

## 2 SAMUEL - A TEACHER'S GUIDE

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### THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

#### What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
  - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. What picture of God would you have if you had only the book of 2 Samuel? Who do you think wrote this book which includes events scattered over many years?

There is much that can be learned from the story of David. David's is the only person in the Bible described as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Others are called God's friends (for example, Abraham and Moses - 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23; Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10). Serious Bible students must ask themselves what would have led an inspired writer to make such a statement about David. He obviously committed many sins—polygamy, adultery and murder, for example, and kept idols in his house in Jerusalem. He was very respectful of Saul, as the anointed of the Lord, despite being hunted by him. David never apparently went after idols or other "gods". Whatever David did, he did with great energy! David wrote many beautiful psalms about God and their relationship, but also many vengeance psalms that sound terrible. (See 2 Samuel 22; Psalms 18) Much of his life was spent in consolidating the kingdom of Israel and ridding it of its suppressors and then establishing the headquarters that was to be the center of Israeli history for the rest of eternity, Jerusalem. David established Jerusalem as the place where God was to be worshiped and wanted to build the temple that was later built by Solomon. God specifically told David that he was not to build the temple because he had shed so much blood (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 28:3).

It is possible that the expression "a man after God's own heart" means nothing more than, "a man of God's own choosing" emphasizing God's ability and prerogative to set up the kings of Israel. God is clearly here rejecting the "dynasty" of Saul and choosing David, whose "dynasty" will later be confirmed as lasting forever! (2 Samuel 7:16) The emphasis here is that God is the one who establishes a real kingdom and He will choose a king who sues Him as opposed to one who was what the people wanted like Saul.

Conservative Biblical scholars and Jewish tradition suggest that the last few chapters of 1 Samuel and all of 2 Samuel were written by Nathan and Gad under the direction of King David. (See 1 Chronicles 29:29) Since Samuel is not mentioned even once in this book and it is almost all about King David, it would probably be more correct to call this book *David*. In all Hebrew manuscripts written before 1517 AD, 1 and 2 Samuel are included as one book. This would suggest that the material was originally recorded by several authors but later perhaps edited and combined into a single history of the earliest years of the kingdom by another person under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. In some of these stories, God seems to dialogue with David (1 Samuel 22:10; 23:1-4,9-13; 30:6-8; 2 Samuel 2:1,2; 5:17-25; 7:1-17; 12:1-15,24,25; 21:1; 24:10-18), in others, He dialogues with David through a prophet—Nathan (2 Samuel 7:1-17; 12:1-15) or Gad (2 Samuel 24:11-13)—and eventually someone writes the account down. How was inspiration operating in all this? Was David inspired, was his prophet inspired, or was the one writing it down inspired?

See note in #1 above. These books were clearly completed after Samuel (1 Samuel 25:1) and David (2 Samuel 23:1) were dead. While it may seem to us like God would speak directly to a prophet and have that prophet do His writing for Him, there is much in Scripture that suggests that it was not always done that way. 1 and 2 Chronicles were almost certainly written by Ezra

hundreds of years after many of the original events took place. 1 and 2 Samuel were also probably compiled by an editor some time later even though the original stories were probably written down in one of the many books mentioned in Chronicles (See 2 Chronicles study guide #2) as a record of the histories of the kings of Israel. This may make us a little nervous as we consider how inspiration works, but we have no right to limit God's way of working in any sense. The Holy Spirit obviously worked through many different individuals, including all those mentioned in this question, and we should thank God that He has preserved the record for us no matter how He actually accomplished that.

One strong suggestion that these books were compiled by someone at a later date is found in 1 Samuel 13:1, where the original Hebrew does not say how old Saul was when he began to reign nor how many years he reigned. The Hebrew reads literally, "Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . . and two years over Israel". This is a standard formula for reporting the reigns of Hebrew kings. (See 2 Samuel 5:4; 2 Kings 21:1; 24:8,18, etc.) If we leave out this verse—as earlier editions of the *LXX* do, then Saul is the only Hebrew king for whom the Old Testament makes no such statement. (The *LXX* is the symbol for the earliest Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, meaning the "seventy".) It is possible that a later editor putting all of this material together wanted to give this information about Saul but didn't have the numbers available to him. It is also possible that the original had the numbers correctly and a later copyist left them out by mistake. In either case, it shouldn't disturb our view of inspiration at all.

3. What should be our attitude toward God in these stories? If we have real "faith" should we accept these accounts without asking questions?

God never expects us to accept Him without giving the evidence. The purpose of the Bible is to show us what God has done in human history. "Faith" is another word for trust. God would never ask us to trust Him without giving us plenty of reason to do so. (SC 105)

4. What is revealed about God by His dealings with David? If God has foreknowledge, how could He at any point choose David as "a man after His own heart?" (1 Samuel 13:14 Compare Acts 13:22) What is it about David that made him a "man after God's own heart?" Do Psalms 32 and 51 give you any hints? Later we are told "David did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite." (1 Kings 15:5, RSV; Compare 1 Kings 11:38,39; 2 Chronicles 7:17,18) Would you agree with these statements?

See handout on "**DAVID: A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**".

5. In the context of all that David was doing at this point, why did God strike Uzzah dead just for stepping forward to stabilize the ark? (2 Samuel 6:6; Compare 1 Chronicles 13:9-14; 15; 26:4,5) Doesn't it seem that God acts with incredible severity over sins that we consider insignificant, while other sins that we consider to be really bad seem to be ignored? What effect did Uzzah's death have on the onlookers? What is the meaning of "David was furious because the Lord had punished Uzzah in anger?" (2 Samuel 6:8) If God consumed every sinner, there would be no one left--so why does God seem to make such an issue of "irreverence?" Compare: she-bears (2 Kings 2:24); Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-11); but contrast David and the shewbread (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and Adonijah taking hold of the altar. (1 Kings 1:50,51)

"And the anger of the LORD (Jehovah) was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for *his* error; and there he died by the ark of God." (*KJV, Darby, ASV*)

"Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for *his* error; and he died there by the ark of God." (*NKJV*)

“And the anger of the LORD burned against Uzzah, and God struck him down there for his irreverence; and he died there by the ark of God.” (*NASB, NASB-1995*)

“And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there because he put forth his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. (*RSV*)

“The anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God.” (*NRSV*)

“But the LORD was angry with Uzzah; God struck him on that spot, and he died there before God.” (*NAB*)

“The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.” (*NIV*)

“The LORD God was very angry at Uzzah for doing this, and he killed Uzzah right there beside the chest.” (*CEV*)

“The LORD became angry with Uzzah, so God killed him there for his lack of respect. He died beside the ark of God.” (*God’s Word*)

“Then the anger of the Lord flared out against Uzzah and he killed him for doing this, so he died there beside the Ark.” (*TLB*)

“Then the LORD’s anger blazed out against Uzzah for doing this, and God struck him dead beside the Ark of God.” (*New Living*)

“At once the LORD God became angry with Uzzah and killed him because of his irreverence. Uzzah died there beside the Covenant Box,” (*GNB*)

“The LORD was angry with Uzzah and killed him because of what he did. So Uzzah died there beside the Ark of God.” (*NCV*)

“The Lord was angry with Uzzah and struck him down there for his rash act. So he died there beside the Ark of God.” (*NEB*)

“The Lord was angry with Uzzah and struck him down for his imprudent action, and he died there beside the Ark of God.” (*REB*)

Then the anger of Yahweh blazed out against Uzzah, and for this crime God struck him down on the spot, and he died there beside the ark of God. (*Jerusalem*)

“This roused Yahweh’s anger against Uzzah, and for this crime God struck him down on the spot, and there he died beside the ark of God.” (*New Jerusalem Bible*)

“The LORD was incensed at Uzzah. And God struck him down on the spot for his indiscretion, and he died there beside the Ark of God.” (*Tanakh-Jewish*)

“When he did so, the Lord struck him, and he died right there beside the Ark. Uzzah had known better than to touch the Ark, but he had lost the sense of its sacredness and had acted rashly. With unconfessed sin in his life he brazenly dared to touch the symbolic presence of God, a right given only to the priests.” (*Clear Word*)

There are several facts that need to be understood about the story of Uzzah. Uzzah and his brother Ahio were members of the tribe of Levi and they had kept the ark in their home for a long period of time. David decided that he needed the ark in Jerusalem. He decided to retrieve it in grand military style with 30,000 soldiers to accompany him. (2 Samuel 6:1-8; 1 Chronicles 13:1-14) It was David’s custom to think in military terms. But God had given strict instructions about how the ark was to be carried. (Numbers 3:27-32; 4:1-20; 7:9, and Deuteronomy 10:8) David had invited the whole nation to come and observe the bringing of the ark up to Jerusalem.

In this context, when one of the members of the tribe of Levi and members of the household of Abinadab, who should have known that they were not carrying the ark in the correct way, reached out his arm before all of Israel to steady the ark, God struck him dead. God felt that it was necessary at this point to say something very important about the necessity of strict observance of God’s laws. God cannot bless those who are knowingly rebelling against Him. Was Uzzah just being careless? Was he showing off? Uzzah’s irreverence cost him his life. God needed to say something to the whole nation about obedience and this was an opportunity to do so. If God had not

taken a “stand” when Uzzah sinned, thousands of others would have remembered the incident and felt more free to transgress.

David clearly did things much differently the second time he tried to bring the ark to Jerusalem. (1 Chronicles 15:1-24) This was no longer a military occasion, but a very solemn celebration of respect for Yahweh’s commands. (See Ellen White notes #1 and #2)

6. Who changed Nathan’s message to King David and why? (2 Samuel 7:1-17) Does this mean that Nathan was really not a very reliable prophet?

Nathan was excited about David’s idea, but God had a different plan. He did not want David to proceed with the building of the temple. So God appeared to Nathan and “corrected” his message. God told David that he could proceed with the gathering of materials but his some was to build the temple because he would be much more a man of peace. (1 Chronicles 28:3) We have already read about times when God “changed His mind” so this should not be a problem. In this case, Nathan simply made the mistake of speaking before consulting God!

7. Did Michal’s despising of David dancing in the streets have anything to do with her not having children? Why hadn’t she had any before this? (She had already had two husbands; 2 Samuel 3:13-16) Did God curse her? (2 Samuel 6:14,16,20-23)

At one point in time Michal had really loved David, and even helped to save his life by helping him to escape from her father. Now she apparently despises him. It is possible that she never had any children for several reasons. She may have been infertile because of disease or heredity. She may have been prevented by God from having children, or David may simple have refused to sleep with her even though he wanted her back from her interim husband. It is significant to note that she had no children so far even though she had been married for years to two different husbands!

8. Why would an anointed King of God’s people measure off his enemies and kill 2/3 of them (2 Samuel 8:2)? These were his great grandmother’s kinsmen (Ruth 4:17-22) and they had protected his parents (1 Samuel 22:3,4)!

At this point in time, the Moabites were serious enemies of David. He is no doubt here attempting to prevent them from ever being a major threat to his throne again. Perhaps it is because he had Moabite blood in his own veins and had asked help from the Moabites earlier when fleeing Saul that he did not kill them all!

9. What is implied by the expression “the time of the year when kings usually go to war” (2 Samuel 11:1)?

In the spring of the year it was much easier to organize people to go forth to war. In this case the Ammonites had apparently organized a force against Israel and David’s army was going forth to meet them.

10. There is plenty of evidence that David had many wives and many concubines. (1 Samuel 25:43,44; 2 Samuel 2:1,2; 3:2; 5:13; **12:8**; 15:16; 1 Chronicles 3:1-9; 14:3-7; Compare 1 Kings 3:1 and 1 Kings 11:1-3) Where did all these wives come from? What is a concubine? In light of all these wives why did God make such an issue about Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-15)? Did the evils that befell David after his sin with Bathsheba occur just as a natural result of what he had done, or was God specifically punishing David? (2 Samuel 11-18) Did David’s sin lead to the death of that first child (2 Samuel 12:14-23), then the rape of Tamar and the death of Amnon (2 Samuel 13), then the whole conflict with Absalom (2 Samuel 14-18), and the behavior and death of Adonijah? (1 Kings

1:5-10; 2:13-25) Why are these events largely ignored in 1 Chronicles?

In Old Testament times, a concubine was a female slave or mistress with whom a man was lawfully permitted to have sexual intercourse. (See details below) The story of Bathsheba and her first husband Uriah are mentioned repeatedly as the major sin of David's life. It became widely known and led to a great deterioration in his moral influence even on his own children. It is clear that David married many women that he chose himself. He inherited Saul's wives when he died. He no doubt acquired a number of them in the process of formal agreements with neighboring nations. It was often the custom in those days to marry or take as a concubine the daughter of the king of a nation with whom you were forming a major alliance.

The deaths of four of David's sons were probably at least partly the direct result of his loss of moral influence with his children. We have no way of knowing the details of why Bathsheba's first child died. The fact that David could arrange Uriah's death, even though Uriah was one of his closest friends and most powerful soldiers (2 Samuel 23:39; 1 Chronicles 11:41) is so despicable that it could not be ignored by God or the people of Israel.

It is specifically mentioned that David did not discipline Adonijah (1 Kings 1:6) and the same must have been true for others of his sons.

11. How would you feel about your new king Absalom if you saw him lying with his father's concubines on the roof? (2 Samuel 16:20-23; Compare 2 Samuel 12:8 and 1 Kings 2:13-23) How well was Ahithophel representing the God that he served? Do you think God had anything to do with this advice? Was this an intentional ploy to lead to Absalom's eventual destruction? What could possibly be the use of the mixed and conflicting advice of Ahithophel and Hushai? (2 Samuel 17:1-14) What could possibly be the use of recording the whole story of Absalom and his rebellion?

The whole story of Absalom is the fullest illustration of how low things had gone in David's household. From the time of Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom's sister, to Absalom's banishment and return and then his rebellion against his father and his final death we see a young man that is impatient, deceitful, passionate and ambitious. It is good to remember here that ancient kings of David's time tended not to record anything in their official records that would reflect badly on their kingdom or their reign. Following this custom, the ancient Egyptian records never record any Egyptian king as losing a single battle. They only reported the battles they won! But the Scriptures don't hesitate to record the sins of Yahweh's most prominent followers, in great detail, including the consequences! This makes Scripture much more believable.

There is considerable evidence in Scripture that taking the wives of a former king was the same as saying that you had now irrevocably displaced him. (See 2 Samuel 12:8; 1 Kings 2:22-25)

Ahithophel understood this clearly and wanted to make sure that since he now was on Absalom's side and had abandoned his old friend David, Absalom would not reconcile with his father and leave Ahithophel to the mercy of David.

It is significant to note that 2 Samuel 11:3 says Bathsheba was Eliam's daughter and 2 Samuel 23:34 says Ahithophel was Eliam's father. This would suggest that Bathsheba was Ahithophel's granddaughter. If this is true, it may give us another reason for his leaving David.

In any case, Ahithophel's advice at least in military matters was no doubt the best that was available. He was clearly regarded as a godly and wise counselor.

12. What is suggested by the statement that more men died in the forest than fell in battle by the sword? (2 Samuel 18:8)

In the tangled dense scrub and irregular terrain on which they were fighting, David's well-trained forces were far superior to the scattered army of Absalom. As a result more deaths were actually attributed to the fighting conditions than to the sword. Even the death of Absalom was clearly a

result of this factor.

13. What do you think of David's picture of God as presented in the victory song? (2 Samuel 22; Psalms 18) Could God be our Savior and also have "smoke pour out of his nostrils and a consuming flame and burning coals from his mouth"? (2 Samuel 22:2-13) Was David really "right" and "innocent"? (2 Samuel 22:21-25) It seems more like David when he says, "You make my enemies run from me; I destroy those who hate me...I crush them...I trample them like mud in the streets". (2 Samuel 22:41-43) What do you think David was actually thinking about when he talked about "my salvation" and "my Savior"? (2 Samuel 22:2-4)

This "psalm" is clearly the work of a military leader who felt that God had blessed him by helping him win the battle. David felt that God was directly fighting on his side. The description is probably intended to represent a terrible storm that may have occurred and possibly helped David win one of his battles. The thunder, lightening, and clouds were pictured in this very poetic and impressive way as a symbol of God's control and use of even the forces of nature. Many of the expressions in this chapter are typical of David and can be found in other familiar psalms.

14. In the list of David's strong men it states that one man killed 800 men in one battle. (2 Samuel 23:8) How is this even possible? Compare Samson with the jawbone (Judges 15:15,16), and Shamgar with his oxgoad. (Judges 3:31)

This man was apparently David's top soldier. We are not given the details of how the battle actually took place. This soldier was no doubt very good with a sword and probably spent much of the day slaughtering men. Elijah also killed 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah in a short time with the help of the people of Israel so it is apparently possible. (1 Kings 18:19,40)

15. What caused the Lord's anger to burn against Israel to incite them to take a census? (2 Samuel 24:1 Compare 1 Chronicles 21:1) Why should all those people die because of David's sin? Even David recognized that he was the one who had sinned. (2 Samuel 24:10,17)

As we have noted before, God is regarded as responsible for anything that He allows. (See *Judges Teacher's Guide* #13) Instead of attributing evil things that happened to an "evil god" as most of the pagans did, the Israelites believed that Yahweh was overall and responsible for everything. David's goal here was to assess his military strength so he could plan his future conquests. God wanted David and the whole nation to realize that the only real question is whether God is on your side! With God on your side, you cannot lose even with a few. (See Gideon's story - Judges 7:15-25) God clearly won many battles for Israel in which they did not lift a single hand! (See 2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36)

David was here feeling some pride in his own accomplishments and beginning to depend on human abilities. The people no doubt felt the same as they saw one enemy after another destroyed before David's armies. Thus the sin was becoming widespread and although David was the one who had given the command to take the census despite the advice of Joab, he was certainly not alone in thinking that he had accomplished much of this destruction with his own hand and by his own military prowess.

This is one of only a few passages in the Old Testament where Satan is specifically attributed with doing something in the history of the nation. The story of Job probably is the clearest indication of how Satan actually does some of these things. (See Job 1,2) Satan could not have done anything at all without God's permission. Thus we note in the book of Job that God is repeatedly mentioned as the One who was causing Job's suffering.

16. What do you think led to the eventual division into "Israel" and "Judah?" Who was included in each?

The ten tribes to the North (Dan, Ashur, Naphthali, Gad, Reuben, Simeon, Manasseh (Joseph), Ephraim (Joseph), Zebulon, and Issachar) became the nation of Israel, while the two tribes to the South (Judah and Benjamin, including most of the Levites) formed the nation of Judah. The division took place as seen in 1 Kings because Solomon levied such heavy taxes that the people demanded relief from his son Rehoboam. When Rehoboam refused, following the advice of his young counselors instead of the older counselors, the ten tribes to the North broke away. But ultimately it was the greed, the sumptuous living, the abandoned life style of Solomon that led to this action.

17. Has the Bible been written the way God really wanted it to be written or was He limited by the understanding and language of humans? Compare Early Writings vs. Desire of Ages

“Every chapter and every verse of the Bible is a communication from God to men. We should bind its precepts as signs upon our hands and as frontlets between our eyes. If studied and obeyed, it would lead God’s people, as the Israelites were led, by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.” *Patriarchs and Prophets* 504 (1890)

While Scripture is the word of God, it is presented to us in man’s language. God cannot communicate with us in the perfect language and vocabulary of heaven because it would not mean anything to us! God must stoop down and speak to us in a language that we can understand. God chooses to do this by “inspiring” prophets and apostles who speak for God, but use their own languages, cultural norms, and thought patterns to express themselves. Thus in order for us to best understand what they have written we need to try to recreate the setting in which they spoke and understand as far as possible what the passage meant to the people to whom it was originally written. God understands all of this and chooses to work with it. He could have sent an angel to write the Bible for us. He could communicate with each one of us individually and thus eliminate the need for a written Bible, but God in His wisdom felt that this was the best way to do it.

18. Is it possible that irreverence is more dangerous than other sins? “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”. (Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Compare Psalms 46:10; 111:10) How is God to get our reverence and respect, while not scaring us to death?

God repeatedly acts in very forceful ways to try to maintain some reverence and respect among us humans. God does this because He knows that if He does not have our attention and respect He can accomplish almost nothing at all. So God is constantly struggling back and forth between scaring us, and having us tremblingly fearful of Him and treating us with more kindness and gentleness and having us lose our respect for Him. This is the history of God’s dealing with the human race down through the ages.

19. After Uzzah’s death, David apparently offered sacrifices every six paces to get the ark to Jerusalem! (2 Samuel 6:13) Compare also Solomon’s sacrifices at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:5,62-64). Is it true that in order to impress God, one should try to offer an enormous number of sacrifices? (But see Amos 5:21-25; Isaiah 1:10-17, Hosea 6:6; **Micah 6:6-8**) Samuel had already said essentially the same thing “To obey is better than sacrifice.” (1 Samuel 15:22) Even David recognized that this was true in Psalms 51. So why did they do it? Did all these sacrifices please God? Did He smell a “sweet savor”?

When God asked His people to offer sacrifices to teach them about the consequences of sin, He recognized that there was a tremendous risk that the purpose of these offerings could be misunderstood. It wasn’t long before people began to feel that offering these sacrifices would somehow please God and even “appease” His wrath or displeasure. It wasn’t long then for people to get the idea that if one or two sacrifices were good, why wouldn’t many sacrifices be even better!

They completely lost sight of the fact that what God wanted was a changed heart.

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#### Ellen White Quotations:

*Patriarchs and Prophets* 705, 706 (Compare *PP* 324,325; *CC* 176)

“David and his people had assembled to perform a sacred work, and they had engaged in it with glad and willing hearts; but the Lord could not accept the service, because it was not performed in accordance with His directions. The Philistines, who had not a knowledge of God’s law, had placed the ark upon a cart when they returned it to Israel, and the Lord accepted the effort which they made. But the Israelites had in their hands a plain statement of the will of God in all these matters, and their neglect of these instructions was dishonoring to God. Upon Uzzah rested the greater guilt of presumption. Transgression of God’s law had lessened his sense of its sacredness, and with unconfessed sins upon him he had, in face of the divine prohibition, presumed to touch the symbol of God’s presence. God can accept no partial obedience, no lax way of treating His commandments. **By the judgment upon Uzzah He designed to impress upon all Israel the importance of giving strict heed to His requirements. Thus the death of that one man, by leading the people to repentance, might prevent the necessity of inflicting judgments upon thousands.**”

*Patriarchs and Prophets* 589

“The survivors were not led by this judgment to repent of their sin, but only to regard the ark with superstitious fear. Eager to be free from its presence, yet not daring to remove it, the Beth-shemites sent a message to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, inviting them to take it away. With great joy the men of this place welcomed the sacred chest. They knew that it was the pledge of divine favor to the obedient and faithful. With solemn gladness they brought it to their city and placed it in **the house of Abinadab, a Levite**. This man appointed his son Eleazar to take charge of it, and it remained there for many years.”