



## The Glory Returns to Israel (2 Sam 7-8)

Notes: Week Four

*\*\*Scripture divisions used in our series and various commentaries differ from each other. This is the reason for the occasional discrepancy between the verse range listed in our series and the commentary notes provided in our Scripture Studies.*

### New American Commentary<sup>1</sup>

#### (5) David Desires to Build a Temple for the Lord [7:1-3](#)

The covenant between the Lord and David has been compared both to Amorite and Hittite treaties, as well as to the one established between the Lord and Abraham (cf. [Gen 15](#)). As noted by G. E. Mendenhall and G. A. Herion, the two primary similarities between God's commitments to Abraham and David are (1) that God is bound by an oath and (2) that God made a promise to the individuals. The agreement that God made with David sometimes has been termed a grant/promissory/oath-type covenant—a concept that suggests unconditionality—and sometimes a charter—a concept that emphasizes the role of the initiator while downplaying the responsibilities/role of the recipient.

[7:1-3](#) The events of this section occurred sometime after Hiram's stonemasons and carpenters had built David's palace (cf. [5:11](#)). They also took place after the Lord had given David "rest from all his enemies around him" and after the ark had been deposited in Jerusalem (cf. v. [2](#)); thus, it was likely a period of at least a few years after David's conquest of the Jebusite city and probably after the events described in [8:1-14](#) and [10:1-19](#). Having entered into a period of rest because of God's help (cf. [Heb 4:3](#)), David desired to provide a rest for God.

At that time David had a conversation with "Nathan the prophet" (v. [2](#)), a previously unknown spokesman for the Lord who would come to play a major role in the course of David's life (cf. [12:1-25](#); [1 Kgs 1:11-45](#)) and the preservation of Israelite history (cf. [1 Chr 29:29](#); [2 Chr 9:29](#)). David was troubled that he, the Lord's servant, was honored and blessed by a palace, while the ark of God—the Lord's locus on earth—was still in a tent (v. [2](#)). It seemed inappropriate to David for an underling to be living in greater luxury than his divine master.

Near Eastern kings throughout history—certainly long before David's time—had devoted national resources to the enhancement of temples in order to honor their gods and secure divine blessing for themselves and their kingdoms. Nathan saw no problem in David introducing this practice into the Israelite royal tradition. Accordingly, he encouraged the king to "go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you" (v. [3](#)). Since Nathan later received a word from God contrary to what he told David, however, it seems safe to assume that Nathan spoke without first consulting God in this matter.

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1. Robert D. Bergen, *New American Commentary – Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 333 - 351.

## **(6) The Lord Makes Eternal Promises to the House of David [7:4-17](#)**

The events portrayed in this section may rightly be understood as the flowering of a Torah prophecy, the climax of David's life, and the foundation for a major theme in the writings of the Latter Prophets. Youngblood understands this section to be "the center and focus of ... the Deuteronomic history itself"; Brueggemann sees it as "the dramatic and theological center of the entire Samuel corpus" and in fact "the most crucial theological statement in the Old Testament." The Lord's words recorded here constitute the longest recorded monologue attributed to him since the days of Moses (197 words). The prodigious size of this divine pronouncement suggests that the writer intended it to be interpreted as centrally important—perhaps on a plane with the Torah itself.

The Lord's words spoken here demonstrate him to be the promise-keeping God; having prophetically placed the scepter in Judah hundreds of years earlier ([Gen 49:10](#)), he here secured its place within that tribe "until he comes to whom it belongs." Through the prophetic pronouncements of this chapter David is made the founder of the only royal family the Lord would ever sanction in perpetuity; not only would he become the source of all Israel's uniquely favored dynastic line, but he would become the standard by which his descendants would be judged.

The covenant that the Lord established with the house of David became the nucleus around which messages of hope proclaimed by Hebrew prophets of later generations were built (cf. [Isa 9:1-7](#); [11:1-16](#); [16:5](#); [55:3](#); [Jer 23:5-6](#); [30:8](#); [33:15-26](#); [Ezek 34:23-24](#); [37:24-25](#); [Hos 3:5](#); [Amos 9:11](#); [Zech 12:7-8](#)). To a people broken and humbled by invaders sent as agents of divine punishment, the Lord's promise to David of a kingdom that "will endure forever" (v. [16](#)) was the seed of hope that resurrected a nation. The Lord's promise of an enduring house for David became Israel's assurance that God would once again lift the nation up and cause it to flourish anew.

The significance of the eternal covenant between the Lord and David for the New Testament writers cannot be overemphasized. These words played an essential preparatory role in developing the messianic expectations that were fulfilled in Jesus. The hopes that were raised by the Lord's words—that God would place a seed of David on an eternal throne and establish a kingdom that would never perish—were ones that no Israelite or Judahite monarch satisfied, or even could have satisfied. But they were ones that the first-century Christians understood Jesus to fulfill.

The Lord's words recorded here arguably play the single most significant role of any Scripture found in the Old Testament in shaping the Christian understanding of Jesus. The divine declarations proclaimed here through the prophet Nathan are foundational for seven major New Testament teachings about Jesus: that he is (1) the son of David (cf. [Matt 1:1](#); [Acts 13:22-23](#); [Rom 1:3](#); [2 Tim 2:8](#); [Rev 22:16](#), etc.); (2) one who would rise from the dead (cf. [Acts 2:30](#); [13:23](#)); (3) the builder of the house for God (cf. [John 2:19-22](#); [Heb 3:3-4](#), etc.); (4) the possessor of a throne (cf. [Heb 1:8](#); [Rev 3:21](#), etc.); (5) the possessor of an eternal kingdom (cf. [1 Cor 15:24-25](#); [Eph 5:5](#); [Heb 1:8](#); [2 Pet 1:11](#), etc.); (6) the son of God (cf. [Mark 1:1](#); [John 20:31](#); [Acts 9:20](#); [Heb 4:14](#); [Rev 2:18](#), etc.); and (7) the product of an immaculate conception, since he had God as his father (cf. [Luke 1:32-35](#)).

**[7:4-7](#)** The Lord did not delay in correcting the word Nathan had given David. "That night" he instructed the prophet to convey a message to David that would dramatically change his life and the future of his dynasty forever.

The divine revelation began with words of commendation for David; the Lord called the king "my servant" (*Hb.* *'abdî*; v. [5](#)), a term used elsewhere in speeches by the Lord to refer to honored faithful patriarchs, prophets, Israel, and the Messiah. However, immediately following this positive word, the Lord indicated by means of a rhetorical question that David was not to be the one to build God's house.

In fact, the Lord questioned the desirability of anyone building a permanent structure in which he might dwell—at least doing so unbidden and at that point in time. When God “brought the Israelites up out of Egypt” (v. [6](#)), he did so without any sort of a material residence—not even a tent. Even so, his presence among the Israelites was real and certainly impressive (cf. [Exod 13:21–22](#)). Before the Israelites left Mount Sinai, they obeyed the Lord’s command and constructed a special skin “tent” that served as a divine “dwelling” place (cf. [Exod 26:1–37](#); [40:34–38](#)). Throughout the events following Israel’s departure from Sinai, the Lord had never expressed displeasure with having a tent for his earthly domicile, nor did he ever order any of the Israelite “staffs” (v. [7](#); NIV, “rulers”)—the ancient symbol of authority used metonymically to signify a person with authority—to build him “a house of cedar.” Even in the absence of an impressive building that people could see, the Lord’s presence among them was discernible, especially as he acted through the leaders “whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel.”

[7:8–11a](#) Through David God had presented additional testimony to his presence among his people. David’s meteoric rise to prominence and power in Israel—being taken “from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel” (v. [8](#))—was compelling evidence of the Lord’s presence. The Lord himself had brought David from the pasture; the Lord had made David ruler; the Lord had “been with” (v. [9](#)) David wherever he had gone; and it was the Lord who had “cut off all” David’s “enemies from before” him.

David did not need to construct an impressive but lifeless building in which the Lord could dwell; the Lord had already constructed an impressive living building in which to dwell, and that edifice was the life of David. Though the ark resided in a lifeless tent of skin, in a very real sense the Lord resided in the living tent of David. And the Lord was not finished adorning his earthly dwelling place; he would make David’s “name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth”—a covenantal promise not made by the Lord to an individual since the days of Abraham (cf. [Gen 12:2](#)).

The Lord’s words become eschatological in character as they describe the benefits that will accrue for Israel with the magnification of the house of David. David’s rise to the ranks of the “greatest men of the earth” would mean that the Lord would provide Israel a secure and peaceful homeland (v. [10](#)). In addition, justice would prevail for the Lord’s people: “wicked men will not oppress them anymore.” The Lord planned a further benefit for David beyond those already mentioned: an era of tranquility awaited Israel’s king, for the Lord would “also give” David “rest from all” his “enemies” (v. [11](#)), an apparent reference to a continued and increased freedom from the threat of non-Israelite aggressors (cf. v. [1](#)). These promises, however, were not fulfilled in David’s lifetime; later prophets understood them to refer to a future period (cf. [Isa 9:7](#); [16:5](#); [Jer 23:5–6](#); [33:15–16](#)).

[7:11b–17](#) Even more significantly, “the LORD himself will establish a house” (v. [11](#))—that is, a dynasty—for David. David had sought to build a house (= temple) for the Lord, but the Lord would instead build a house (= dynasty) for David. The incredible blessings that the Lord both gave and pledged would not be set aside for some usurper to the throne. Instead, the Lord “will raise up your offspring [*Hb. zera*‘; lit., “seed”; cf. [Gen 13:15](#)] to succeed you” (v. [12](#)). For the New Testament Christian community, this verse apparently was viewed as proof that Jesus was indeed the Messiah; God did indeed “raise up” Jesus (cf. [Acts 2:30](#); [13:23](#)), thus legitimizing him as the messianic son of David. According to the prophecy, the royal successor would be one “who will come from your body.” The emphasis on an offspring/seed who would come from David’s body links this covenant with the Abrahamic covenant (cf. [Gen 15:4](#)). As with David, so with the royal successor—the Lord would “establish his kingdom.”

It would not be David but his successor who would “build a house for” (v. [13](#)) the Lord. Viewed in its immediate historical context, the prophetic reference was to Solomon, who constructed the temple for the Lord in Jerusalem between 966 and 959 B.C. (cf. [1 Kgs 6:1–38](#)).

The New Testament does not deny that some aspects of the prophetic revelation of v. [13](#) referred to Solomon (cf. [Acts 7:47](#)). But for the New Testament writers, the primary application of this verse was to Jesus, the ultimate “son of David” (e.g., [Matt 1:1](#)). One reason for this is that the Lord’s promise to “establish the throne of his kingdom forever” seems to vault this portion of the prophecy beyond the bounds of Solomon’s reign and give it eschatological and/or messianic overtones. The throne of Solomon’s kingdom was not permanently established; in fact, his kingdom—in the strict sense of the word—ceased to exist immediately after his death (cf. [1 Kgs 11:31–38](#)). This incongruity between divine prophecy and human history invited the New Testament writers to look to a different son of David for the fulfillment of the word.

In applying v. [13](#) to Jesus, the New Testament writers took their cue from Jesus himself. Three of Jesus’ claims concerning himself allude to this verse. First, Jesus claimed he would build a temple (cf. [Matt 26:61](#); [27:40](#); [Mark 14:58](#); [15:29](#); [John 2:19–22](#)). Second, he claimed to possess an eternal throne (cf. [Matt 19:28–29](#)). Finally, he claimed to possess an imperishable kingdom (cf. [Luke 22:29–30](#); [John 18:36](#)).

Of this promised descendant of David the Lord said “I will be his father, and he will be my son” (v. [14](#)). Although some Old Testament interpreters suggest this may refer to an otherwise unreported practice whereby an Israelite king was ritually “adopted” by the deity upon assumption to the throne, the New Testament writers accepted the claim literally. Jesus is unambiguously understood in the New Testament to be the Son of God ([Mark 1:1](#); [John 20:31](#); [Acts 9:20](#); [Heb 1:5](#)), an understanding fostered by Jesus’ own self-claims (cf. [Matt 27:43](#); [Luke 22:70](#)). In taking this verse literally and applying it to Jesus, the New Testament connected it with Jesus’ virgin birth (cf. [Luke 1:32](#)).

The Lord indicated that he would punish David’s seed “when he does wrong.” Punishment would be “with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.” This warning restates the Torah’s teaching that the Lord would punish disobedient covenant people with the instrumentality of human oppressors (cf. [Lev 26:25](#); [Deut 28:25, 49–52](#)): it was literally fulfilled in the case of Solomon (cf. [1 Kgs 11:14, 23–26](#)). Without affirming Jesus’ need for punishment due to personal sin, the writer of the Book of Hebrews seems to suggest that this passage is likewise messianic (cf. [Heb 5:8–9](#)).

Though sin by David’s descendants would bring punishment and alienation, it would not result in the Lord’s withdrawal of love. In fact, the Lord’s faithful, loving commitment (*Hb. [hesed](#)*) to David’s descendants would “never be taken away” (v. [15](#)). What God had done in removing the dynasty of Saul from Israel he would never do to the house of David, though because of sin David might later think it possible (cf. [Ps 51:11](#) [*Hb. v. [13](#)*]).

God would establish David’s “house,” “kingdom,” and “throne ... forever” (v. [16](#)). Once again the facts of history demonstrated that the Davidic dynasty’s grip on royal power in Israel was tenuous. Interloping Israelites (e.g., Athaliah; [2 Kgs 11:1–3](#)) and foreign conquerors perforated Davidic claims to the throne. As a result, these verses also were understood eschatologically/messianically. In the New Testament they were explicitly applied to Jesus ([Heb 1:8](#)).

Nathan “reported to David all the words of this entire revelation” (v. [17](#)). This may have come to the king in both oral and written forms (cf. [1 Chr 29:29](#); [2 Chr 9:29](#)).

## **(7) David Praises the Lord [7:18–29](#)**

[7:18–20](#) David’s response to the Lord’s magnificent declarations was awestruck humility, solemnity, and bold faith. After hearing the Lord’s words, David entered the sacred tent that housed the ark—perhaps by virtue of his priestly status (cf. discussion at [6:16–19](#))—and “sat before the LORD.” There he

spoke the second-longest monologue recorded from his lips in 1, 2 Samuel (198 words), exceeded only by the psalmodic recitation found in the appendix ([22:2–51](#)). Its similarity in size to the Lord’s immediately preceding pronouncement—only one word longer in the Hebrew text—suggests it was literarily shaped so as to make David’s response as thematically important as the divine words themselves. Indeed, the faith-filled response of the king serves as a model for all who receive unmerited blessing from the living God. Like David, all believers are implicitly encouraged to be humbled, pensive, and emboldened by the perception of God’s incredible goodness expressed within their lives.

David’s prayerful monologue, spoken while the king was in a sitting position, begins with a note of wonder, as the king meditatively asked “Lord Yahweh” [NIV, “Sovereign LORD”], “Who am I, ... and what is my house [NIV, “family”], that you have brought me this far?” David’s question implicitly recognized that the Lord, not David, was the source of the transformation of the lowly shepherd of Bethlehem into Israel’s king. David’s employment of the phrase “Lord Yahweh” here is the first of seven occasions in this monologue. This phrase appears for the first time in the Old Testament in a tête-à-tête between the Lord and Abram in which the Lord revealed the blessed future of Abram’s family (cf. [Gen 15](#)). David’s reuse of the relatively unusual appellation for God in a similar context seems deliberate. The lexical links between the Lord’s compact with Abraham in the Torah and the one with David invite the reader to compare the two events and perhaps to accord them equal significance. Coming out of Abram’s experience with God was the promise of land for Israel; out of David’s experience came the promise of a leader for Israel within that land.

In spite of the magnitude of God’s blessings already bestowed on the house of David, they were (lit.) “little” [NIV, “not enough”; **NASB**, “insignificant”] in comparison to those that would ultimately accrue. The Lord’s blessings for David would not cease at that point in time; God had “also spoken about the future [**NASB**, “distant future”] of the house of your servant” (v. [19](#)), and those pronouncements were favorable. In David’s acknowledgment of God’s concern for the king’s descendants, he referred to himself as the Lord’s servant/ slave, the first of ten times he would do so during this prayer to God. In so doing David was following a pious tradition of using the socially demeaning term as a badge of honor. However, David is recorded in Old Testament narratives as having used the phrase more than any other person (13x), followed by his son Solomon (7x). The Lord’s provision of insight into a family’s fate was certainly not the deity’s “usual way of dealing with man,” but it was not unknown, especially among the patriarchs (cf. [Gen 12:2–3](#); [15:4–21](#)), priests ([1 Sam 2:28–36](#); [3:11–18](#)), and even kings ([1 Sam 15:28](#)).

[7:21–22](#) Although David did not profess to understand why he had received the Lord’s wonderful promises, he recognized that these promises had been given for a reason: not as a reward for David’s righteousness but “for the sake of your word and according to your will” (v. [21](#)). David did not indicate what “word” he was referring to, for the sake of which these promises had been given. In keeping with the larger purposes of the books of Samuel, we can speculate that he was alluding to a Torah promise, particularly one that links royal leadership with the tribe of Judah (cf. [Gen 49:10](#)).

David’s failure to understand the Lord’s gracious activity in no way minimized his recognition that it was a “great thing.” It was made even greater by the fact that God had “made it known to your servant”; God’s gift of this prophetic revelation added an additional reason to marvel at God’s gracious activities in Israel’s behalf.

In light of all this, David could only marvel at “how great” (v. [22](#)) the Lord is; no being is or could be his equal. Only a divine being could possibly do or be all that David attributed to the Lord, but “there is no God but” the Lord. Thus Israel’s God—One who makes promises in the Torah and then acts for their sake so as to fulfill them and who can speak of their fulfillment even before the events themselves—is without peer.

[7:23–24](#) The Lord’s unique status and his gracious covenant with Israel meant that his “people Israel” (v. [23](#)) were also unique. They were “the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself” (cf. [Amos 3:2](#)). As the Lord had implied in his prophetic promise to Abram (cf. [Gen 15:13–21](#)), he had driven “out nations and their gods from before” Israel in the Promised Land and had “redeemed” Israel “from Egypt.” In making this confession David echoed a theme prominent in Moses’ Deuteronomic monologues (cf. [Deut 7:8](#); [9:26](#); [13:5](#); [15:15](#); [24:18](#)). The Lord’s actions on Israel’s behalf, like those on behalf of David, were used “to make a name”—that is, to bring glory to God.

Through these actions the Lord had established his “people Israel as [his] very own forever” (v. [24](#)). His covenant with Israel was an eternal one (Hb. *’ad ’ólām*), just as David’s throne, dynasty, and kingdom were eternal (Hb. *ólām*; cf. vv. [13](#), [16](#)). As promised to Abraham and thus to Israel, the Lord had indeed “become their God” (cf. [Gen 17:8](#)).

[7:25–29](#) Having marveled at the Lord’s work in his own life and on behalf of Israel, David now boldly commanded (*hiphil* imperative of *qûm*) the Lord to “keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house” (v. [25](#)). Borrowing a literary device from the poetic genre, David used synonymous parallelism to underscore his mandate to the Lord: “do [qal imperative of *’āsāh*] as you have promised.” This act of giving an order to God should not be viewed as an irreverent act on David’s part; on the contrary, it was an act of great faith. David heard Nathan’s prophecy and accepted it for what it was—a solemn promise from God. Through these commands David acknowledged that he believed and accepted what the Lord had said and was confidently asking God to do what he said he would do.

By fulfilling his promise to establish “the house of your servant David” (v. [26](#)), the Lord’s name would be “great forever” because God’s trustworthiness and goodness would be manifestly evident to all. As people—especially the covenant people of Israel—witnessed God’s incredible display of mercy and favor to the family of David, they would “say, ‘The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!’ ”

David did not wait for the historical outworking of the promises before making his confession of faith. He heard Nathan’s prophecy and accepted it immediately as God’s “revealed” word; therefore he found courage to offer his prayer and confession of faith. David’s confession—“O Sovereign LORD, you are God” (v. [28](#))—mirrors that which he entreated other Israelites to proclaim.

The logic of David’s faith was not complicated. It was a syllogism consisting of a major premise, a minor premise, and an implicit conclusion stated as a prayer request:

*Major Premise:* The Lord’s words “are truth” (Hb. *’emet*; NIV, “trustworthy”)

*Minor Premise:* The Lord “promised these good things to” David

*Conclusion:* [Implicit: the Lord would “bless the house of” (v. [29](#)) David]

*Resulting Prayer:* “Be pleased to bless the house of your servant” David

The Lord had spoken a blessing upon David’s family line, and “with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever.” David’s simple acceptance of the Lord’s word mirrors Abraham’s (cf. [Gen 15:6](#)) and confirms that David was indeed a man after the Lord’s own heart.

## **(8) The Lord Gives David Victory Over All His Enemies [8:1-14](#)**

Immediately after the writer recorded the phenomenal promises the Lord revealed to David, he began presenting materials that demonstrate their fulfillment. The Lord had stated that he would provide a safe haven for Israel, one in which wicked men would be unable to oppress them (cf. [7:10](#)). Now God is shown working through David to make these words a reality. In fact, the thematically central refrain of this section is, “The LORD gave David victory wherever he went” (vv. [6](#), [14](#)). The events mentioned in this section come from various periods in David’s administration, most of which cannot be located at specific points in time.

**[8:1-2](#)** The events described in this chapter were said to have occurred “in the course of time” (lit., “after thus”), an expression understood by Keil and Delitzsch to serve “as a general formula of transition to attach what follows to the account just completed, as a thing that happened afterwards.” Since the days of Samson, Israel’s most oppressive enemy had been the Philistines. In order to demonstrate that the Lord was keeping his promise, it was appropriate to indicate that David triumphantly waged holy war against them. David’s efforts were mightily successful (v. [1](#)). Furthermore, he also enlarged Israel’s presence in the Promised Land when he secured “Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines.” The name “Metheg Ammah” is an unusual one, possessing the literal meaning “The Bridle of the Forearm/Cubit.” No ancient city bearing this name has been discovered, and this has led some to speculate that the phrase is (1) the name of a topographical feature such as “common lands,” not a city; (2) an idiomatic expression meaning “tribute”; (3) an idiomatic expression—or perhaps a textual corruption—meaning “a city of importance” (= Gath; cf. [1 Chr 18:1](#)); or (4) an idiomatic expression meaning “the government.” David’s efforts did not eradicate the Philistines, but after David’s time they are never portrayed in the Old Testament as presenting a serious threat to Israel (cf. [1 Kgs 4:21](#); [15:27](#); [16:15](#); [2 Kgs 8:2-3](#); [18:8](#)).

Besides dealing with Israel’s greatest foreign threat to national security, David also waged war successfully against a traditional enemy that had opposed Israel since the days of Moses. In keeping with a Torah prophecy (cf. [Num 24:17](#)), King David “defeated the Moabites” (v. [2](#)). In so doing David demonstrated that his commitment to obeying the Torah was greater than his family ties (cf. [Ruth 4:13-21](#)).

Through a policy that would be highly controversial and universally condemned today, David also eliminated any serious near-term military threat that might have been posed by the Moabites. In his successful campaign against them, David captured a number of prisoners of war. These he made to “lie down on the ground.” Then he “measured them off with a length of cord” and put to death all the prisoners falling under two of every three lengths of cord. No parallels to David’s action against the Moabites exists in Scripture.

In spite of all appearances, such an action probably was considered compassionate in contrast to the options of killing all the prisoners or selling them all as slaves to foreign nations. After all, many of David’s enemies were permitted to live and return to their families. David’s decisive action certainly benefited Israel economically because the survivors could return to work the fields of Moab and produce grain and livestock, a portion of which would be sent annually to David’s court as “tribute.”

**[8:3-8](#)** Besides attacking enemies to the west and east, David channeled military efforts to the northeast as he “fought Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah” (v. [3](#)), an area more than sixty miles north of the Sea of Galilee. The circumstances of David’s encounter with this Aramean king are debated by scholars, due to geographical considerations and ambiguities in the Hebrew text.

One issue of uncertainty relates to the identity of the river. One Hebrew tradition (the *qere*, followed by the NIV) adds “Euphrates” (i.e., *pěṛāt*), whereas another (the *kethiv*) simply has “the river,” allowing perhaps the Jordan or the Yarmuk. Another basic issue of uncertainty is the question of who “went to” the Euphrates River—was it David or Hadadezer? If it was David, what was he doing so far north at this time? And if it was Hadadezer, why was David contesting Hadadezer’s activities so far away from Jerusalem? A third issue is what the person by the river was doing—was he going “to restore his control” of the region (so NIV), or was he going to plant a stele there?

This episode likely relates to a time when David led a military expedition to the Euphrates to fulfill another Torah promise, namely, that of extending Israel’s territorial claims to the Euphrates (cf. [Gen 15:18](#); [Exod 23:31](#); [Deut 1:7](#); [11:24](#)). God had declared in the Torah that the land belonged to Israel, and Saul had made an attempt to conquer it (cf. [1 Sam 14:47](#)); now David the man of the Torah went to stake a more credible claim on this region. Though David encountered opposition from Hadadezer, who likewise claimed control of the region, David and his forces handily defeated them. In the process the Israelite king “captured a thousand of [Hadadezer’s] chariots, seven thousand charioteers, and twenty thousand foot soldiers” (v. [4](#)), thus drastically reducing the military threat of perhaps the most formidable opponent in the region of Aram.

In disposing of the captured military resources, David “hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses.” He probably did this for at least three reasons. First and foremost, the Torah prohibited Israelite kings from “acquiring great numbers of horses” ([Deut 17:16](#)). Second and most practically, the Israelite kingdom was not equipped to maintain thousands of horses: they had neither the government facilities nor the numbers of permanent government employees necessary to care for them. Furthermore, chariots—and therefore chariot horses—were useless for military purposes in much of the Israelite heartland because of the terrain: in cost-versus-benefit terms, they were a bad investment for a nation of rugged hills and brushy forests.

Israelite incursions into the territories traditionally controlled by Aramean city-states were met with opposition from more than one kingdom. “Arameans of Damascus” (modern Damascus) “came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah” (v. [5](#)). However, like the army of Zobah they experienced a crushing defeat as “David struck down twenty-two thousand of them” (v. [5](#)). Then, in an effort to consolidate his gains, David “put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus.” This permanent Israelite military presence in the region helped assure that the subjugated Arameans “brought tribute” annually to Jerusalem. David’s success here represents the first recorded Israelite success in gaining control of Damascus. So significant was the event that the writer noted what every Israelite soldier involved in the campaign must have felt—“The LORD gave David victory” (v. [6](#)).

Bringing Damascus under Israelite control was of immense financial significance to David’s kingdom for two reasons. First, this city was the junction point for the Way of the Sea and the King’s Highway, the two major caravan routes connecting Asia with Africa. By controlling this location and stationing garrisons along the caravan routes, Israel was able to collect revenues from itinerant merchants in exchange for safe passage on the roads. Second, David was able to tap the reserves of wealth already in place within the region. David did this in part by taking “the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer” (v. [7](#)) and bringing them to Jerusalem. These shields were likely ceremonial in function, stored in Damascus for use during courtly and religious festivities (cf. [1 Kgs 10:16–17](#); [14:26–28](#)). David may have dedicated these objects to the Lord as *herem*, items irrevocably given over for service to the deity (cf. [2 Kgs 11:10](#); [Lev 27:28](#)). David also “took a great quantity of bronze” (v. [8](#)) from the Aram-Zobahite towns of “Tebah and Berothai.” The identity and location of Tebah is in doubt; in the **MT** the city is called Betah, but the NIV uses Tebah here to harmonize the passage with [1 Chr 18:8](#). Berothai probably occupied the same site as modern Bereitan; in [1 Chr 18:8](#) it is called Cun.



**8:9–10** David’s successful military exploits against both Zobah and Damascus intimidated leaders of the other Aramean city-states, causing them to take steps to appease David and establish nonaggression pacts with him. When, for example, “Toi [NIV, “Tou”; cf. [1 Chr 18:9](#)] king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer” (v. [9](#)), he sent a high-level delegation “to King David to greet him and congratulate him” on his recent successes. Heading the delegation was Toi’s son and heir-apparent Joram (= “Yah is exalted”), known elsewhere as Hadoram (= “Hadad is exalted”; cf. [1 Chr 18:10](#)), “who brought with him articles of silver and gold and bronze.” The importance of the persons and gifts sent to David suggest that Hamath was establishing a treaty with Israel in which Israel was the superior party.

David, who recognized the Lord as the true source of his success, “dedicated these articles to the LORD” (v. [10](#)), along with the plunder he had taken from the other nations. According to [1 Chr 22:14](#), the cumulative amount of these acquisitions was staggering: one hundred thousand talents of gold (approx. 7.5 million pounds) and one million talents of silver (approx. seventy-five million pounds). In keeping with Torah precedent (cf. [Num 4:4](#)), David assigned the Levites the task of protecting this immense wealth.

David’s decision to give the silver and gold to the Lord rather than keep it for himself marked him as a true man of the Torah. The law required kings not to “accumulate large amounts of silver and gold” ([Deut 17:17](#)), and David’s obedience to this basic requirement displayed his unalloyed heart for the Lord. At the same time, it provided a foil for his son Solomon, who amassed huge amounts of the precious metals for himself (cf. [1 Kgs 10:14–23](#)) and ultimately developed a heart that strayed from the Lord (cf. [1 Kgs 11:4](#)). David’s sacrificial obedience here also provides a partial explanation of why David’s reign was evaluated more positively than Solomon’s by the writer of 1 Kings.

David’s military exploits also brought him east of the Dead Sea, where he killed eighteen thousand (v. [13](#)) enemy troops. The identity of the enemy is disputed: Samuel states they were Arameans, but [1 Chr 18:12](#) indicates they were Edomites. The NIV and most modern versions accept the Chronicles account as the superior one, mainly because of the reference to the “Valley of Salt,” an area south of the Dead Sea. If the reference in the title of [Psalm 60](#) is to this battle, then the Edomite reading is confirmed.

Perhaps this dispute can be resolved by recognizing that the King’s Highway, a major trade route that was controlled by Arameans farther to the north, also ran through this area. It is conceivable that Aramean troops had extended their control into traditionally Edomite territory in order to gain revenues from the caravans passing through the region. Thus after David took control of the caravan routes in the region of Damascus, he would have had to wrest control of the Aramean-dominated sections to the south as well. Having taken control of the Edomite sections of the King’s Highway, David “put garrisons throughout Edom” (v. [14](#)). As a result, “all the Edomites became subject to David.”

The section summarizing David’s military exploits east of the Jordan ends as it began (cf. v. [6](#)), by noting that the Lord “gave David victory wherever he went.” From beginning to end, David’s battlefield successes were the Lord’s successes.

## **(9) David Establishes a Righteous and Just Administration [8:15–18](#)**

**8:15–18** Justice and righteousness (Hb. *mišpāṭ* and *šēdāqâ*) were primary attributes of the Lord’s character ([Job 37:23](#); [Pss 33:5](#); [36:6](#); [99:4](#); [103:4](#); [Isa 5:16](#); [Jer 9:24](#); [Mic 7:9](#)) and were considered the two basic virtues that characterized every person and society that pleased the Lord ([Ps 106:3](#); [Prov 21:3](#); [Isa 1:27](#); [9:7](#); [56:1](#); [Ezek 18:5, 27](#); [33:14–19](#)); by possessing them an individual would avoid the Lord’s judgments and receive covenant promises and blessings ([Gen 18:19](#); [Ps 106:3](#); [Jer 22:15](#); [Ezek 18:5, 27](#); [33:14–19](#)). Israelite leaders especially were expected to possess these traits ([1 Kgs 10:9](#); [2 Chr 9:8](#); [Isa 9:7](#)). David’s exemplary administration of justice over all Israel opened the way for the Lord’s blessing to fall on the land.

David demonstrated his competency in administering justice and righteousness over all Israel by appointing competent leaders who would enforce the Lord’s judgments. His nephew Joab (v. [16](#); cf. [20:23](#)) was charged with the task of bringing divine justice militarily on those who opposed the Lord. Jehoshaphat was “recorder” (Hb. *mazkîr*; lit., “one causing to remember”), that is, one who chronicled David’s administration and the discharge of the Lord’s will, thus permitting future generations to “remember the wonders [Yahweh] has done” ([Ps 105:5](#)). He probably also bore the responsibilities of overseeing the archiving of official records and of disseminating royal commands. Seraiah, who served as “secretary” (Hb. *sôpēr*, v. [17](#)), probably assisted him in these tasks.

Zadok and Ahimelech (v. [17](#)) were both direct descendants of Aaron though through different families. Their responsibility in David’s cabinet was the proper implementation of Israelite worship, especially as it was administered in Jerusalem (cf. [2 Sam 15:24–35](#)). Zadok also functioned as one of several court prophets (cf. [2 Sam 15:27](#)).

Benaiah, a military hero of legendary proportions (cf. [23:20–21](#)), was the son of a priest (cf. [1 Chr 27:5](#)) from the southern Judahite city of Kabzeel (cf. [2 Sam 23:20](#); [Josh 15:21](#)). The Kerethites and Pelethites are usually understood to be non-Israelite soldiers of Cretan and Philistine extraction that served as a private militia for the king, the assumption being that mercenaries would have no vested interest in participating in treachery against the throne. The Kerethites and Pelethites are always mentioned in connection with each other—as though they were a single group—and only in passages dealing with David’s kingship; perhaps the group ceased to exist after David’s death. David’s appointment of a priest as the head of the Kerethites and Pelethites seems to reflect his characteristic concern to have Israelite military affairs conducted in accordance with the Lord’s guidelines (cf. [1 Sam 21:5](#)). Benaiah’s priestly status probably also explains his mention after the Aaronic priests and prior to David’s priestly sons.

David’s sons served as priests (Hb. *kōhānîm*; NIV, “royal advisers”). Scholars have proposed various explanations of the actual role David’s sons played as priests. Some, such as the NIV, take their interpretive cue from [1 Chr 18:17](#) and translate the term *kōhānîm* as though it conveyed a consultative role. G. J. Wenham proposes a textual emendation and suggests they were “administrators of the royal estates.” It is preferable, however, to interpret the term in light of David’s presumed status as a priest in the order of Melchizedek (cf. comments on [6:14](#)); accordingly, David’s sons would have possessed the inherited title and performed whatever duties were associated with the office. Still others understand the term to refer to David’s sons’ participation in sacerdotal duties that could be performed by laypersons. Although I know of no scholar who holds this position, a fourth—and unlikely—possibility is that David bestowed the title on his sons in recognition of the Torah’s assertion that Israel was to be a “kingdom of priests” ([Exod 19:6](#)): as a faithful son of the covenant, David was a priest, and by bestowing the title on his sons, he was dedicating them to faithful service to the covenant as well.

