

David's Sin and Consequences

When last we met we were into the second portion of 2 Samuel. If you recall, we began the outline entitled 2 Samuel 11-24, "David's Sin and Its Consequences," and that is where we want to pick up. We already talked about sin and reconciliation. That is, we talked about 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Chapter 11 recounts David's sin with Bathsheba against her husband, Uriah. His sin was really against both of them. We also saw the Lord's justice and mercy in chapter 12 as Nathan confronted David with his sin.

We come now to a section entitled "Sin and Incomplete Reconciliation." I want to begin by asking a question. Sometimes as we get older and older, we find ourselves saying, "What is wrong with kids these days?" That might be a title to 2 Samuel 13-18. This whole section deals with the family life of David and his children. What is wrong with kids these days? Perhaps part of the answer might be to give these chapters another title, which is "The Sins of the Fathers Visited on the Children." Last time we mentioned that terrible scene in chapter 13, the rape of Tamar by her half-brother, Amnon. After that, we noticed David's reaction. How did David react in 2 Samuel 13:21? "When King David heard all this, he was furious." When King David heard what Amnon had done to Tamar, he was furious but apparently did nothing. Absalom gave Amnon a stony silence, as described in 2 Samuel 13:22, "Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar. Two years later when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there." Included in this was an invitation for Amnon. It was on this occasion that Absalom found it possible to justify or defend the honor of his sister by killing Amnon. This was not the right thing for Absalom to do, but you can see how he was in part driven to it by David's inaction. David was furious at Amnon's violation of Tamar, and that is understandable. But it is not understandable that he took no action.

As we move on to 2 Samuel 14, we will discover that this inaction on David's part begins to compound the problem that began with his sin. I have entitled chapter 14, "Doing Wrong by Halfway Resolving." Doing wrong by resolving a conflict only halfway is not a complete resolution. Absalom returned to Jerusalem after a period of time in exile, but he was not restored to David. In 2 Samuel 14:23 and 24 we read this, "Then Joab when to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king said, 'He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.' So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king." After a while this becomes rather unbearable for Absalom, so he demanded to see the king. In verse 32, "Absalom said to Joab, 'Look, I sent word to you and said, 'Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!'" Now then, I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.'" We do not know whether Absalom intended this sincerely as though he really felt he was guilty of nothing. It may have been that he felt that he could defend himself to David or charge him with wrongdoing. Absalom could tell David, the king and his father, that he should have done what Absalom ultimately had to do. Because David did not do it, Absalom had to take the law in his own hands. We do not know what he actually would have said if that were the case.

Joab does engineer a meeting with the king, in verse 33. "Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom." Sometimes we learn in Scripture something from what is not said as well as from what is said. What do you find lacking here if, indeed, something is lacking? What would you expect to have taken place? Obviously, accounts are abbreviated in the Scriptures, but what is missing here?

We are looking for some kind of repentance or forgiveness on the part of either David or Absalom or preferably both. Both had, in fact, been wrong, so we are looking for some reconciliation. We would expect them to have a heart-to-heart talk, coming to an understanding and a mutual forgiveness of one another. We do not hear any of that. Arguments from silence are notoriously weak arguments. They are dangerous arguments, at least, and I think in terms of what begins to happen after this. I think we can assume that David simply kissed Absalom and really did not want to talk about it. Absalom did not have a chance to really go through it and to work it out verbally. You want to see my face, you want to come back, you want to be able to be in the palace, fine. David gives him a kiss and with that sweeps the whole thing under the rug. But things that we sweep under the rug make a little lump and eventually can become very uncomfortable. It is always dangerous and that is, in fact, what happens in this particular instance.

In the next section we get to 2 Samuel 15-18, which deals with Absalom's rebellion and death. In Absalom's conspiracy toward David we see David as a man of God in trouble. Notice what the issue is. Something is bothering Absalom very much, so he brings it to the people. In 2 Samuel 15:2-6, Absalom basically accuses the king of not taking care of business in terms of justice. Notice that justice is the issue that he brings to the people. In verse 2 he would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city. People would come with a complaint to be placed before the king for judgment. Some of your translations may say "for judgment" or "for justice." *Mishpat* is the word from which we get it; it is a noun derived from the word meaning to judge. Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" and he would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." The servants were not being evasive here. This is a very interesting instance of the way in which historical accounts are told. Each of the different individuals addressed by Absalom would have said the particular town they were from. One would have said, "I am from Naphtali," another would have said, "I am from Zebulun," another one would have said, "I am from Simeon," perhaps. Instead, the narrator simply says that they would answer, "I am from such and such a tribe." Some of your translations may even say that, "I am from such and such a tribe." We mess ourselves up a little bit by putting all that in direct quotation marks in our English Bibles. It was not exactly the same kind of direct quotation in the Hebrew Bible. They would answer, I am from this or that tribe, and then Absalom would respond in verse 3, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." In other words, you are coming to a king under whose authority justice is not done. "And Absalom would add, 'If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice.'" He is basically saying, "Remember what I did to Amnon; justice does not elude my grasp." I think that David's failure to respond to Amnon contributed to the offenses of Absalom for which Absalom also is responsible. Absalom then launches a rebellion in this way. Many come out to follow Absalom. David is forced to flee from Jerusalem. Even Ahithophel, who had been one of David's advisors, joins Absalom's conspiracy.

Why would Ahithophel possibly have sided with Absalom rather than staying with David? The text does not tell us directly, but we get some information in the text. Look at 2 Samuel 11:3 and 23:34. In 2 Samuel 11:3 it says, "David sent someone to find out about her [Bathsheba]. The man said, 'Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah, the Hittite?'" So we know that Bathsheba was the daughter of Eliam. Now look at 2 Samuel 23:34, this is in the account of David's mighty men and among the thirty, "Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maachathite, Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite." We do not know for sure, but probably this is the same Ahithophel, which would make Ahithophel Bathsheba's grandfather. What David did to Bathsheba and to Uriah, having Uriah killed and disrupting the family, might have seemed, indeed, an injustice to Ahithophel. It may have prompted him to side with Absalom. Since Absalom is worried about justice, Ahithophel joins in the rebellion.

As David is forced to flee for his life from Jerusalem, a number of things happen. He is cursed in 2 Samuel 16 by Shimei. David is now a man of God in trouble. Notice how he responds. Look at 2 Samuel 16:10. Shimei is cursing David and throwing stones and dust at him as he is coming out of the city. David's men want to kill him. In verse 9 it says, "Abishai son of Zeruiah [brother of Joab] said to the king, 'Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.' But the king said, 'What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, "Curse David," who can ask, "Why do you do this?"'" David then said to Abishai and all his officials, 'My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.'" David understands, in a sense, that though the specific charge that Shimei is bringing against him is incorrect, David has done wrong. Thus, he receives the curse. He trusts God and simply makes a theological issue out of it. Rather than saying, I have got to defend myself, go over and kill him, he says it may be that the Lord will see his distress. In verse 11 he says, "Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to." Later he ultimately counsels Solomon to kill him. That is in 1 Kings 2, which we will reserve for then. He also counsels Solomon to kill Joab, a difficult individual in David's estimation.

Look at 2 Samuel 15:25 as another example of how David responds to difficulty. Zadok came out from Jerusalem carrying the Ark of the Covenant. They set down the ark of God and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city. Verse 25 says, "Then the King said to Zadok, 'Take the ark of God back into the city.'" Zadok had tried to rescue it and bring it so that David would have the benefit of the ark and the visible representation of the presence of God with him. But David says to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it in his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him." that should remind you of Eli in 1 Samuel 3. Remember Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes." At that time, we talked about the fact that this is a pattern for how an individual should respond to the judgments of God. We should respond like this when God says you are disqualified from this particular role, from this particular ministry—you need to step aside. The right response is to say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what is right in His own eyes." Or as David says here, "Let him do to me whatever seems good to him." It is His prerogative. God is sovereign. We are all sinful. We do not deserve anything from His Hand. If God says, "Step aside," then our right response is to say, "Right Lord, I will step aside and let You rebuild my world in whatever way You may deem appropriate, but if I am disqualified in some way, I accept that from Your hands." We do not always see that in our world around us. Often we see people trying to reestablish themselves, get back, re-attain their ministry in Christian circles. We need to be aware of that. This is also very important for the interpretation of the books of Samuel because we need to see how Eli responded and even more so how David responded in order to rightly assess how Saul responded. We talked a lot about Saul's unwillingness to let go. He continued to hang on to what was no longer his. He was defensive of himself, and that is an indication that Saul's heart was not really in tune with God's. David's heart was in tune with God. He sinned grievously, but he cast himself on the Lord. He is a man of God in trouble, but he cast himself on the Lord.

As we move on to 2 Samuel 18, contrast David's response with Absalom, who dies. By the way, let that be a warning to you. Absalom took great pride in his hair. This is not a good idea, speaking as one who knows. His hair was his downfall. Absalom's head was entangled in a tree and he was left dangling helpless. When he would get a haircut, he was so proud of his hair that he would even weigh it up each year. It was ultimately his downfall. While he was hanging there helpless, Joab killed him. Notice, however, what he left behind. If David was a man of God in trouble, I would say that Absalom was a man without God. It is interesting to see what a man without God leaves behind. Look at 2 Samuel

18:16-18, "Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him." We saw in the book of Joshua a number of heaps of rocks that almost stood as memorials for significant events in the history of Israel. This may be another large heap of rocks, but it does not say, "and it is there to this day." They piled a large heap of rocks over him. This is not the only rock that commemorates Absalom, however. Verse 17 continues, "Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes. During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, 'I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.' He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day," that is, to the time at which this account is being written. A man without God seeks at best to leave behind monuments to himself. This too recalls something that Saul had done in 1 Samuel 15 when Samuel was going out to try and find Saul. He was told Saul had gone down to Gilgal and had erected a monument there, a monument to himself. We see there is a great contrast between those who are really seeking to follow and submit their wills to God and those who are simply working their way through life trying to leave some mark behind. Let God leave the mark; let it be God's mark. Do not erect monuments to yourself. That is a brief description of Absalom's rebellion and death.

When we come to 2 Samuel 19 and 20 we have the restoration of David's reign. He is restored as king after the death of Absalom, though he laments Absalom's death almost to the point that he loses his men. Finally, Joab has to pull him up and basically say, "Look, David, if you keep lamenting the death of Absalom, who was out to kill you, what is that going to say to those men who risked their lives to defend you?" He convinces David that he had better fix himself up and take charge again and not be so distraught forever. David does so, and his reign is restored.

As far as the monument Absalom erected saying, "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name," two theories have been propounded. Either Absalom had children, which were in some way lost or, as seems more likely, he erected this monument prior to the birth of those children, which then followed. That kind of thing would not have gone unnoticed by those who were the historiographers of Israel. Had they seen it as an out and out contradiction, they would have been troubled as well by it and probably done something about it.

Absalom's children were mentioned, though the specific children were not named. Possibly, that would indicate that they died at a rather young age and thus never made themselves much of a mark. Thus their names are not recorded.

Some have asked about 2 Samuel 15 if it was certain that David was, in general, not doling out justice to the people. Was it Absalom's problem that might have been improved if Absalom had been given some responsibility? Did he need to be assured that there was going to be a place for him in the kingdom? It is possible. I think that this was Absalom's problem more so than David's. In 2 Samuel 8:15, before all this happened in David's life, we have a summary of David's reign to that point. It says, "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people." David was a good king who reigned justly and rightly, at least at that stage. We can assume that he had the interest of the people at heart. It does, however, seem that in his familial sphere there was a sense of guilt that he continued to carry. Even though God had forgiven him for his sin, he saw his child doing something not unlike it, and he was unwilling to do what he should have done. He should have responded not only as father, but particularly as king. Thus the issue of justice became an issue with Absalom. I do not think we would want to broaden it and say that David was an unjust king, far and wide, but it certainly was a sore point with Absalom. He used it to launch his rebellion.

It might be of interest to think over this whole section leading up to the restoration of David's kingdom. It tells us something about the debilitating effects of sin. We talk a lot about being under God's grace, and indeed we are, if we are believers and those who trust Him. We are His children by adoption. We did not earn it. We do not preserve it by our good behavior. We are His unconditionally by His unconditional love. Does that mean that sin has no consequences or that there are not debilitating effects to sin? I think not. Our sins still wreak havoc in our lives. It is not that sin is inconsequential. There is no merit in good works because even if we have done our duty, we are only servants to God. We can never merit God's grace. However, as those who are recipients of God's grace and recipients of His worth, we need to realize that He has given us commands and instructions for our good. So there are debilitating effects when we sin. We see this in David's life with his sons. We talked about Amnon. David was furious but did not intervene. David's inability to reconcile fully with Absalom allowed Absalom to launch a rebellion.

We will discover perhaps the most striking thing of all when we come to 1 Kings 1. At the beginning of that book, we have another son of David by the name of Adonijah, who launches a bid for the throne. It is not a rebellion because David is old and he is about to die. Adonijah thinks this may be his moment. So he gets his chariots and horses ready with 50 men to run ahead of him, reminiscent of what Absalom had done. In 1 Kings 1:6 the narrator, in an unusual way, breaks frame and tells us something parenthetically. There are no parentheses in Hebrew, but you can tell it is a parenthetical comment that the narrator is making. He says directly, "His father had never interfered with him by asking, 'Why do you behave as you do?' He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom." It is an ominous association to be compared with Absalom and called handsome, which Absalom also was. Notice that it says his father never interfered with Adonijah by asking why he acted as he did. What was the problem there? Again, I think David must have felt that he had lost his moral high ground and thus could not question Adonijah. Either that or it was simply a weakness on his part that he was an absentee father and did not pay much attention to his children. Be that as it may, it was a failure on his part to not take some interest in his child and not offer some correctives in the lives of his children. The lesson to us is not to look at our weakness and frailties and decide that we cannot be God's instrument of change and correction in the lives of our children. Two wrongs do not make a right. Because something has been a weakness for me is no reason that I should propagate that weakness in my child. We need to ask God to make us adequate. We should not be overly strict or overly permissive. We need to find the right balance that will discipline a child in love, the way God disciplines us. He does not hammer us, but He does take an active concern in what we are doing and where we are. David, I think, had a problem partially stemming from his own past. He seemed to have a lack of ability to admit he did wrong, but not allow that to make him continue to do wrong in the lives of his children.

David's house stood under a curse. Nathan had said the sword will never depart from his house. What David did in secret, his son would do in broad daylight. That is what Absalom did. This aspect must have weighed heavily upon David too. Still, even there, David should have done what was right in each circumstance. David was not only weak with his sons, but as he himself admits, I think he was weak in dealing with Joab. In 2 Samuel 18:14, Joab was responsible for the murder of Absalom in direct contradiction to what David had instructed him to do. Joab was also responsible for the murder of Amasa, in 2 Samuel 20:8-10. But David leaves it for Solomon to deal with these individuals. If they needed to be dealt with, David should have done it. In 2 Samuel 3:39, David makes that well-known statement, "And today, though I am anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me." He admits there to being weak, or perhaps overly gentle, and the sons of Zeruiah were too harsh or too strong for him. There were some debilitating effects of sin, even in the life of David.

Now we come to the epilogue. In the epilogue, which comprises 2 Samuel 21-24, we have one of the more curious sections in the book. People have wondered what is going on here because these particular episodes do not seem to be chronologically arranged, yet there seems to be some kind of conscious arrangement that is going on. Here is one way in which this section has been analyzed. We have talked before about how in the biblical narratives there are what we call chiasmic structures or inverse structures like ABC/CBA. That is what we have here. I will put it this way: A, B, C, C prime, B prime, A prime. That is the basic structure that we are going to find. The first episode is a famine story, which is the result of the sin of a king, the king in that instance being Saul. We have a famine story in 2 Samuel 21:1-14. Paralleling that, at the very end of the book we have a plague story, also resulting from the sin of a king, but the king in this instance was not Saul, but David. We have that in 2 Samuel 24:1-25. Up in the B element, we have a short list of David's mighty men or David's warriors in 2 Samuel 21:15-22. Paralleling that down below, we have a long list of David's men found in 2 Samuel 23:8-39. Remember when we talked about these structures, we have stressed that, like a picture frame, these structures accentuate what is in the middle. Parts A are the frame, parts B are the mat, parts C are what is of primary importance, that which you most want to look at. Here we have two poetic compositions. We have, first of all, a long poetic composition by David and then we have a short poem. The long poem is in 2 Samuel 22:2-51 and the short poem is 2 Samuel 23:1-7. The epilogue is in a chiasmic arrangement; it has some internal logic to it. We want to focus on the middle. First of all, the long poem stresses a central theme which is that the Lord has been David's deliverer. Notice how it begins in 2 Samuel 22:1, "The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; / My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, / My shield and the horn of my salvation." Where have we heard some of those images before? They are in Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2: rock, horn, salvation, deliverance. Those are the kinds of themes, images, and terms that were introduced in that early poetic composition. In a nice fashion, framing the books of 1 and 2 Samuel, you have Hannah's song striking those themes and then David bringing those themes up again at the end of the book. He stresses them all over again. The long poem, what is sometimes called "David's Song of Praise," praises God as his deliverer.

The second poem stresses the fact that God has made an everlasting covenant with David. Look at 2 Samuel 23:5, which says,

Is not my house right with God?
Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,
arranged and secured in every part?
Will he not bring to fruition my salvation
and grant me my every desire?

These are two things that set David apart from Saul and from others who would be destined to fail as kings. It is not that David was less a sinner than Saul. Perhaps that is the emphasis of the frame.

The first problem, the famine, was brought on by an unspecified sin of Saul. We do not know exactly what he had done to the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites were those villagers whom Joshua had spared because he did not pray about it. They are still around in the days of Saul, and perhaps Saul did not like them still being around. In some way he did something wrong toward them. In punishment of what he did, a famine came upon the land. So Saul was a sinner, but David was too. The plague was brought about as a result of David's taking a census. This is a very mysterious thing; why did David take a census? What was the point? There are various theories. It may have been that David was thinking they were now at the full extent of those boundaries that God had promised them. They occupied the Promised Land, but perhaps he wondered how strong his military force was. Maybe he wanted to count up his soldiers, thinking he could go a bit better. He could capture some further territories. It may have

been that kind of prideful ambition that God felt was inappropriate. Instead of saying, as we have in 2 Samuel 24:1, that “the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them,” the book of Chronicles actually says, “The accuser, Hassacanda,” Satan actually incited David. This is very interesting. A theological discussion could emerge on the basis of primary and secondary causation. Satan is under God’s ultimate sovereignty and is only being able to do what he does with God’s permission.

The point of this structure is both Saul and David were sinners. The condition of the relationship between God and David made the difference. David was God’s elect king in a special sense. He had a real relationship with God. He was God’s choice. Saul was the people’s choice. He really did not have a relationship with God. It was not the quality of their sin and the resulting symptoms. There is a vast difference between a diseased and dead heart in Saul and a healthy heart in David. David still did wrong things sometimes. This central section stresses that God is the one who has delivered David and He has made an everlasting covenant with him. Those are two very important insights to be gleaned from the books of Samuel, and particularly 2 Samuel. That establishes then the Davidic throne, which will then continue to be brought to the fore as we get into the books of Kings. It will keep harking back to the promises God made to David.

The question has been asked about David’s polygamy and the fact that the text remains silent about that. Remember what Nathan said to David in 2 Samuel 12:8 in his judgment upon David. He went and took the one wife of Uriah, that one who is represented as the one lamb of the poor man, even though the rich man had all these sheep. The image is supposed to be about all these wives. In verse 7-9, Nathan speaks for the Lord, saying, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says, ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes?’” It is a very, very difficult question, particularly because we feel so strongly about monogamy.

It is clear from the creation account that God feels strongly about it. The question is how could this go on without God making that the main issue, or at least a secondary issue, in His dealing with His people? I do not have an answer to that other than there is such a thing as God’s progressive unfolding of His will to His people. There is also the situation of what was common practice all around Israel. That is not a satisfying answer because God does not generally accommodate Himself to wrong behavior of other people. But we do know that He has unfolded His will to us gradually. As Jesus answered questions about divorce, He said, “Because of the hardness of your heart, he allowed that then. But from the beginning, it was not so.” That is not what God wanted. God allowed the Mosaic regulation about giving a certificate of divorce, and even gave a regulation for it: “because of the hardness of your heart.” Knowing that He needed to move you along and discipline you gradually, He dealt with an issue at a time. I am not satisfied with the answer, particularly, but that is about the best I can do. Fortunately, God does not reveal to me the full plethora of my sins all at once. He deals with me one at a time. I think He deals with all of us this way. He will point out one thing. If He were to show us all the areas in which we are still in sin, it might be overwhelming to us if we really saw ourselves as He sees us.

If we put that on a societal level, God is saying polygamy is not ideal. It is not the plan from the beginning. However, we will regulate it and make it as just as we can and gradually work toward further clarity. At this early stage there are other issues God needed to deal with first. We may wish that He had dealt with that one earlier. My wife and I were in Uganda two summers ago, and polygamy is still widely practiced there. Christian leaders there often discuss what to do about it. I think that most of them realize that once you are in that situation, it is a case-by-case basis as to what is the best solution. There

is not an easy, clear answer. If they told everyone in a polygamist situation they must immediately disband, that could lead to even greater abuses. The husband might say, "I have been wishing to get rid of these three wives and keep the one I like." Then they have to go fend for themselves. Instead the Christian leaders need to think, "You are in this situation, so what is the right thing to do here?" The only advice we could give was to take those situations case by case, but teach your children what God has said. Teach your children to do otherwise before they get into those situations so that they can establish more godly patterns on the basis of Scripture.

It has been asked what Saul meant in 1 Samuel 14:18-19 when he said, "Withdraw your hand." This is a specific question relating to the procedure there. In verse 18 when Saul says to Ahijah, "'Bring the ark of God.' (At that time it was with the Israelites." There is some question as to whether we are reading that right. It is unclear whether he is actually talking about the ark or the ephod. The word for "ark" and the word for "ephod" look very similar in Hebrew. If you look in 1 Samuel 14:3, Ahijah is mentioned as wearing or bearing an ephod. It seems probable that what Saul has done is to say to Ahijah, "Bring the ephod because Saul wants to inquire as to what God's will is for the battle, which is already underway." Saul wants to know what his involvement should be. Because the battle keeps heating up, Saul does not want to miss all the action. He says, "Withdraw your hand." The high priestly ephod would have been a breastplate. In the ephod would have been the orimin and thumin, the lots that would be cast to determine the will of God. Apparently the priest Ahijah had brought the ephod as Saul asked. He stuck his hand in there to get the lots and Saul basically says, "Forget it, withdraw your hand. Let us get on with it. We do not have time to talk to God about this. We are going to miss the whole thing." It fits in this interesting pattern of Saul having waited seven days at Gilgal, but not quite waiting for Samuel. He waits maybe a few minutes, but cannot ultimately wait to hear what God has to say. Later in 1 Samuel 14 the priest will have to remind him to consult God before he goes ahead. He even forgets to do that. That adds to the irony when we come to 1 Samuel 28. Saul was trying to find the instructions from God because he did not know what to do. Time after time, he had refused to wait to hear what God would have him do. It is a sad irony, but true to life.

Let us talk about 2 Samuel 21 when the Gibeonites want to be avenged of the wrong that Saul had done to them. In verse 4 they say, "'We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we had the right to put anyone in Israel to death.' 'What do you want me to do for you?' David asked. They answered the king, 'As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, let seven of his male descendants be given to us and exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the LORD's chosen one.' So the king said, 'I will give them to you.'" And he does. Is there a contradiction there? They say, "We have no right to ask for the life of anyone in Israel," and then they ask for Saul's sons. We need to understand that they are saying, "We do not have the right to put anyone in Israel to death." In other words, they are saying they do not have a general grievance against Israel and thus they are not just going to go out and generally avenge themselves against the Israelites. Or they may be more likely saying, "We do not have jurisdiction here; we are essentially powerless. We do not have the power of the sword, so we cannot put anyone to death. That is why we are coming to you." That is probably the way to understand it. David asks what they need and want. They ask for the lives of Saul's sons.