

The Background to David Becoming King over Israel

Part 2

In the first part of this series, we considered three factors that contributed to the failure of the Israelites as a nation following the conquest of Canaan.

- Allowing evil influences to remain in their midst.
- Not teaching a new generation their own history, nor the biblical principles established by God.
- Intermarrying with groups that worshipped false gods, thus willfully dissolving the boundaries meant to keep them distinct.

But, in spite of these factors and the resulting failure of the nation, the text also introduced the concept of grace in which Adonai, speaking as the Angel of the Lord, declared: “I will never break My covenant with you” (Judges 2:1). His manner of accomplishing that promise was first fulfilled in the establishment of Judges, beginning with Othniel, in order to deliver Israel from the consequences of their pagan intermarriages.

In other words, in spite of Israel’s continual rebellion, God would always provide a righteous man to deliver and lead them. They would later rebel in demanding a king over their nation, while Adonai desired for them to let Him be their full sovereign. Nevertheless, David would be His granting of grace by giving them a king who was after His own heart. And David would be the prophetic type or shadow of Yeshua, the antitype or fulfillment. And Yeshua would provide the ultimate gift of grace in the form of deliverance from sin for all people – both Jews and Gentiles alike who are yoked together by faith in the true and living God.

Now, as the narrative continues, we will consider other factors that lead to David becoming king.

The Downward Spiral of the Judges (Judges 6-16)

The Calling of Gideon (Judges 6-8)

- **The Context of Oppression:** The Midianites had stripped the land bare, leaving Israel impoverished and hiding in caves, prompting the people to cry out to God.
- **The Reluctant Deliverer:** The Angel of the Lord commissioned Gideon, calling him a “mighty warrior” despite his fear, insecurity, and low social standing. Before Gideon can fight external enemies, he had to cleanse his own house by destroying his father’s altar to Baal (6:11-35).
- **The Demand for Signs:** Gideon repeatedly tested God with a fleece of wool to confirm his calling and overcome his doubts (6:36-40).
- **The “Impossible” Ask:** Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 men to fight a Midianite force described as “thick as locusts.” God tells Gideon he has too many men and forces him to systematically whittle the army down to just 300 soldiers. Then, instead of weapons, God commands them to attack at night carrying only trumpets, empty jars, and torches.

- **Why it Defies Logic:** Military strategy relies on numbers, high ground, and weaponry. God intentionally strips away every human variable for victory, forcing 300 men to look at a massive invading army and march toward them with pottery and musical instruments.

The connection to David

Gideon's calling establishes the divine pattern for how God chooses leadership in Israel, a blueprint that is perfectly fulfilled when David is selected.

- **The Obscurity of the Leader:** Gideon models a humble beginning similar to David, who was also overlooked as the youngest brother. Gideon objects to his calling because his clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and he is the least in his father's house. This directly mirrors David's story in 1 Samuel 16. When Samuel arrives to anoint the next king, Jesse doesn't even bother bringing David in from the fields because he is the youngest and most insignificant. Both narratives emphasize that God looks at the heart and chooses the overlooked to confound the mighty.

Abimelech and the Premature Kingdom (Judges 9)

- **The Usurpation of Power:** Abimelech, a son of Gideon born to a concubine, murders seventy of his half-brothers to forcefully claim kingship over Shechem.
- **Jotham's Parable:** The sole surviving brother, Jotham, delivers a prophetic warning using the parable of the bramble, predicting that a toxic, self-appointed king will consume the people.
- **The Fractured Rule:** Abimelech's three-year reign is defined by civil unrest, betrayal, and violence, ending in his humiliating death when a woman drops a millstone on his head.

The connection to David

The tragic story of Abimelech serves as a negative foil, warning Israel what happens when a man tries to force a kingdom by human strength instead of waiting for God's covenant.

- **Seizing the Throne by Violence:** Abimelech murders his seventy brothers on a single stone to cement his power. He rules by fear, manipulation, and tribal division. David represents the exact opposite philosophy. Even when King Saul is actively hunting him down, David has multiple opportunities to kill Saul and seize the throne by force. Instead, David refuses to "stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed," choosing to wait years in exile for God to give him the kingdom in His own timing.
- **The Fragile, Self-Appointed Reign:** Abimelech's kingdom lasts only three years before collapsing into betrayal and a humiliating death. David's kingdom lasts forty years and becomes the foundation for an eternal covenant. Abimelech shows the devastating failure of a self-made king, highlighting why Israel desperately needed a king who was chosen and sustained by God alone.

Minor Judges and Deeper Rebellion (Judges 10)

- **The Leadership of Tola and Jair:** Following the disastrous reign of Abimelech, God provides brief stability through two minor judges. Tola rises to "save Israel" and rules for 23

years, followed by Jair, who leads for 22 years and secures wealth and land for his thirty sons.

- **The Great Apostasy:** Once Jair dies, Israel plunges into unprecedented idolatry, abandoning Yahweh entirely to serve a pantheon of foreign gods, including the Baals, the Ashtarothe, and the deities of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia.
- **Divine Refusal and Repentance:** Oppressed by the Philistines and Ammonites for 18 years, Israel cries out for help. In a sobering turning point, God initially refuses to save them, telling them to go cry out to the foreign gods they chose. The people respond by ridding themselves of foreign idols and confessing their sins, moving God to compassion.

Jephthah's Tragic Vow (Judges 11)

- **From Outcast to Leader:** Jephthah, the son of a prostitute, is rejected by his family but later recalled by the elders of Gilead to lead the defense against the Ammonites.
- **The Rash Vow:** Despite being empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, Jephthah attempts to barter with God by promising to sacrifice whatever first steps out of his house upon his return.
- **The Cost of Ignorance:** Jephthah wins the battle but loses his only daughter to his foolish vow, demonstrating how thoroughly Canaanite religious practices had corrupted Israelite worship.

The connection to David

Jephthah represents a leader who has military capability but lacks a deep, relational understanding of God's character and law, resulting in immense personal and national tragedy.

- **Ignorance vs. Intimacy with God:** Jephthah treats Adonai like a pagan deity, believing he needs to bribe God with a human sacrifice to win a battle. He does not know God's heart. David, by contrast, is deeply anchored in the law and nature of God. We see this explicitly in the Psalms, where David pours out his heart in genuine, relational intimacy. David knows that God does not desire empty sacrifices or blind rituals, but a "broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17).
- **The Broken Covenant:** Jephthah's ignorance of God's word destroys his own family legacy. David, despite his severe moral failures later in life (such as his sin with Bathsheba), immediately repents when confronted by the prophet Nathan. Because David understands God's mercy and justice, his failures lead to repentance and a restored covenant, whereas Jephthah's failure leads only to grief and isolation.

Civil War and the Final Minor Judges (Judges 12)

- **The Ephraimite Grievance:** The tribe of Ephraim aggressively confronts Jephthah, furious that they were not called to fight the Ammonites, and threatens to burn his house down over him.
- **The Shibboleth Civil War:** Unlike Gideon, who diffused Ephraim's pride with diplomacy, Jephthah retaliates with force. The Gileadites seize the fords of the Jordan and execute escaping Ephraimites who expose their identity by mispronouncing the password "Shibboleth" as "Sibboleth"—resulting in 42,000 casualties.

- **The Leadership of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon:** The chapter concludes with a rapid succession of three minor judges who oversee a fragile peace. Ibzan (7 years), Elon (10 years), and Abdon (8 years) lead Israel, with their large families and domestic prosperity emphasizing a focus on personal legacy during a time of national fragmentation.

Samson and the Philistine Crisis (Judges 13-16)

- **The Nazirite Mandate:** Samson is set apart from birth by divine decree to “begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines” (13:5).
- **Personal Vengeance vs. Divine Calling:** Samson routinely breaks his vows and operates out of personal lust and retaliation rather than a desire to shepherd God’s people.
- **The Final Sacrifice:** Blinded, enslaved, and mocked by the Philistines, Samson prays for strength one last time, killing more enemies in his death than he did during his life.

The connection to David

Samson’s life introduces a reality that will dominate David’s early reign and highlights the difference between a rogue champion and a true shepherd.

- **The Philistine Threat:** Samson’s birth narrative explicitly states that he will only *begin* the deliverance of Israel from the Philistines. The Philistines remain a terrifying existential threat throughout the rest of Judges, Eli’s priesthood, and Saul’s reign. It is not until David kills Goliath and later subdues the Philistine armies as king that this threat is finally neutralized. So, David finishes the work that Samson started.
- **The Rogue vs. The Shepherd:** Samson is a lone wolf. He never leads an army, never shepherds the people, and uses his divine gifts primarily for personal vengeance and lust. He leaves Israel leaderless and fractured. David, however, is a true shepherd-king. He gathers an army of outcasts, unifies the twelve fractured tribes into a single nation, and uses his strength to protect and feed the flock of Israel. Samson shows the limits of individual talent without holy character; David shows the power of a leader dedicated to the communal good of God’s people.

The Big Picture: Transition to King David

Looking across all four characters, we see Israel’s leadership progressively decomposing (from Gideon’s doubts, to Abimelech’s tyranny, to Jephthah’s ignorance, to Samson’s total self-indulgence). It is this moral decay that contrasts the absolute necessity for a “man after God’s own heart” like David to lead the nation?