go back home!” So he went home.

¹⁷ Abner spoke with the elders of Israel and said, "For a while now you have wanted to have David as your king. ¹⁸ Now is the time to do it, because the Lord promised David, 'Through my servant David I am going to save my people Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.' " ¹⁹ Abner also talked to the people of Benjamin, and went to Hebron to let David know everything that the Israelites and the whole tribe of Benjamin had decided to do.

²⁰ Abner came with twenty of his men to see David at Hebron, and David prepared a feast for them. ²¹ Abner told David, "Let me go immediately and summon all of Israel to come together for my lord the king, so they may make an agreement with you, and that you may rule over all you would wish." Then David sent Abner safely on his way.

²² Soon after Joab and David's men came back from a raid, bringing with them a large amount of plunder. However, Abner wasn't there with David in Hebron because David had already sent him safely on his way in peace. ²³ When Joab and all the army that was with him arrived, he was told, "Abner, son of Ner, came to see the king, who sent him safely on his way."

²⁴ Joab went to the king and asked, "What do you think you're doing? Here's Abner, who came to see you. Why on earth did you send him on his way? Now he's got clean away! ²⁵ You do see that Abner, son of Ner, came here to trick you, to

spy on the movements of your army, and to find out everything you're doing!"

²⁶ When Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner. They met up with him at the well of Sirah and brought him back, but David didn't know anything about it. ²⁷ When Abner arrived back in Hebron, Joab took him aside into the town gatehouse as if he was going to talk with him in private. But Joab stabbed him in the belly, killing him in revenge for killing Joab's brother Asahel.

²⁸ When David heard about this later he said, "I and my kingdom are totally innocent before the Lord regarding the death of Abner, son of Ner! ²⁹ May the guilt for his death fall on Joab and his family! May Joab's descendants always have someone who has running sores or leprosy or is crippled* or who is killed by the sword or who is starving."

³⁰ (This is why Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel during the battle at Gibeon.)

³¹ Then David ordered Joab and everyone who was there, "Tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn for Abner." King David himself followed the body as it was carried to the grave. ³² They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king cried loudly at the grave, along with all the people. ³³ The king sang this lament for Abner:

* **3:29** "Crippled": following the Septuagint reading which suggests that such a person always has to lean on a crutch.

“Did Abner deserve to die like a criminal?
³⁴ Your hands were not tied together, your feet were not in shackles. But just like a murderer's victim, you too were killed.” All the people cried for him even more.

³⁵ Then people came to David and tried to persuade him to have something to eat during the day. But David swore an oath, saying, “May God punish me severely if I eat bread or anything else before sunset!”

³⁶ Everyone saw this and thought it was the right thing to do, in the same way that they thought everything the king did was the right thing to do. ³⁷ That day everyone in Judah and throughout Israel realized that David had not ordered Abner's murder.

³⁸ Then the king said to his officers, “Don't you recognize that a commander and a truly great man has fallen in Israel today? ³⁹ I am weak right now, even though I'm anointed as king and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too powerful for me. But may the Lord repay the evil man according to the evil he has done.”

4

¹ When Ishbosheth,* son of Saul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he was very discouraged,† and everyone in Israel was shocked.

² Ishbosheth had two commanders of his raiding bands, brothers by the name of Baanah and

* **4:1** Both here and in verse 2, Ishbosheth is simply referred to as “son of Saul.” His name is not given. † **4:1** “He was very discouraged”: literally, “his hands hung limply.”

Rechab. They were the sons of Rimmon of the tribe of Benjamin from the town of Beeroth. Beeroth is considered part of the territory of Benjamin, ³ because the people who had lived in Beeroth before ran away to Gittaim and lived there as foreigners right up to the present.

⁴ Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan had come from Jezreel. His nurse had picked him up and ran away, but as she rushed to get away, he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.‡

⁵ Rechab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to Ishbosheth's house, arriving in the heat of the day as the king was taking his midday rest. ⁶ The woman doorkeeper had been cleaning wheat, but she had grown tired and fallen asleep, so Rechab and Baanah were able to slip inside. § ⁷ They had gone into the house while Ishbosheth was asleep on his bed in his bedroom. After stabbing and killing him, they cut off his head which they took with them, and they traveled all night by the Jordan Valley road.

‡ **4:4** Mephibosheth. His name is given as “Meribaal” in 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 1 Chronicles 9:40. The name here reflects the writer's reluctance to use the name of a pagan god in the name of one of the kings of Israel. See footnote to 2:8. § **4:6** There are a number of issues with this verse. Here this translation follows the Septuagint. The Hebrew text says, “They went inside the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the belly. Then Rechab and his brother Baanah slipped out.” Sadly this verse is not extant in any of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

⁸ They took the head of Ishbosheth to David in Hebron. They told the king, "Here is the head of Ishbosheth, son of Saul, your enemy who tried to kill you. Today the Lord has taken revenge on Saul and his family for my lord the king."

⁹ But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, "As the Lord lives, who has saved me from all my troubles, ¹⁰ when someone told me, 'Look, Saul is dead' and he thought he was bringing me good news, I grabbed him and had him put him to death at Ziklag. That was what he got for bringing me his news! ¹¹ Even more so then, when evil men kill a good man in his own house, and in his own bed, shouldn't I demand you pay for his life with your own lives, and exterminate you!"

¹² David gave the order to his men, and they killed Rechab and Baanah. They chopped off their hands and feet, and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron. Then they took Ishbosheth's head and buried it in Abner's grave in Hebron.

5

¹ All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and told him, "We are your flesh and blood. ² Previously when Saul was our king, you were the one who led the Israelite army into battle. The Lord told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel, and you will be their ruler.' "

³ All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, where King David made an agreement

with them in the Lord's presence. Then they anointed him king of Israel.

⁴ David was thirty when he became king, and he reigned for forty years. ⁵ He reigned over Judah seven years and six months from Hebron, and he reigned over all of Israel and Judah for thirty-three years from Jerusalem.

⁶ David the king and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites who were living there. The Jebusites told David: "You'll never enter here. Even the blind and lame could stop you." They were convinced that David could not get in.

⁷ But David did capture the fortress of Zion, now known as the City of David. ⁸ At that time he said, "If we are to successfully conquer the Jebusites we'll have to go up the water shaft to attack these 'lame and blind' —these people who hate David. This is why it's said, 'The blind and the lame will never enter the house.' "*"

⁹ David went and lived in the fortress, and named it the City of David. He extended it in all directions, starting from the outer supporting terraces and moving inwards. ¹⁰ David became increasingly powerful, for the Lord God Almighty was with him.

¹¹ King Hiram of Tyre sent representatives to David, together with cedar timber, carpenters, and stonemasons, and they built a palace for

* **5:8** There is debate over the meaning of "house" here. It could refer to ordinary houses, or the king's house (palace). However, the Septuagint has "house of the Lord," which probably refers to the stipulation in Leviticus 21:17-23.

David. ¹² David realized that the Lord had installed him as king of Israel, and had made his kingdom great for the sake of his people Israel.

¹³ After he moved from Hebron, David added more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, and he had more sons and daughters. ¹⁴ These are the names of his children born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ¹⁵ Ibhah, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶ Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

¹⁷ When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel, the whole Philistine army came out to capture him, but David found out and went inside the stronghold. ¹⁸ The Philistines came and spread out across the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁹ David asked the Lord "Should I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

"Yes, go," the Lord replied, "for I will definitely hand them over to you."

²⁰ David went to Baal-perazim and he defeated the Philistines there. "Like a flood that bursts out, so the Lord has burst out against my enemies right before me," David declared. So he named that place Baal-perazim. ²¹ The Philistines left their idols behind, and David and his men removed them.

²² A while later the Philistines came again and spread out across the Valley of Rephaim. ²³ David asked the Lord what to do. The Lord replied, "Don't attack them directly, but go round behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. ²⁴ Immediately you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees be

ready, because this means the Lord has marched out before you to attack the Philistine camp.”

²⁵ David followed the Lord's orders, and he slaughtered the Philistines from Geba all the way to Gezer.

6

¹ Once again David called up all specially chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand in total.

² He went with all his men to Baalah in Judah to bring back the Ark of God, which belongs to the Lord Almighty who sits between the cherubim that are on the Ark. ³ They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house, which was on a hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were directing the cart ⁴ with the Ark of God on it, with Ahio walking in front of it.* ⁵ David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the Lord's presence, singing songs accompanied by zithers, harps, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.†

⁶ But when they came to the threshing floor of Nachon, the oxen stumbled, so Uzzah reached out to stop the Ark of God from falling. ⁷ The Lord was angry with Uzzah, and God struck him down right there for his disobedience,‡ and he

* **6:4** Septuagint reading, supported by one of the Dead Sea Scrolls. † **6:5** The reference on the Hebrew to fir trees is improbable here, and the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 13:8 helps provide clarity. ‡ **6:7** The meaning of the word used here is uncertain. It may indicate an action that is rash or irreverent. Here it seems to be reflective of a presumptuous attitude that treated the Ark as simple an ordinary object.

died beside the Ark of God. ⁸ David was angry because of the Lord's violent outburst against Uzzah. He called the place Perez-uzzah, § which is still its name today.

⁹ David became afraid of the Lord that day. "How can I ever bring back the Ark of God home to me?" he asked. ¹⁰ Not wanting to bring the Ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David, he had it taken to the home of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹¹ The Ark of the Lord remained in Obed-edom's home for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom's whole household.

¹² King David was told, "The Lord has blessed Obed-edom's household and all that he has because of the Ark of God." So David went and had the Ark of God brought from Obed-edom's house to the City of David. There was a lot of celebration! ¹³ After those carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴ Wearing a priest's ephod, David danced as hard as he could before the Lord ¹⁵ as he and all the Israelites brought along the Ark of the Lord, with plenty of shouting and the sound of horns being blown.

¹⁶ As the Ark of the Lord was carried into the City of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked down from a window. She watched King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she really loathed him.

¹⁷ They brought the Ark of the Lord and put it on its place inside the tent that David had set up for it. Then David offered burnt offerings

§ 6:8 Meaning "outburst against Uzzah."

and friendship offerings before the Lord. ¹⁸ Once he had finished offering the sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. ¹⁹ He gave all the Israelites, both men and women, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. Then he sent everyone home.

²⁰ When David got home to bless his family, Michal, Saul's daughter came out to meet him and said, "How distinguished the king of Israel made himself look today, taking off his robes so everyone's servant girls could see, just as somebody crude would expose himself!"

²¹ David told Michal, "I was dancing before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his family when he named me ruler over the Lord's people Israel. I will continue to celebrate before the Lord, ²² in fact I'm going to make myself even less distinguished, become even more humble. However, I will be respected by those servant girls you spoke about." ²³ And Michal, Saul's daughter, never had any children.

7

¹ By now the king was comfortable in his palace and the Lord had given him peace from all the enemy nations around him. ² So he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look at me—I live in a palace made of cedar, but the Ark of God is still in a tent."

³ "Go ahead, do whatever you want, for the Lord is with you," Nathan told the king.

⁴ But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan and told him, ⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, This

is what the Lord says: Should you be the one to build a house for me to live in? ⁶ For I have never lived in a house, from the time I led the Israelites out of Egypt up till now. I have always moved from place to place, living in a tent and a Tabernacle. ⁷ But in all those travels with all of Israel did I ever ask any Israelite leader I'd ordered to take care of my people, 'Why haven't you built a cedar house for me?'

⁸ So then, tell my servant David this is what the Lord Almighty says. It was me who took you from the fields, from looking after sheep, to become a leader of my people Israel. ⁹ I have been with you wherever you've gone. I have destroyed all your enemies right in front of you, and I will make your reputation as great as the most famous people on earth. ¹⁰ I will choose a place for my people Israel. I will settle them there and they won't be disturbed anymore. Evil people won't persecute them as they used to, ¹¹ from the time I placed judges in charge of my people. I will defeat all of your enemies.

Also I want to make it clear that I the Lord will build a house for you.* ¹² For when you come to the end of your life and join your ancestors in death, I will bring to power one of your descendants, one of your sons, and make sure his kingdom is successful. ¹³ He will be the one to build me a house, and I will make sure his kingdom lasts forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. If he does wrong, I

* **7:11** In other words, the Lord would build a "house" for David in the sense of establishing a royal dynasty.

will discipline him with the rod like people do, like a parent punishing a child. ¹⁵ But I will never take away my kindness and love from him, as I did in the case of Saul who I removed before you. ¹⁶ Your house and your kingdom will last forever; your dynasty will be secure forever.” ¹⁷ This is what Nathan explained to David—everything he was told in this divine revelation.

¹⁸ Then King David went and sat down in the presence of the Lord. He prayed, “Who am I, Lord God, and what is significant about my family, that you have brought me to this place? ¹⁹ God, you talk as if this was a small thing in your eyes, and you also have spoken about the future of my house, my family dynasty.† Is this your usual way of dealing with human beings, Lord God?

²⁰ What more can I, David, tell you? You know exactly what your servant is like, Lord God. ²¹ You're doing all this for me and you have explained it to me, your servant, and because of your promise and because it's what you want to do.

²² How great you are, Lord God! There really is no-one like you; there is no other God, only you. We have never heard about anyone else.

²³ Who else is as fortunate as your people Israel? Who else on earth did God go and redeem to make his own people? You gained a wonderful reputation for yourself by all the tremendous, amazing things you did in driving out other

† **7:19** “My family dynasty”: explaining the meaning of “house” in this context.

nations and their gods before your people as you redeemed them from Egypt. ²⁴ You made your people Israel your own forever, and you, Lord, have become their God.

²⁵ So now, Lord God, please ensure that what you have said about me and my house happens, and is confirmed forever. Please do as you have promised, ²⁶ and may your true nature be honored forever, with people declaring, 'The Lord Almighty is Israel's God!' May the house of your servant David continue to be there in your presence. ²⁷ Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to me, your servant, telling me, 'I will build a house for you.' That's why your servant has had the courage to pray this prayer to you. ²⁸ Lord Almighty, you are God! Your words are truth, and you are the one who has promised these good things to your servant. ²⁹ So now, please bless your servant's house that it may continue in your presence forever. For you have spoken, Lord God, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."

8

¹ Sometime after this, David attacked and subdued the Philistines, taking Metheg-ammah* from the them. ² David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground, and he measured them with a length

* **8:1** The meaning of this term is not known. It may be a place name. The parallel passage in Chronicles identifies "Gath and its nearby towns." 1 Chronicles 18:1.

of cord. He measured two lengths for those to be killed, and one cord length for those to be allowed to live. So he made them subject to him and required them to pay taxes.

³ David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he tried to enforce his control along the Euphrates River. ⁴ David captured from him 1,000 chariots, 7,000 charioteers, and 20,000 foot soldiers. David hamstringed all the chariot horses—except he saved enough for 100 chariots.

⁵ When the Arameans of Damascus came to help King Hadadezer of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of them. ⁶ He placed garrisons in Aramean kingdom with its capital in Damascus, and made the Arameans subject to him and required them to pay taxes. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went.

⁷ David took the shields of gold that belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸ King David also took a large quantity of bronze from Betah and Berothai, towns that had belonged to Hadadezer.

⁹ When Tou, king of Hamath, learned that David had destroyed the entire army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, ¹⁰ he sent his son Joram to David to make friends with him and to congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer. Tou and Hadadezer had often been at war. Joram brought all kinds of gifts of gold, silver, and bronze. ¹¹ King David dedicated these gifts to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from all the nations he had subdued: ¹² Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines,

and Amalekites; as well as the plunder taken from Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

¹³ David also made a name for himself when he came back after defeating eighteen thousand Edomites[†] in the Valley of Salt. ¹⁴ He placed garrisons all through Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went. ¹⁵ David ruled over all Israel. He did what was fair and right for all his people. ¹⁶ Joab, son of Zeruah, was the army commander, and Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the official records. ¹⁷ Zadok, son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, were priests, while Seraiah was the secretary. ¹⁸ Benaiah, son of Jehoiada was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites;[‡] and David's sons were priests.[§]

9

¹ David said, "Is there anyone still left of Saul's family so I can be kind to him for Jonathan's sake?"

² There was a man called Ziba who used to be a servant of Saul's family. They called for him to come to David, and the king asked him, "Are you Ziba?"

"Yes, I am your servant," he replied.

[†] **8:13** The Hebrew text actually refers to Arameans, but in context this must be a scribal error. [‡] **8:18** "The Cherethites and Pelethites": the king's bodyguard. **§ 8:18** "David's sons were priests": clearly not being Levites, David's sons would not be priests in the sense of officiating in religious ceremonies. Some have suggested that as used here, the word means "administrators." See the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 18:17.

³ The king asked him, “Is there anyone still left of Saul’s family so I can be kind to him as I promised before God?”*

“There’s still one of Jonathan’s sons, who is lame in both feet,” Ziba replied.

⁴ “Where is he?” asked the king.

“He’s in the town of Lo-debar, living in the home of Machir, son of Ammiel,” Ziba replied.

⁵ So King David had him brought from Machir’s home. ⁶ When Mephibosheth,† son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David, he bowed facedown to the ground in respect. Then David said, “Welcome Mephibosheth.”

“I am your servant,” he replied.

⁷ “Do not be afraid,” said David, “for I will truly be kind to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will return to you all the land owned by your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

⁸ Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “Who am I, your servant, that you should pay any attention to a dead dog like me?”

⁹ Then the king called for Saul’s servant Ziba and told him, “I have given to your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. ¹⁰ You and your sons and workers are to farm the ground for him and bring in the produce, so that your master’s grandson

* **9:3** “I promised before God”: David is probably remembering the mutual promise shared with Jonathan. 1 Samuel 20:42.

† **9:6** He is called Meribbaal in 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 1 Chronicles 9:40. The same issue arises here as given in the footnote to 2:8.

will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, will always eat at my table." Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty workers.

¹¹ Ziba replied to the king, "My lord the king, your servant will do everything that you have commanded." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. ¹² Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. All the people who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. ¹³ But Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table. He was lame in both feet.

10

¹ Sometime after this, Nahash, the Ammonite king died and his son Hanun succeeded him.

² David said, "I will be kind to Hanun, son of Nahash, just as his father was kind to me." So David sent representatives to take his condolences to Hanun regarding his father. But when they arrived in the country of the Ammonites,

³ the Ammonite military leaders said to Hanun their king, "Do you really believe David sent condolences to you out of respect for your father? Isn't it more likely that David sent his representatives to scout out the city, spy on it, and then conquer it?"

⁴ So Hanun had David's representatives detained, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their clothes at the buttocks, and then sent them back home.

⁵ When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet them, because they were

very embarrassed. The king instructed them, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have re-grown, and then you can return.”

⁶ When the Ammonites realized they had become like a bad smell to David, they sent a request to the Arameans and hired twenty thousand of their foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as one thousand men from the king of Maakah, and also twelve thousand men from Tob.

⁷ When David learned of this, he sent Joab and the entire army to confront them. ⁸ The Ammonites set up their battle lines near the entrance to their town gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah took up positions by themselves in the open fields. ⁹ Joab realized he would have to fight both in front of him and behind him, he chose some of Israel's best troops and he took charge of them to lead the attack the Arameans. ¹⁰ He put the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother. They were to attack the Ammonites. ¹¹ Joab told him, “If the Arameans are stronger than me, you come and help me. If the Ammonites are stronger than you, I'll come and help you. ¹² Be brave, and fight your best for our people and the towns of our God. May the Lord do what he sees as good!”

¹³ Joab attacked the Arameans with his forces and they ran away from him. ¹⁴ When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans had run away, they also ran away from Abishai, and

retreated into the town. So Joab went back to Jerusalem after fighting the Ammonites.

¹⁵ As soon as the Arameans saw they had been defeated by the Israelites they reassembled their forces. ¹⁶ Hadadezer sent for more Arameans to be brought from beyond the Euphrates River. They arrived in Helam under the leadership of Shobach, commander of Hadadezer's army.

¹⁷ When this was reported to David, he assembled all Israel together. He crossed the Jordan and advanced on Helam. The Arameans positioned themselves in battle line against David and fought him. ¹⁸ But the Aramean army ran away from the Israelites, and David killed 700 charioteers and 40,000 infantry. He also attacked Shobach, their army commander, and he died there. ¹⁹ When all the kings allied with Hadadezer realized that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became subject to him. As a result, the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites any more.

11

¹ In the spring, at the time of year when kings go out to war, David sent out Joab and his officers and the whole Israelite army on an attack. They massacred the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. However, David remained behind in Jerusalem.

² Late one afternoon, David got up from taking a nap and was walking on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing—a very beautiful woman. ³ David sent someone to find out about the woman. He was told, "It's

Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah the Hittite.” ⁴ David sent messengers to fetch her. When she came to him, he had sex with her. (Now she had just purified herself from having her period.)* Afterwards she went back home. ⁵ Bathsheba became pregnant and sent a message to David to tell him, “I’m pregnant.”

⁶ So David sent a message to Joab, telling him, “Send Uriah the Hittite to me.” Joab sent him to David. ⁷ When Uriah came to see him, David asked him how Joab was doing, and how the army was doing, and how the war was going. ⁸ Then David told Uriah, “Go home now and have a rest.”† Uriah left the palace, and the king sent him a gift after he’d gone. ⁹ But Uriah didn’t go home. He slept in the guardroom at the palace entrance with all the king’s guards.

¹⁰ David was told, “Uriah didn’t go home,” so he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just got back from being away? Why didn’t you go home?”

¹¹ Uriah answered, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and my master Joab and his men are camped out in the open. How can I go home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? On my life I won’t do such a thing!”

¹² David told him, “Stay here today, and tomorrow I’ll send you back.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day, and the next. ¹³ David invited Uriah to dinner. Uriah ate and drank with him,

* **11:4** The Hebrew refers to “uncleanliness.” † **11:8** “Have a rest”: literally, “wash your feet.”

and David got Uriah drunk. But in the evening he went to sleep on his mat with the king's guards, and didn't go home.

¹⁴ In the morning David wrote Joab a letter, and gave it to Uriah to take to him. ¹⁵ In the letter, David told Joab, "Put Uriah right in the front where the fighting is worst, and then pull back behind him so that he'll be attacked and killed." ¹⁶ As Joab besieged the town, he made Uriah take a place where he knew the strongest enemy men would be fighting. ¹⁷ When the town's defenders came out and attacked Joab, some of David's men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite.

¹⁸ Joab sent David a full report about the battle. ¹⁹ He ordered the messenger, saying, "When you've finished telling the king all about the battle, ²⁰ if the king's gets angry and asks you, 'Why did you get so near to the town in the attack? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? ²¹ Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerub-Besheth? Wasn't it a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall, killing him there in Thebez? Why on earth did you get so close to the wall?' Just tell him, 'In addition, your officer Uriah the Hittite was killed.' "

²² The messenger left, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had directed him to say. ²³ The messenger explained to David, "The defenders were stronger than us, and they came out at us in the open, but we forced them back to the entrance of the town gate. ²⁴ Their archers shot at us from the wall, and killed some of the

king's men. Your officer Uriah the Hittite was also killed.”

²⁵ Then David said to the messenger, “Tell Joab this: ‘Don't be upset about this, for the sword destroys people at random. Press on with your attack against the town and conquer it.’ Encourage him by telling him this.”

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷ Once the period of mourning was over, David sent for her to be brought to his palace, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But what David had done was evil in the Lord's sight.

12

¹ The Lord sent Nathan to see David. When he got there, he said, “Once there were two men living in the same town. One was rich, and one was poor. ² The rich man had many thousands of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man didn't have anything but one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He cared for it, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his plate and drank from his cup. It slept on his lap and was like a daughter to him. ⁴ One day the rich man had a visitor. He didn't want to take one of his own sheep or cattle to feed his visitor. He took the poor man's lamb instead to prepare a meal for his visitor.”

⁵ David became absolutely furious with what that man did, and angrily told Nathan. “As the Lord lives, the man who did this should be put to death! ⁶ He must repay that lamb with four*”

* **12:6** See Exodus 22:1.

of his own for doing this, for being so heartless.”

⁷ “You are that man!” Nathan told David. “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel, and I saved you from Saul. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you and placed your master's wives in your lap. I gave you the kingdom of Israel and Judah, and if that hadn't been enough, I would have given you so much more. ⁹ So why have you treated what Lord said with contempt by doing evil in his sight? You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and stole his wife—you killed him using the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰ So your descendants will always face the sword[†] that kills because you treated me with contempt and stole Uriah's wife.

¹¹ This is what the Lord says: I'm going to bring disaster in you from your own family. I will take your wives before your very eyes and give them to someone else, and he will sleep openly with your wives where everyone can see. ¹² You did it all in secret, but I will do it openly where everyone in all of Israel can see.”

¹³ David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Lord.”

“The Lord has forgiven your sins. You're not going to die,” Nathan replied. ¹⁴ “But because by doing this you have treated the Lord with complete contempt, the son you have will die.”

¹⁵ Then Nathan went home.

The Lord made the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David become very sick. ¹⁶ David

[†] **12:10** “Sword” used in these verses refers to any kind of violent death.

pleaded with God on behalf of the boy. He fasted, went to his bedroom, and spent the night lying in sackcloth[‡] on the ground. ¹⁷ His senior officials approached him and tried to help him up from the ground, but he didn't want to, and he refused their appeals to eat.

¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died. But David's officials were scared to tell him that the child was dead, for they said to each other, "Look, while the child was still alive, we talked with him, and he refused to listen to us. How on earth can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something really bad!"

¹⁹ But David saw his officials were whispering among themselves, he realized that the child was dead. So he asked his officials, "Did the child die?"

"Yes, he died," they replied.

²⁰ David got up from the ground, washed and put on scented oils, and changed his clothes. Then he went to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Afterwards he went back home, and asked for some food. So they served him a meal which he ate.

²¹ "Why are you acting like this?" his officials asked him. "While the child was still alive, you fasted and cried aloud, but now that he's dead, you get up and eat."

²² David replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and cried aloud, for I thought to myself, 'Who knows? Maybe the Lord will be gracious to me and let him live.'" ²³ But now

[‡] **12:16** "In sackcloth": Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls reading.

that he's dead, what's the point for me to go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? One day I will die and go to him, but he will never come back to me.”

²⁴ David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and he made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and named him Solomon. The Lord loved the child, ²⁵ so he sent a message through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah,§ because the Lord loved him.

²⁶ At this time Joab had been fighting against the Ammonite town of Rabbah, and had captured the royal fortress. ²⁷ Joab sent messengers to David to tell him, “I have attacked Rabbah and I have also captured its water supply. ²⁸ So please call up the rest of the army, besiege the town, and capture it. Otherwise I will capture the city, and I will get the credit.”

²⁹ So David called up the rest of the army and marched on Rabbah. He attacked it and captured it. ³⁰ He took the crown from the head of their king, and it was placed on David's head. It weighed a talent of gold and was decorated with precious stones. David took a large amount of plunder from the town. ³¹ David took the inhabitants and forced them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes, and he also made them work making bricks.* He did the same in all the Ammonite towns. Then David and the whole Israelite army returned to Jerusalem.

§ 12:25 Meaning “loved by the Lord.” * 12:31 The Hebrew here is unclear.

13

¹ David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and another of David's sons, Amnon, fell in love with her. ² Amnon became so infatuated with his sister Tamar that he felt sick. She was a virgin, and Amnon saw it was impossible for him to have her.

³ However, Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, and he was the son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab was a very cunning man. ⁴ He asked Amnon, "Why are you, the king's son, so down every morning? Why don't you tell me what's wrong?"

"I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister," Amnon replied.

⁵ "Lie down on your bed and pretend you're sick," Jonadab told him. "When your father comes to see you, tell him, 'Please have my sister Tamar come and give me some food to eat. She can make it as I watch and she can hand it to me.'"

⁶ So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. When the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, "Please have my sister Tamar come and make a couple of pancakes as I watch, and she can hand them to me to eat."

⁷ Then David sent a message to Tamar at the palace: "Please be so kind as to go to the house of your brother Amnon and make him some food."

⁸ So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon to where he was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, and cooked the pancakes as he watched. ⁹ Then she took the pan and emptied it out before him, but he refused

to eat. "Everybody leave me!" Amnon shouted. Everyone left.

¹⁰ Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so you can hand it to me to eat." So Tamar took the pancakes she had made to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. ¹¹ But as she handed him the food, he grabbed hold of her, and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister!"

¹² "No, you're my brother!" she exclaimed. "Don't rape me! That's not what we do in Israel! Don't do something so shameful! ¹³ Stop and think about me! How could I bear such a disgrace? Think about yourself too! You'd be treated with contempt as a complete fool in Israel! Please talk with the king, for he won't stop you marrying me."

¹⁴ But Amnon wouldn't to listen to her, and because he was stronger than she was, he raped her. ¹⁵ Then Amnon hated Tamar with immense hatred. His hatred was so strong that it was greater than the love he'd had before. "Get up! Get lost!" he told her.

¹⁶ "No! Don't do this!" she answered. "Sending me away in disgrace would be an even greater evil than what you've already done to me." But he wouldn't listen to her. ¹⁷ He called for his servant and said, "Get rid of this woman and lock the door behind her!"

¹⁸ So his servant threw her out and locked the door behind her. Tamar was wearing the long robe of a princess, which is what the king's virgin daughters wore. ¹⁹ Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her long robe. She put her hands on her head, she went away crying loudly.

²⁰ Her brother Absalom found her and asked, “Has brother Amnon been with you? Keep quiet for the moment, my sister. He’s your brother. Don’t be so upset about it.” So Tamar lived as a ruined and abandoned woman in her brother Absalom’s home.

²¹ When King David heard about it, he was very angry. ²² Absalom didn’t talk to Amnon at all because he hated Amnon for raping his sister Tamar.

²³ Some two years later, when his sheepshearers were at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king’s sons to join the celebrations.* ²⁴ He went to the king and said, “I, your servant, have hired shearers. Would the king and his servants please join me?”

²⁵ “No, my son,” the king replied, “we can’t all go. We would be a burden to you.” Even though Absalom went on asking, he was not willing to go, but he did give Absalom his blessing.

²⁶ “Well then, at least let my brother Amnon join us,” Absalom responded.

“Why do you want him to go?” the king asked.

²⁷ But Absalom kept on asking, so the king sent Amnon and his other sons.

²⁸ Absalom gave orders to his men, saying, “Pay attention! When Amnon is feeling happy from drinking wine and I tell you, ‘Attack Amnon!’ then kill him. Don’t be afraid. I myself am giving you this order. Be strong and be brave.”

* **13:23** “To join the celebrations.” Added for clarity, the yearly sheepshearing was also a time for feasting.

²⁹ So Absalom's men did what Absalom had ordered and killed Amnon. Then all the rest of the king's sons jumped up, got on their mules, and ran away.

³⁰ While they were on their way back, David received a message, "Absalom has killed all the king's sons—there's not a single one left!" ³¹ The king stood up, tore his clothes, and lay down on the ground. All his officials stood beside him with their clothes torn.

³² But Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah, told them: "Your Majesty must not think they have killed all the king's sons—only Amnon is dead. Absalom has been planning ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar.

³³ So, Your Majesty, please don't believe the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."

³⁴ In the meantime, Absalom had run away.

When the watchman in Jerusalem[†] looked out, he saw a large crowd coming along the road west of him, down the side of the hill.[‡]

³⁵ Jonadab told the king, "Can you see? The king's sons are arriving! It's exactly as your servant said." ³⁶ As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, crying and wailing. Then the king and all his officials also cried loudly.

³⁷ Absalom ran away to Talmai, son of Amihud, the king of Geshur. Every day David

[†] **13:34** "In Jerusalem": added for clarity. [‡] **13:34** The Septuagint adds here: "The watchman went and told the king, 'I see men coming from the direction of Beth-horon, down the side of the hill.' "

mourned for his son Amnon. § 38 After Absalom had run away to Geshur, he remained there for three years. 39 King David longed to go and see Absalom, for he had finished grieving over the death of Amnon.

14

1 Joab, son of Zeruah, knew that the king kept on thinking about Absalom.* 2 So Joab sent a messenger to Tekoa to bring back a wise woman who lived there. He told her, “Pretend to be a mourner. Put on clothes for mourning, and don't use any scented oils. Be like a woman who has been in mourning for the dead a long time. 3 Then go to the king and tell him this.” Joab told her what to say.

4 When the woman from Tekoa went to see the king, she bowed facedown to the ground in respect, and said, “Please help me, Your Majesty!”

5 “What's the matter?” the king asked her.

“Sadly I'm a widow. My husband is dead,” she replied.

6 “Your Majesty, I had two sons. They had a fight outside, and there was nobody there to stop them. One of them hit the other, and killed him. 7 Now the whole family is against me. They're saying, ‘Hand over your son who killed his brother so we can put him to death

§ 13:37 “Amnon”: the name is not explicitly given in the Hebrew text. * 14:1 The text does not say whether these were positive or negative thoughts. Perhaps the best is to keep it neutral, since David would have certainly had mixed feelings about Absalom.

for murdering his brother. That way he won't inherit anything either!' By doing this they would snuff out the last ember of hope I have to carry on my husband's name and family in the world."

⁸ "Go on home," the king told the woman, "and I myself will make sure your case is dealt with for you."

⁹ "Thank you, Your Majesty," said the woman. "I and my family will take the blame,[†] and may Your Majesty and your family be held to be innocent."

¹⁰ "If anyone complains to you about it, bring him here to me, and he won't bother you again!" the king told her.

¹¹ "Please, Your Majesty," the woman continued, "swear by the Lord your God that you will stop the person wanting to avenge the murder from making it worse by killing my son!"

"As the Lord lives," he promised, "not a single hair from your son's head will fall to the ground."

¹² "Could I please ask for one other thing, Your Majesty?" the woman asked.

"Go ahead," he replied.

¹³ "So why have you schemed in a similar way against the people of God?" the woman asked. "Since Your Majesty just decided my case by what you said, haven't you convicted yourself because you refuse to bring back the son you banished? ¹⁴ Yes, we all have to die.

[†] **14:9** The woman is suggesting that because she is not following the Law of Moses in executing the murderer then her and her family are to be blamed.

We're like water spilled on the ground that can't be collected again. But that's not what God does. Instead he works out ways for anyone who is banished to come back home to him. ¹⁵ That's why I've come to explain this to Your Majesty, because someone has frightened me. So I thought to myself, I will go and speak to the king. Perhaps he will grant my request. ¹⁶ Perhaps the king will listen and save me from the man who would cut off both me and my son from God's chosen people. ¹⁷ I thought: May what Your Majesty says bring me peace, for Your Majesty is able to tell the difference between good and evil, just like an angel of God. May the Lord your God be with you!"

¹⁸ "Please don't refuse to answer the question I'm about to ask," the king said to the woman.

"Please ask your question, Your Majesty," she replied.

¹⁹ "Is all this Joab's doing?" the king asked.

The woman replied, "As you live, Your Majesty, no one can hide anything from you. Yes, it was Joab, your officer, who ordered me to do this—he told me exactly what to say. ²⁰ He did so to show the other side of the situation, but Your Majesty is as wise as an angel of God, and you know everything that happens in this country."

²¹ The king said to Joab, "Fine, I'll do it. Go and bring young Absalom back."

²² Joab bowed down with his face to the ground in respect, and blessed the king. "Today," said Joab, "I, your servant, know that you approve of me, Your Majesty, because you have granted my

request.” ²³ Joab went to Geshur, and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. ²⁴ But the king gave this order, “He may return to his home, but he’s not to come and see me.” So Absalom returned to his own home, but he didn’t go and see the king.

²⁵ Absalom was admired as the most handsome man in the whole of Israel. He didn’t have a single blemish from head to toe. ²⁶ He cut his hair every year because it got so heavy—it weighed two hundred royal shekels. ²⁷ He had three sons, and a daughter named Tamar—a very beautiful woman.

²⁸ Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years but was not permitted to see the king. ²⁹ Absalom called Joab to arrange for him to see the king, for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come. Absalom called Joab again, but Joab still wouldn’t come. ³⁰ So Absalom told his servants, “Look, Joab’s field is next to mine, and he has barley growing there. Go and set it on fire!” Absalom’s servants went and set the field on fire.

³¹ Joab went to Absalom’s house and asked “Why did your servants set my field on fire?”

³² “Look here,” said Absalom, “I sent for you, saying, ‘Come here. I want you to go to the king and ask: Why did I bother coming back from Geshur? It would have been better for me to stay there.’ So go and arrange for me to see the king, and if I’m guilty of anything, he can kill me.”

³³ So Joab went and told the king what Absalom had said. Then David summoned Absalom, who came and bowed down with his face to the

ground before him in respect. Then the king kissed Absalom.

15

¹ Sometime later, Absalom got himself a chariot with horses, and fifty men as bodyguards to run ahead of him. ² He used to get up early and stand by the main road that led to the city gate. When people brought a case to the king for his decision, Absalom would call out and ask them, "What town are you from?" If they replied, "Your servant is from this particular tribe of Israel," ³ Absalom would tell them, "Look, you're in the right and you've got a good case. It's such a shame there's no one from the king to hear you." ⁴ Then he would say, "If only there was someone to appoint me as judge for the country. Then everyone could come to me with their case or complaint, and I would give them justice."

⁵ When anyone came to bow down before him, Absalom would stop them by reaching out his hand, taking hold of him, and kissing him. ⁶ This is how Absalom treated all the Israelites who came to the king for his judgment. So he captured the loyalty of the men of Israel.

⁷ Four* years later Absalom asked the king, "Please let me go to Hebron to fulfill a promise I made to the Lord. ⁸ For I, your servant, made this promise while living at Geshur in Aram, saying: 'If the Lord does bring me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.' "

* **15:7** Septuagint and Syriac reading. The Hebrew has "forty."

⁹ “Go in peace,” said the king. So Absalom went to Hebron.

¹⁰ Then Absalom sent his accomplices among all the tribes of Israel, saying, “When you hear the sound of the ram's horn, you shout, ‘Absalom is king at Hebron!’ ” ¹¹ Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom. They had been invited and went in all innocence, because they didn't know anything about what was planned. ¹² While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's advisor, asking him to come from Giloh, the town where he lived. The conspiracy grew stronger, and Absalom's followers went on increasing.

¹³ A messenger came to tell David, “Absalom has the loyalty of the men of Israel.”

¹⁴ David said to all the officials with him in Jerusalem, “Quick! Let's go! Otherwise we won't be able to get away from Absalom! We must leave immediately, or he will soon catch up with us, attack us, and kill the people here in the city.”

¹⁵ “Whatever Your Majesty decides, we'll do what you want,” the king's servants replied.

¹⁶ The king set off with his whole household following him, but he left behind ten concubines to look after the palace. ¹⁷ The king left with all his soldiers following him. He stopped at the last house, ¹⁸ and all his men marched past him, including all the Cherethites and Pelethites, and six hundred Gittites who had come with him from Gath.

¹⁹ The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why are you coming with us too? Go back and stay with

the new king, because you are a foreigner and an exile a long way from home. ²⁰ You only just got here, so why should I make you wander around with us now when I don't even know where I am going? Go back and take your men with you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness."

²¹ But Ittai answered the king, "As the Lord lives, and as Your Majesty lives, wherever Your Majesty may be, whether dead or alive, that's where your servant will be!"

²² "Go ahead, march on!" David replied. Ittai the Gittite marched past with all his men and all the families that were with him.

²³ All the people in the countryside were crying aloud as everyone with David passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley with the king on the way toward the wilderness. ²⁴ Zadok was there too, and all the Levites were with him, carrying the Ark of God's Agreement. They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until everyone had left the city.

²⁵ Then the king told Zadok, "Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find the Lord approves of me, he will bring me back and let me see both the Ark and his Tent again. ²⁶ But if he says, 'I'm not happy with you,' then here I stand. Let him do to me whatever he thinks best."

²⁷ The king also told Zadok the priest, "You understand the situation, don't you?† Go back

† **15:27** "You understand the situation, don't you?" This could be translated as "you see?" or "aren't you a seer?" The implication is that David is trusting Zadok to let him know what is happening in Jerusalem.

to the city safely with your son Ahimaaz, and also Jonathan, son of Abiathar. You and Abiathar take both of your sons back with you. ²⁸ I'll wait at the fords of the wilderness until I hear from you." ²⁹ Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and remained there.

³⁰ David went on his way up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he did so. He had his head covered, and walked barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads, weeping as they went along. ³¹ David was told, "Ahithophel[‡] is one of the people conspiring with Absalom." So David prayed, "Lord, please make Ahithophel's advice worthless."

³² When David arrived at the top of the Mount of Olives, where people worshiped God, there to meet him was Hushai the Archite, with his robe torn and with dust on his head.

³³ David told him, "If you come with me, you'll only be a burden to me, ³⁴ but if you go back to the city and tell Absalom, 'I will be your servant, Your Majesty! Formerly I worked for your father, but now I'll work for you,' then you can block Ahithophel's advice for me. ³⁵ Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, will be there too. Tell them everything you hear in the king's palace. ³⁶ Their two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, are there with them. Send them to me so they can tell me everything you hear." ³⁷ David's friend

[‡] **15:31** Ahithophel, David's advisor, was Eliam's father according to 23:34, who in turn was the father of Bathsheba (11:3). This would surely have been a factor in Ahithophel joining Absalom's rebellion.

Hushai arrived back in Jerusalem at the same time Absalom was entering the city.

16

¹ After David had gone a little way past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, waiting to meet him. He had two donkeys already saddled with him carrying two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred raisin cakes, a hundred summer fruits,* and a skin of wine.

² "What did you bring these for?" David asked Ziba.

Ziba replied, "The donkeys are for the king's family to ride on, the bread and summer fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is for those to drink who get worn out in the wilderness."

³ "Where is your master's grandson?"† the king asked.

Ziba answered, "He decided to stay in Jerusalem. He's saying, 'Today the people of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.' "

⁴ The king told Ziba, "I give you everything that belongs to Mephibosheth!"

"I bow before you," Ziba replied. "May you approve of me, Your Majesty."

⁵ As King David arrived at the town of Bahurim, a man from Saul's family was just leaving. His name was Shimei, son of Gera, and he was shouting out curses as he came.

⁶ He threw stones at David and all the king's

* **16:1** "Summer fruits": probably figs. † **16:3** Referring to Mephibosheth.

officers, even though the king's men and all his bodyguards surrounded David.

⁷ “Get out of here, just get out, you murderer, you wicked man!” Shimei said as he cursed.

⁸ “The Lord has paid you back for all of Saul's family that you killed, and for stealing Saul's throne. The Lord has given the kingdom to your son Absalom. Look how you've ended up in disaster because you're a murderer!”

⁹ Abishai, son of Zeruiah, asked the king, “Why should this dead dog curse Your Majesty? Let me go and cut off his head!”

¹⁰ “What's that got to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?” the king replied. “If he's cursing me because the Lord told him to, then who can question what he's doing?”

¹¹ David said to Abishai and to all his officers, “Look, if my very own son is trying to kill me, why shouldn't this Benjamite[‡] want to even more! Leave him alone; let him curse me, for the Lord told him to. ¹² Perhaps the Lord will see how I'm suffering and will pay me back with good for his curses today.” ¹³ David and his men continued down the road, with Shimei keeping up with them on the hillside opposite. He went on cursing as he went along, throwing stones and dirt at David.

¹⁴ The king and everyone with him were tired

[‡] **16:11** The people of the tribe of Benjamin were generally Saul's supporters, and Saul is described as being a Benjamite in 1 Samuel 9:21.

out when they arrived at the Jordan. § David rested there.

¹⁵ In the meantime Absalom and all the Israelites with him arrived in Jerusalem, along with Ahithophel. ¹⁶ Hushai the Arkite, David's friend, went to see Absalom and declared, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

¹⁷ "Is this how you show loyalty to your friend?" Absalom asked. "Why didn't you leave with your friend?"

¹⁸ "Certainly not!" Hushai replied. "I'm on the side of the one chosen by the Lord, by the army, and by all the people of Israel. I will remain loyal to him. ¹⁹ In any case, why shouldn't I serve his son? In the same way I served your father I will serve you."

²⁰ Then Absalom asked Ahithophel, "Give me your advice. What shall we do?"

²¹ Ahithophel told him, "Go and sleep with your father's concubines—the ones he left here to look after the palace. Then everyone in Israel will realize that you have so offended your father there's no turning back, which will encourage all your supporters."

²² So they put up a tent on the palace roof and Absalom went in and had sex with his father's concubines in the full view of everyone. ²³ At that time Ahithophel's advice was like receiving messages from God himself. This was how both David and Absalom viewed Ahithophel's advice.

§ **16:14** "Jordan." Not in the Hebrew, but given by some of the Septuagint manuscripts. Since the destination was given in 15:28 as "the fords of the wilderness" this appears reasonable.

17

¹ Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men and set off in pursuit of David tonight. ² I'll attack him while he is tired and weak. I'll catch him by surprise and all his men will run away. I'll only kill the king ³ and bring everybody else back to you. When everybody returns apart from the one man you're after, the whole country will be at peace." ⁴ This plan looked good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

⁵ But then Absalom said, "Call in Hushai the Archite too, and let's hear what he's got to say as well." ⁶ When Hushai came in, Absalom, asked him, "Ahithophel has recommended this plan. Should we go ahead with it? If not, what's your suggestion?"

⁷ "For once Ahithophel's advice isn't good," Hushai replied. ⁸ "You know what your father and his men are like. They're great fighters, and now they're as furious as a she-bear robbed of her cubs. In any case, your father is experienced in military tactics, and he won't spend the night with his men. ⁹ Right now he's holed up in a cave or some place like that. If he attacks first and some of your men are killed, people who hear about it will say, 'Absalom's men are being slaughtered.'" ¹⁰ Then even the bravest soldier who has the heart of a lion will be scared to death, because everyone in Israel knows that your father is a powerful man who has brave men with him.

¹¹ My recommendation is that you call up the entire Israelite army from Dan to Beersheba—an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore! Once they've assembled, then you yourself lead them into battle! ¹² Then we'll attack David wherever he is, and we'll fall on him as dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor a single one of all the men with him will be left alive! ¹³ If he tries to find protection in a town, all of Israel will bring ropes to that town, and we will pull it down into the valley so that not even a stone will be left."

¹⁴ Absalom and all the Israelite leaders said, "Hushai the Arkite's advice is better than Ahithophel's." For the Lord had decided to block Ahithophel's good advice in order that he might bring disaster on Absalom.

¹⁵ Hushai spoke to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, and told them, "Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the Israelite leaders to act in one way, but I have advised them to act in this different way. ¹⁶ So send a message quickly to David and tell him, 'Don't wait and spend the night at the fords of the wilderness, but cross over immediately or the king and everybody with him will be destroyed.' "*"

¹⁷ Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel because they couldn't be seen entering the city. A servant girl would come and tell them what was happening. Then they would go and let King David know. ¹⁸ But a boy did see them and he told Absalom. So the two left immediately

* **17:16** "Destroyed": literally, "swallowed up."

and went to the house of a man in the town of Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed into it. ¹⁹ His wife took a cloth to cover the well and spread it out over the opening and then scattered grain over it. No one knew the men were there.

²⁰ When Absalom's officers arrived they asked the woman, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" "They crossed over the stream," she replied. The men searched for them but didn't find them, so they went back to Jerusalem.

²¹ After Absalom's officers left, the two men climbed out of the well and rushed off to give the king their message. "Have everybody get up and cross the river right away, for Ahithophel's advice is to attack you immediately." ²² David and everybody with him got up and crossed the Jordan. By the time it got light there wasn't anybody who hadn't crossed over.

²³ When Ahithophel realized that his advice had been ignored, he saddled up his donkey and left for his home in the town where he lived. He put his affairs in order and then he hanged himself. He died and was buried in his father's tomb.

²⁴ David went on to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed over the Jordan with the entire Israelite army. ²⁵ Absalom had put Amasa in charge of the army to replace Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra, the Ishmaelite[†] who lived with Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister

[†] **17:25** "Ishmaelite": following 1 Chronicles 2:17. The Hebrew here has "Israelite."

of Zeruah, Joab's mother. ²⁶ The Israelites under Absalom set up camp in the land of Gilead.

²⁷ When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was welcomed by Shobi, son of Nahash, from Rabbah of the Ammonites, Machir, son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. ²⁸ They brought bedding, bowls, and clay jars, as well as wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, ²⁹ honey, curds, sheep, and cheese made from cow's milk for David and the people with him to eat. For they said, "The people are hungry, tired, and thirsty from their time in the wilderness."

18

¹ David organized the men who were with him and put commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds in charge of them. ² David sent the army out divided into three sections. One third was commanded by Joab, one third was commanded by Abishai, son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, and one third was commanded by Ittai the Gittite. The king told the men, "I myself will go out into battle with you."

³ But the men replied, "No, you must not go out into battle! For if we have to run away, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care about that either. But you are worth ten thousand of us, so it's better if you stay here and send us help from the town."

⁴ "I will do whatever you think best," the king replied. The king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out by hundreds and by

thousands. ⁵ The king ordered Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Treat young Absalom gently for me." All the men heard the king giving orders to each of his commanders about Absalom.

⁶ David's army marched out to face the Israelites in battle, which was fought in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷ The Israelites were defeated by David's men and many were killed that day—some twenty thousand. ⁸ The battle covered the whole countryside, and that day more died because of the forest than were killed by the sword.

⁹ Absalom ran into some of David's men while he was riding on his mule. As the mule went under the twisted branches of a large oak tree, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. The mule he was riding kept going, leaving him hanging between earth and sky. ¹⁰ One of David's men saw what happened, so he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree!"

¹¹ "What! You saw him like that?" Joab said to the man. "Why didn't you kill him right then and there? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a soldier's belt as a reward!"

¹² But the man replied, "Even if you gave me a thousand shekels of silver, I wouldn't hurt the king's son. We all heard the king give the order to you, Abishai, and Ittai, 'Look after young Absalom for me.'"^{*} ¹³ If I had disobeyed and killed

* **18:12** The Hebrew here is difficult, and is not the same as verse 5.

Absalom[†]—and the king finds out everything—you yourself wouldn't have defended me.”

¹⁴ “I'm not going to waste time waiting around like this with you!” Joab told him. He grabbed three spears and drove them into Absalom's heart while he was still alive, hanging from the oak tree. ¹⁵ Ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom and hacked him to death.

¹⁶ Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and his men stopped chasing the Israelites because Joab had signaled them to stop. ¹⁷ They took Absalom and threw him into a deep pit in the forest, and piled a large heap of stones over him. All the Israelites ran away to their homes.

¹⁸ Absalom while he was alive had made a stone pillar and set it up in the King's Valley as a memorial to himself, for he thought to himself, “I don't have a son[‡] to keep the memory of my name alive.” He named the pillar after himself, and it's called Absalom's Monument even today.

¹⁹ Then Ahimaaz, son of Zadok, said, “Please let me run and take the good news to the king that the Lord has vindicated him over his enemies.”

²⁰ “You're not the man to take the good news today,” Joab replied. “You can do it some other time, but don't do it today, because the king's son is dead.”

²¹ So Joab said to a man from Ethiopia, “Go and tell the king what you have seen.” He bowed to Joab and ran off.

[†] **18:13** Alternatively, “If I had put my own life in danger by killing Absalom.” [‡] **18:18** In 14:27 it's recorded that Absalom had three sons, so either they had died or Absalom had disowned them.

²² Ahimaaz asked Joab again, “Never mind what happens, please let me run too, after the Ethiopian!” “Son, why do you want to run—you won’t get anything for it?” Joab replied.

²³ “Doesn’t matter, I want to run anyway,” he said.

“Fine, start running!” Joab told him. Ahimaaz took the route over flatter ground and overtook the Ethiopian.

²⁴ David was sitting between the inside and outside gates. The watchman climbed up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. He looked out, and saw a man running by himself. ²⁵ So he shouted down to tell the king.

“If he’s by himself then he’s bringing good news,” the king replied.

As the first runner got closer, ²⁶ the watchman saw someone else running, and he shouted down to the gatekeeper, “Look! There’s another man running by himself!”

“He’ll also be bringing good news,” said the king.

²⁷ “The first man seems to me to be running like Ahimaaz, son of Zadok,” said the watchman.

“He’s a good man,” the king replied. “He’ll bring good news.”

²⁸ Ahimaaz shouted out greetings to the king. Then he came and he bowed facedown before the king. “Blessed be the Lord your God!” he said. “He has defeated the men who rebelled against Your Majesty!”

²⁹ “How is young Absalom? Is he alright?” the king asked.

Ahimaaz answered, "It was very chaotic when your officer Joab sent me, your servant. I really don't know what was happening."

³⁰ "Stand to one side and wait," the king told him. So Ahimaaz stood to one side and waited.

³¹ Right then the Ethiopian arrived and said, "Your Majesty, listen to the good news! Today the Lord has defeated all those who rebelled against you!"

³² "How is young Absalom? Is he alright?" the king asked.

The Ethiopian replied, "May what has happened to the young man happen to Your Majesty's enemies, and to everyone who rebels against you!"

³³ The king broke down. He went up to the room over the gate and cried. As he walked, he sobbed out, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! I wish I'd died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

19

¹ Soon Joab was told, "The king is crying and mourning for Absalom." ² Victory that day was turned into mourning for the whole army, because they were told, "The king is grieving for his son." ³ They stole back into town that day like defeated people steal in, ashamed of running away from the battle. ⁴ The king held his face in his hands and sobbed loudly, "My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!"

⁵ Then Joab went inside and told the king, "Today you have humiliated all your men who

have saved your life, and the lives of your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your concubines. ⁶ You did this by loving those who hate you and hating those who love you. Today you have made it plain that the commanders and the men don't mean anything to you. Today I'm sure that you'd be quite happy if Absalom was alive and all of us were dead! ⁷ So get up, go out, and thank your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't, you won't have a man left by tonight. That will be far worse for you than all the disasters you've had from your youth until now."

⁸ So the king got up and went to sit at the town gate.* Everybody was told: "Look, the king is sitting at the town gate." They all came to see the king.

In the meantime the Israelites had run away and gone to their homes. ⁹ Everyone among the tribes of Israel were arguing with each other, saying, "The king rescued us from the persecution of our enemies, he saved us from the Philistines, but now he's had to run from the country because of Absalom. ¹⁰ Now Absalom, the man we chose to be our king by anointing him, he's died in battle. Why don't we do something and invite King David† to come back?"

¹¹ King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: "Tell the elders of Judah, 'Are you going to be the last people to bring the

* **19:8** In other words, David made himself accessible to them, rather than stay cooped up in his room. † **19:10** "David": name supplied for clarity.

king back to his palace, since the king has heard that all of Israel wants it? ¹² You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. Why should you be the last ones to want to bring the king back?' ¹³ Tell Amasa, 'Aren't you my flesh and blood too? May God punish me very severely if from now on you're not the commander of my army instead of Joab!' "

¹⁴ Amasa convinced all the people of Judah to unitedly support David,[‡] so they sent a message to the king: "Please come back, you and everyone with you." ¹⁵ The king began his journey back, and when he arrived at the Jordan, the men of Judah met him at Gilgal to help him cross the river. ¹⁶ Shimei,[§] son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. ¹⁷ With him were one thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin, including Ziba, servant of Saul's family, as well as Ziba's fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed down to the Jordan to meet the king. ¹⁸ They crossed at the ford to bring the king's household over and whatever else he wanted. Shimei crossed the Jordan and fell facedown before the king.

¹⁹ "Your Majesty, please forgive me and disregard the wrong that I, your servant, did when Your Majesty left Jerusalem. Please forget all about it. ²⁰ I, your servant, recognize that I have sinned. But look! Today I'm the first from any

[‡] **19:14** "David": name supplied for clarity. [§] **19:16** See 16:5.

of the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet Your Majesty.”

²¹ Abishai, son of Zeruah, said, “Shouldn't Shimei be executed for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed one?”

²² But David replied, “What's that got do with you, you sons of Zeruah? Do you want to be my enemies today? Is this a day to execute anybody in Israel? Aren't I certain that today I'm the king of Israel once more?”

²³ David turned to Shimei and swore an oath to him, “You're not going to die.”

²⁴ Then Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, went to meet the king. He had refused to look after his feet or trim his mustache or have his clothes washed from the day the king left until the day of his peaceful return. ²⁵ When he arrived from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, “Why didn't you come with me, Mephibosheth?”

²⁶ Mephibosheth answered, “Your Majesty, my servant Ziba tricked me. I told him, ‘Saddle up my donkey[†] so I can ride her and leave with the king,’ because you know that I'm lame.

²⁷ Ziba has misrepresented me, your servant, to Your Majesty. However, Your Majesty is like an angel of God, so do what you think best. ²⁸ All my grandfather's family could only expect death from Your Majesty, but you included me, your servant, among those who eat at your table. So

* **19:22** David is not only replying to Abishai, but also to Joab, Abishai's brother. † **19:26** Septuagint reading. Hebrew: “Let me saddle up my donkey.”

what right do I have to ask the king for anything more?"

²⁹ "Why talk any more about these issues of yours?" David responded. "I've decided that you and Ziba should divide the land."

³⁰ Mephibosheth replied to the king, "Let him have it all! I'm just happy that Your Majesty has returned home in peace."

³¹ Barzillai the Gileadite had also come down from Rogelim to help the king cross the Jordan and to make his way onwards from there.

³² Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age, and because he was a very wealthy man, he had provided the king with food while he was staying in Mahanaim.

³³ The king said to Barzillai, "Cross the Jordan with me, and I will provide for you while you stay with me in Jerusalem."

³⁴ "How much longer do you think I have to live so I could go to Jerusalem and stay there with the king?" Barzillai replied. ³⁵ "I'm already eighty. I don't enjoy anything anymore. I can't taste what I eat or drink. I can't hear when people sing. There's no point for me, your servant, to be another burden to Your Majesty!

³⁶ For your servant to cross the Jordan River with the king is enough reward for me![‡] ³⁷ Then let your servant go back home, that I may die in my home town near the tomb of my father

[‡] **19:36** These two verses are set out as questions in the Hebrew, but they work better as statements in English.

and mother. But here is your servant, my son[§] Chimham. Let him cross over with Your Majesty, and treat him as you think best.”

³⁸ The king replied, “Chimham will cross over with me, and I will treat him as you think best, and I will do for you whatever you want.”

³⁹ So everybody crossed the Jordan first, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and then Barzillai went back home. ⁴⁰ Then the king carried on to Gilgal, and Chimham went with him. The whole army of Judah and half the army of Israel accompanied the king.

⁴¹ But soon the men of Israel who were there came to the king and asked him, “Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, secretly take Your Majesty away and bring you and your household across the Jordan, together with all your men?”

⁴² The men of Judah explained to the men of Israel, “We did this because the king is one of our relatives. Why are you getting upset about this? When did we ever eat the king's food? When did we ever get anything for yourselves?”

⁴³ “We've got ten shares in the king,”* the men of Israel replied, “so we have a greater claim on David than you do. So why do you look down us? Weren't we the first ones to talk about bringing back our king?” But the men of Judah argued even more strongly than the men of Israel.

[§] **19:37** The text does not explicitly say that Chimham is Barzillai's son, but some Septuagint manuscripts do so and it is a likely conclusion. * **19:43** Referring to the ten northern tribes.

20

¹ A rabble-rouser called Sheba, son of Bichri, from the tribe of Benjamin, happened to be there. He blew the ram's horn and shouted: "We have no interest in David, no commitment to Jesse's son. Israelites, let's all go home!"

² So all the men of Israel abandoned David to follow Sheba, son of Bichri. But the men of Judah accompanied their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem. ³ When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to look after the palace* and put them in a house under guard. He took care of their needs but he didn't sleep with them. They were imprisoned until they died, living like widows.

⁴ Then the king ordered Amasa, "Call up the army of Judah. Have them come to me within three days, and you come too." ⁵ Amasa called up the army of Judah, but he took longer than the time he was given.

⁶ David then spoke to Abishai, saying, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri is going to cause us more trouble than Absalom did. Take the king's men and chase him down, or he will take over fortified towns and get away from us."

⁷ So Joab's men, along with the Cherethites, the Pelethites,† and all the experienced fighters, marched out of Jerusalem to chase down Sheba, son of Bichri. ⁸ While they were at the large rock in Gibeon, Amasa caught up with them. Joab was

* **20:3** See 15:16. † **20:7** "The Cherethites, the Pelethites": David's personal bodyguard.

dressed for battle. Over his clothes was a belt around his waist with a dagger in its sheath. As he moved forward, it fell out.‡

⁹ “How are you doing, my brother?” Joab asked Amasa. Joab held Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. ¹⁰ Amasa wasn't prepared for the dagger in Joab's left hand. Joab stabbed him in the belly and his intestines poured out onto the ground. Joab didn't need to stab him twice, because Amasa was already dead. Then Joab and his brother Abishai set off in pursuit of Sheba.

¹¹ One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and called out, “If you're on Joab's side, and if you are on David's side, then follow Joab!” ¹² But Amasa was there, lying in his blood in the middle of the main road. When the man saw that everybody was stopping to look, he pulled the body off the road into a field and threw a cloth over it. ¹³ Once Amasa's body was off the road, all the men followed Joab in pursuit of Sheba.

¹⁴ In the meantime Sheba had gone around all the tribes of Israel§ and eventually ended up the town of Abel-beth-maacah. All the Bichrites* gathered for battle and followed him into the town. ¹⁵ Joab's army came and besieged Sheba

‡ **20:8** The details of what is happening here are not clear. Some think Joab had a concealed dagger which fell out, perhaps just into his tunic. Others think he intentionally dropped his sword so he would appear to be unarmed, but that he had another weapon, a dagger, still in his belt. § **20:14** Presumably seeking support for his rebellion. * **20:14** Members of his own family group.

in Abel-Beth-Maacah. They built a siege ramp against the town's outer wall. While all of Joab's army was battering the wall to knock it down, ¹⁶ a wise woman from the town called out, "Listen! Please listen! Tell Joab, 'Come over here so I can speak to you.' "

¹⁷ He went over to her, and the woman asked, "Are you Joab?"

"Yes, that's me," he replied.

"Please listen to what I, your servant, have to say," she said.

"I'm listening," he replied.

¹⁸ Then the woman said, "In times gone by people used to say, 'If you want advice, go to Abel,' and that's how arguments were settled. ¹⁹ I am one of the peaceful and faithful people of Israel. You're trying to destroy a town that's like a mother in Israel. Why do you want to tear down the Lord's possession?"

²⁰ "Certainly not!" Joab answered. "It's not what I want—to destroy or tear down this town!

²¹ That's not the intention. But a man called Sheba, son of Bichri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has rebelled against the king, against David. Just hand over this one man and I will withdraw from the town."

"Fine," the woman replied, "his head will be thrown over the wall to you."

²² The woman went and talked with everyone about her wise plan. So they cut off the head of Sheba and threw it to Joab. Then Joab blew the ram's horn to sound the retreat, and all his men

left the town and went home. Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem.

²³ Joab commanded the whole army of Israel. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites. ²⁴ Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the official records. ²⁵ Sheva was the secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, ²⁶ and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

21

¹ Once during David's reign there was a famine for three years in a row, and David asked the Lord about it. The Lord replied, "It's because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."

² David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke with them. The Gibeonites were not Israelites, but what was left of the Amorites. The Israelites had sworn an oath to them,* but in his nationalistic passion for the Israelites and Judah, Saul had tried to wipe them out.

³ "What can I do for you?" David asked the Gibeonites. "How can I compensate you so that you may bless the Lord's people?"

⁴ "This isn't a question of us receiving payment in silver or gold from Saul or his family," the Gibeonites replied. "In addition we don't have the right to have anyone in Israel put to death for us."

"I'll do whatever you ask," David answered.

* **21:2** See Joshua 3.

5 They replied, "Regarding the man who destroyed us, who planned to prevent us having any place to live in the whole country of Israel, 6 have seven of Saul's male descendants be handed over to us, and we will hang them in the presence of the Lord at Gibeon of Saul, the Lord's chosen one."

"I will hand them over to you," said the king. 7 However, the king spared Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, because of the oath sworn before the Lord between David and Jonathan, son of Saul. 8 The king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Merab,[†] the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite. 9 He handed them over to the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill in the presence of the Lord. All seven of them died at the same time, executed at the beginning of the barley harvest.

10 Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took some sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock.[‡] From the beginning of the harvest until the time the rains came and poured down on the bodies, she kept the birds away from them during the day and the wild animals at night.

11 When David heard what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, Saul's concubine of Saul had done,

[†] **21:8** The Hebrew text reads Michal, but she is identified as childless in 6:23, and Merab is given as the wife of Adriel in 1 Samuel 18:19. [‡] **21:10** Probably both to cover the ground and as a sheet above her to protect her from sun and rain.

¹² he retrieved the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had taken them from the public square of Bethshan where the Philistines had hung the bodies after they had killed Saul at Gilboa. ¹³ David had the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan brought back, and also had the bones of those who had been hanged gathered up. ¹⁴ They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan at Zela in the land of Benjamin, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. Once they finished doing everything the king had ordered, God answered their prayers to end the famine in the land.

¹⁵ There was war once more between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight the Philistines, and he got worn out. ¹⁶ Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spear weighed three hundred shekels, and who was carrying a new sword, said he was going to kill David. ¹⁷ But Abishai, son of Zeruah, came to his rescue, attacked the Philistine, and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "Don't ever go out with us to battle again, so that the Israel's light isn't snuffed out!"

¹⁸ Some time after this there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob. But then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Repha.

¹⁹ In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan, son of Jair, from Bethlehem, killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite. The shaft of his spear was as thick as a weaver's rod.

²⁰ In yet another battle at Gath, there was a gigantic man, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, making twenty-four all. He too was descended from the giants. ²¹ But when he insulted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. ²² These four were the descendants of the giants in Gath, but they were all killed by David and his men.

22

¹ David sang the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord saved him from all his enemies, and from Saul.* ² He sang:

“The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my Savior.

³ He is my God, my rock who protects me. He shields me from harm, his power saves me,† he keeps me safe. He is my protector; he is my savior; he saves me from violence.

⁴ I call for help from the Lord, who should be praised, and he saves me from those who hate me.

⁵ The waves of death swept over me; surging waters of destruction flooded over me;

⁶ The grave wound its ropes around me; death set snares for me.

⁷ In my despair I called on the Lord; I called out to my God. He heard my voice from his Temple; my cry for help reached his ears.

⁸ The earth shook to and fro; the foundations of the heavens trembled, shaking because of his anger.

* **22:1** This passage parallels Psalms 18. † **22:3** Literally, “horn of my salvation.”

9 Smoke came out of his nostrils, and fire from his mouth, burning coals that blazed before him.

10 He pushed aside the heavens and came down, with dark clouds beneath his feet.

11 Riding on a heavenly being[‡] he flew, swooping on the wings of the wind.

12 He hid himself in darkness, covering himself with black rainclouds.

13 Burning coals blazed out of his brightness.

14 The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.

15 He fired his arrows, scattering his enemies, § he routed them with his lightning bolts.

16 The Lord roared, and by the wind from the breath of his nostrils the valleys of the sea could be seen and the foundations of the earth were uncovered.

17 He reached down his hand from above and grabbed hold of me. He dragged me out of the deep water.

18 He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and who were much stronger than me.

19 They came at me at my worst possible moment,* but the Lord supported me.

20 He set me free,[†] he rescued me because he's happy with me.[‡]

[‡] **22:11** Literally, “cherub,” but in English this has become associated with an angelic baby. § **22:15** Implied. * **22:19** Literally, “my day of disaster.” † **22:20** Literally, “brought me out to a spacious place.” ‡ **22:20** Or “he delights in me.”

²¹ The Lord rewarded me because I do what's right; he repaid me because I am innocent. §

²² For I have followed the Lord's ways; I have not sinned by turning away from my God.

²³ I have kept all his laws in mind; I have not ignored his commandments.

²⁴ I am blameless in his sight; I keep myself from sinning.

²⁵ The Lord rewarded me for doing what's right. I am innocent in his sight.

²⁶ You show trust to those who are trusting; you show integrity to those with integrity,*

²⁷ You show yourself pure to those who are pure, but you show yourself astute to those who are crafty.

²⁸ You save the humble, but your eyes watch the proud to bring them down.

²⁹ You, Lord, are my lamp. The Lord lights up my darkness.

³⁰ With you, I can charge down a troop of soldiers; with you, my God, I can climb a fortress wall.

³¹ God's way is absolutely right. † What the Lord says is trustworthy. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection.

³² For who is God except the Lord? Who is a Rock, except our God?

³³ God makes me strong and keeps me safe.

§ **22:21** Literally, "because of the cleanness of my hands."

* **22:26** The word used here means "complete" or "sound."

† **22:31** The word used here, often translated as "perfect," is the same as in 18:25.

³⁴ He makes me surefooted like the deer, able to walk the heights in safety.

³⁵ He teaches me how to fight in battle; he gives me the strength to draw a bronze bow.

³⁶ You protect me with the shield of your salvation; your help has made me great.

³⁷ You gave me room to walk, and prevented my feet from slipping.

³⁸ I chased my enemies, and caught up with them. I did not turn around until I had destroyed them.

³⁹ I struck them down—they couldn't get up. They fell at my feet.

⁴⁰ You made me strong for the battle; you made those who rose up against me kneel low before me.

⁴¹ You made my enemies run away; I destroyed all my enemies.

⁴² They cried out for help, but no one came to rescue them. They even called out to the Lord, but he did not answer them.

⁴³ I ground them into dust, like the dust of the earth. I crushed them and threw them out like mud in the street.

⁴⁴ You rescued me from rebellious people; you have kept me as ruler over nations—people I didn't know now serve me.

⁴⁵ Foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey.

⁴⁶ They lose heart, and come trembling in surrender from their strongholds.

⁴⁷ The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! May the God who saves me be praised!

⁴⁸ God avenges me, he puts peoples under me,

49 He frees me from those who hate me. You keep me safe from those who rebel against me, you save me from violent men.

50 That's why I will praise you among the nations, Lord; I will sing praises about who you are.‡

51 You have saved the king so often,§ showing your trustworthy love to David, your anointed, and to his descendants forever.”

23

1 These are David's last words. The divine message of David son of Jesse, the divine message of the man made great by God, the one anointed by the God of Jacob, the wonderful psalm-writer of Israel:

2 “The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; my tongue gave his message.

3 Israel's God spoke; Israel's Rock told me, ‘He who rules the people justly, he who rules respecting God, ⁴ is like the light of the morning sunrise on a cloudless dawn; like the shining of raindrops on the new grass growing from the earth.’

5 Isn't this how my family is with God? For he has made an everlasting agreement with me, set out in detail and with every part guaranteed. He will make sure to save me and to give me all I want.

‡ 22:50 “Of who you are”: literally, “to your name”: the concept of name in Hebrew is far more than a simple designation; it refers to the character of the person. § 22:51 Or “You have given many victories to the king.”

⁶ But evil people are like thorns to be thrown aside; they can't be held in the hand. ⁷ The only way to deal with them is to use an iron tool or the handle of a spear. They are completely burned up right where they are.”

⁸ These are the names of the leading warriors who supported David: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, leader of the Three. Using his spear, he once killed eight hundred men in a single battle.

⁹ After him came Eleazar, son of Dodai, the Ahohite, one of the Three leading warriors. He was with David when they defied the Philistines gathered for battle at Pas-dammin. The Israelites retreated, ¹⁰ but Eleazar took his stand and went on killing Philistines until his hand stuck to his sword. The Lord saved them by granting them a great victory. The Israelite army did return, but only to strip the dead.

¹¹ After him came Shammah, son of Agee, the Hararite. When the Philistines gathered at Lehi, in a field full of lentils, the Israelite army ran away from them, ¹² but Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field, defending it and killing the Philistines. The Lord gave them a great victory.

¹³ At harvest time, the Three, who were part of the Thirty leading warriors, went down to meet David when he was at the cave of Adullam. The Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ At the time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was in Bethlehem. ¹⁵ David was feeling really thirsty,

and he said, "If only someone could bring me a drink of water from the well beside the entrance gate to Bethlehem!"

¹⁶ The Three leading warriors broke through the Philistine defenses, took some water from the well at Bethelhem's gate, and brought it back to David. But David refused to drink it, and poured it out as an offering to the Lord. ¹⁷ "Lord, never let me do this!" he said. "Isn't it like drinking the blood of these men who risked their lives?" So he did not drink it. This is just some of the things the Three leading warriors did.

¹⁸ Abishai, Joab's brother, was leader of the second Three.* Using his spear, he once killed 300 men, and became famous among the Three. ¹⁹ He was the most highly regarded of the Three and was their commander, though he was not one of the first Three.†

²⁰ Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, a strong warrior from Kabzeel, did many amazing things. He killed two sons of Ariel of Moab.‡ He also went after a lion into a pit in the snow and killed it.

²¹ Another time he killed a huge Egyptian. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand but Benaiah attacked him with just a club. He grabbed the

* **23:18** However, Jashobeam has already been mentioned as leader of the Three (11:11), and the killing of 300 by his spear has also been mentioned. Some suggest a confusion of names or alternate spelling, or that this refers to another person altogether as leader not of the Three but the Thirty, or that there was another "Three." † **23:19** Identifying a first and second Three seems to be the simplest solution to what are confusing verses. ‡ **23:20** Septuagint understanding; it may refer to two fighting champions of Moab.

spear from the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. ²² These were the kind of things Benaiah did that made him as famous as the Three leading warriors. ²³ He was the most highly regarded of the Thirty, though he was not one of the Three. David put him in charge of his personal bodyguard.

²⁴ Included in the Thirty were:

Asahel, Joab's brother; Elhanan, son of Dodo, from Bethlehem; ²⁵ Shammoth the Harorite; Elika the Harodite, ²⁶ Helez the Paltite; Ira, son of Ikkesh, from Tekoa; ²⁷ Abiezer from Anathoth; Mebunnai the Hushathite; ²⁸ Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai the Netophahite; ²⁹ Heleb, son of Baanah the Netophahite; Ittai, son of Ribai from Gibeah of the Benjamites; ³⁰ Benaiah the Pirathonite; Hiddai from the streams of Gaash; ³¹ Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Baharumite; ³² Eliahba the Shaalbonite; the sons of Jashem; Jonathan, ³³ son of § Shagee the Hararite; Ahiam, son of Sachar the Hararite; ³⁴ Eliphelet, son of Ahasbai, son of the Maacathite, Eliam, son of Ahithophel, the Gilonite, ³⁵ Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, ³⁶ Igal, son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, ³⁷ Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab, son of Zeruiah, ³⁸ Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; ³⁹ and Uriah the Hittite; a total of thirty-seven.

§ 23:33 The Hebrew does not have "son of."

24

¹ The Lord* was angry with Israel, and he provoked David against them, saying, “go and take a census of Israel and Judah.” ² So David told Joab, the army commander, “Go and count the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, so I can have a total number.”

³ But Joab replied to the king, “May the Lord multiply his people a hundred times over, Your Majesty, and may you live to see it! But why does Your Majesty want to do this?”

⁴ But the king was adamant so Joab and the army commanders left the king and went to census the people† of Israel.

⁵ They crossed the Jordan and camped on the south side of the town of Aroer, in the middle of the valley, and then continued towards Gad and Jazer. ⁶ Then they went on to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; and then continued towards Dan, and from Dan around to Sidon. ⁷ After this they went to the fortress of Tyre, and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. They ended up in the Negev of Judah at Beersheba. ⁸ After traveling throughout the whole country for nine months and twenty days, they returned to Jerusalem. ⁹ Joab reported to the king the number of people that had been counted. In

* **24:1** In 1 Chronicles 21:1 Satan is the one identified as provoking David to conduct the census. Here as elsewhere in Scripture it may be that since God is all-powerful he is credited with responsibility even for actions he does not specifically commit. † **24:4** David is of course primarily interested in the number of men he can call up to serve in his army.

Israel there were 800,000 fighting men who could use the sword, and in Judah there were 500,000.

¹⁰ Afterwards, David felt really bad for ordering the census. He said to God, “I have committed a terrible sin by doing this. Please take away the guilt of your servant, for I have been very stupid.”

¹¹ When David got up in the morning, the Lord had sent a message to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, ¹² “Go and tell David that this is what the Lord says: ‘I'm giving you three options. Choose one of them, and that's what I'll do to you.’ ”

¹³ So Gad went and told David, “You can choose three[‡] years of famine in your land; or three months of running from your enemies while they chase you; or three days of plague in your land. So think about it and decide how I should reply to the One who sent me.”

¹⁴ David replied to Gad, “This is an awful situation for me! Please, let the Lord decide my punishment,[§] for he is merciful. Don't let me be punished by people.”

¹⁵ So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the time designated, and seventy thousand people died from Dan to Beersheba.

¹⁶ But just as the angel was getting ready to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented from causing

[‡] **24:13** Septuagint reading. Hebrew reads “seven years,” as does 1 Chronicles 21:12. [§] **24:14** “Let the Lord decide my punishment”: literally, “let me fall into the hands of the Lord.” Also at the end of the verse, “Do not let me fall into human hands.”

such a disaster and told the destroying angel, "That's enough. You can stop now." Right then the angel of the Lord was standing beside the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷ When David saw the angel striking down the people, he said to the Lord, "I'm the one who has sinned; I'm the one who has done wrong. These people are just sheep. What have they done? Punish me and my family instead."

¹⁸ On that day Gad went to David and told him, "Go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

¹⁹ So David went and did what the Lord had ordered, as Gad had told him. ²⁰ When Araunah looked up, he saw the king and his officials approaching. So he went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. ²¹ "Why has Your Majesty come to see me, your servant?" Araunah asked.

"To buy your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord in order that the plague on the people may be stopped." David replied.

²² "Take it, and Your Majesty can use it to make offerings as you think best," Araunah told David. "Here are the oxen for burnt offerings, and here are the threshing boards and the yokes for the oxen for firewood. ²³ Your Majesty, I, Araunah, give it all to the king." Araunah concluded by saying, "May the Lord your God respond positively* to you."

* **24:23** "Respond positively": or, "accept."

²⁴ “No, I insist on paying you for it,” the king replied. “I won't present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that didn't cost me anything.” David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

²⁵ David built an altar to the Lord there, and presented burnt offerings and friendship offerings. The Lord answered his prayer for the country, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

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Free Bible Version
The New Testament and Psalms in the Free Bible
Version translation in American English

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Language: English

Dialect: American

Translation by: Dr. Jonathan Gallagher

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2024-02-21

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