

## The Last Words of David

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I remember a stimulating conversation with Bob Smith more than twenty years ago, when he was expounding on the dramatic significance of the first and last words of Jesus in each of the synoptic Gospels.<sup>1</sup> I've thought of that conversation many times as I have wrestled with one of my favorite biblical characters, David, who has been the subject of one of my regular elective courses,<sup>2</sup> and who is the centerpiece of 1 Chronicles, on which I have just written an extended commentary. David's *first* word is hardly that momentous: "What shall be done for the person who kills this Philistine [Goliath], and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam 17:26).<sup>3</sup> Since the books of Samuel tell the story of David "warts and all," we are not surprised to find David, the hero of faith and military hero, also using an ethnic slur about the uncircumcised Philistines.

But I am far more intrigued by the many "last words of David" since they are so varied in form and content and since he is the only king of Israel or Judah of whom last words are reported.

The biblical narrator explicitly calls the poem cited in 2 Sam 23:1-7 "The Last Words of David" even though there are significant events still coming in David's life before his death (2 Sam 24:1-1 Kgs 2:12).

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 3:15 and 28:18-20; Mark 3:15 and 15:34 (cf. v. 37); and Luke 2:49 and 24:44-49.

<sup>2</sup> "David in the Bible, Literature, and Art."

<sup>3</sup> In 1 Chr 11:6 David's first word is: "Whoever is the first to smite the Jebusites will be head and commander."

## 2 Sam 23:1-7 The First “Last Words of David”<sup>4</sup>

1. These are the last words of David:

“The oracle of David, the son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the person God established,  
the person anointed by the God of Jacob,  
the person favored by the Stronghold of Israel.”<sup>5</sup>

2. The spirit of Yahweh has spoken through me,

Yahweh’s word is on my tongue.

3. The God of Jacob has spoken,

the Rock of Israel has addressed me:

‘One who rules over people as a righteous person,

ruling in the fear of God,

4. is like the light of morning,

like the sun rising on a morning without clouds,

shining from the rain on the verdant land.’

5. Is not my house like this with God?

For God has established an everlasting covenant with me,

worked out in all its details and secure.

Will God not cause to blossom my success and everything I desire?

6. ‘But the good-for-nothings are like thorns to be thrown away;

that cannot be picked up by the hand.

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<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew text of this poem is often quite difficult. My translation incorporates several corrections from the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

<sup>5</sup> This colon in older translations and in the New Living Translation is rendered as “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

7. Anyone who touches them must be equipped with an iron bar or the shaft of a spear.

They will be utterly consumed by fire where they live.’’

King David claims prophetic authority in vv. 1-3a of this poem (he is gifted with the spirit, has Yahweh’s word on his tongue, the Rock of Israel has addressed him, and he delivers an oracle). The divine oracle itself is in vv. 3b-4 and 6-7, with David’s own interjection in v. 5.

The divine oracle has a wisdom flavor, contrasting the righteously ruling king with unspecified “good-for-nothings.” The latter term recalls the sons of Eli in 1 Sam 2:12-17, who stole from the sacrificial offerings. The righteous king and the wicked are described with metaphors from nature. The righteous king is like the sun that gives heat and light and beauty, whereas the good-for-nothings are like thorns that must be discarded and burned, and are so worthless that they can injure the person who tries to weed them out without proper equipment. A final wisdom theme is the reference in v. 3 to ruling in the fear of God.

David’s interjection in v. 5 is quite surprising since he claims his own family has displayed such righteousness and such rule in the fear of God. Readers of 2 Samuel 11-21 would be surprised at that since David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, murdered her husband, responded weakly to the rape of his daughter Tamar by her half brother Amnon, witnessed the assassination of Amnon by Absalom, experienced the revolt of Absalom and his assassination by Joab, and then taken an inappropriate, self-reliant census. This is ruling righteously?

David answers this objection by noting that his kingship is God’s gift, sealed by an everlasting covenant. Success and achievement are brought about solely by divine

initiative. In short, David is talking about the ideal of royal rule, which comes from God. It is not obtained by grasping for political power or living by one's own wits and rules. Only with God's help can David or any of his successors rule righteously. Psalm 72 spells out this ideal kingship in more detail and also begins with the words: "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son." The messianic promise in Isaiah 11:1-5 promises a king who will judge with righteousness and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. This royal ideal at the end of 2 Samuel is reinforced by the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:1-10) at the beginning of the books of Samuel. Hannah sings about Yahweh who judges the ends of the earth and exalts the power of the anointed king. The narrator of the books of Samuel does not whitewash David, but leaves the warts and blemishes of the real David for all to see in 2 Samuel 11-21. Only at the end, in the "Last Words of David," does he paint an alternate, idealized imagery of human rule.

### **The Second and Third "Last Words of David"**

It is usually thought that the materials in 2 Samuel 21-24 were edited by a different hand than the author of 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2, a unit often called the Succession Narrative. This Narrative describes how several of David's sons lost out in their struggle to succeed their father until David, from his deathbed, orders the coronation of Solomon. David is a pathetic figure in 1 Kings 1-2. He is so unable to keep warm that his servants decide to provide him with a beautiful female, Abishag, to remedy the situation, but David is unwilling or unable to consummate his relationship with her. Adonijah, his fourth oldest son, attempts to take advantage of the king's weakness by having himself crowned king while his father lies desperately ill, but Bathsheba,

supported by the prophet Nathan, forcefully intervenes and recalls David's promise that her son Solomon would be the next king. Whereupon David summoned the priest Zadok, the prophet Nathan, and the general Benaiah to anoint Solomon as king immediately. When this had been accomplished, David uttered his second (vv. 2-4) and third (vv. 5-9) valedictory speeches (1 Kgs 2:2-9), this time addressed to his son and successor Solomon.<sup>6</sup>

### **1 Kgs 2:2-9 The Second and Third "Last Words of David"**

2. I am about to go on the road of all the earth. So be strong and act like a man. 3. Keep the requirements of Yahweh your God, to walk in his ways and to keep his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as they are written in the Torah of Moses so that you may prosper in everything you undertake and wherever you turn.

4. Then Yahweh will establish his word which he spoke concerning me, "If your sons take heed to their way by walking before me in fidelity with all their heart and with all their inmost being, there will never cease to be a successor of yours on the throne of Israel."

5. Moreover you know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he murdered, retaliating in time of peace for blood shed in war. He put the blood shed in war on the belt around my<sup>7</sup> waist and on my sandals on my feet. 6. Act therefore in accord with your wisdom and do not let his gray head go down in peace to Sheol. 7. Deal loyally, on the other hand, with the children of Barzillai the Gileadite, and

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<sup>6</sup> The introduction to this speech in 1 Kgs 2:1 is very much like the introduction to Jacob's last will and testament in Gen 47:29.

<sup>7</sup> The use of the personal pronoun "my" here and two more times in this verse follows the text of the Lucianic Septuagint and the Old Latin. The Hebrew reads in all three cases "his."

let them be among those who eat at your table; for they greeted me with similar loyalty when I fled from Absalom your brother. 8. Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, is also with you. He cursed me with a sickening curse when I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to greet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by Yahweh, “I will not kill you with the sword.” 9. Now, do not hold him innocent for you are a wise man and you know what you ought to do to him. Bring down his gray head with violence to Sheol.

In the next verse David dies. In the second farewell address, vv. 2-4, David seems to be speaking for the author of the book of Kings, known today as the Deuteronomistic Historian. This final charge of David to Solomon resembles Yahweh’s address to Joshua when he had replaced Moses as leader of Israel (Josh 1:6-8). The various words for statutes, commandments, etc. are clichés for the law in the book of Deuteronomy, and it is that book which is apparently referred to in v. 3 as the Torah of Moses. The theology could be described as retribution theology, offering Solomon success in all his undertakings in response to his obedience. Verses 3-4 make the promise to Solomon and his descendants conditional, that is, the Davidic dynasty will be permanent only if the sons of David walk before Yahweh in faithfulness (see also 1 Kgs 8:25; 9:4-5). Verse 4 cites an oracle of Yahweh.

Most scholars believe that the theological admonitions in vv. 3-4 are part of the Deuteronomistic Historian’s effort to show why the kingdom eventually did fall since Solomon and his descendants did not keep the statutes, commandments, etc., and therefore did not merit success or meet the requirement for a perpetual dynastic succession. But the second paragraph, that we have called the third “last words of

David,” vv. 5-9, contains older material in which David gives political or practical advice to his son that no doubt helped to legitimate Solomon’s controversial actions.

That second paragraph is “real politics” and basically has David say to Solomon: “Don’t make the same mistake that I did by letting your enemies live.” Joab had murdered Abner, who had made peace with David and had promised to deliver the allegiance of the Northern tribes to him (2 Sam 2:6-21). Joab had felt aggrieved because Abner had killed Joab’s brother Asahel during a battle (2 Sam 2:12-23), and Joab had killed Abner by stabbing him in the stomach (2 Sam 2:22-30). David had mourned for Abner and professed his own innocence in this death, and he complained that Joab and the other sons of Zeruiah were too violent (2 Sam 2:31-39).

The second person Joab had killed was Amasa, who had been Absalom’s army commander when he had revolted against David (2 Sam 17:25). After Joab had killed Absalom (2 Sam 18:14), David appointed Amasa to replace Joab as leader of the army (2 Sam 19:13).<sup>8</sup> When Amasa took too long in assembling the army to fight the rebel Sheba, Joab killed him by striking him in the belly (2 Sam 20:4-10). David felt that he was under a sentence of blood guilt because of the actions of Joab (see my translation of v. 5 above), and Solomon also felt that he and his father’s house shared guilt for the blood Joab had shed (1 Kgs 2:31). Later Benaiah struck down Joab at Solomon’s command even though Joab had sought asylum beside the altar (1 Kgs 2:29-30, 34).

Shimei had cursed David during the revolt of Absalom. When Abishai, the brother of Joab wanted to kill him, David prevented him and noted that Yahweh had instructed Shimei to curse him (2 Sam 16:5-13). At the end of Absalom’s rebellion,

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<sup>8</sup> It is a strange turn of events that David utilizes the same army commander that his son Absalom had used against him.

Shimei threw himself down before David, confessed his sin, and begged for his life. David again rejected Abishai's offer to kill Shimei, and swore to Shimei: "You shall not die" (2 Sam 19:16-23). In these "last words" to Solomon, however, David authorizes the assassination of Shimei, which was carried out by Benaiah under somewhat controversial circumstances, when three years later Shimei had left Jerusalem to pursue run-away slaves (1 Kgs 2:36-46). This execution of Simeon by Solomon was "justified" by David's last words. David's memory of his earlier oath gets reworded: "I will not kill you by the sword" replaces the earlier "You will not die." This let Solomon and Benaiah free to do what David had excluded only for himself.

Barzillai the Gileadite had befriended David in Transjordan during the revolt of Absalom (2 Sam 17:27-29), but Barzillai, because of age, had declined the king's invitation to come to Jerusalem and live from his provisions (2 Sam 19:31-38). David's instructions to Solomon to host the children of Barzillai at his table may not have been completely benign. To eat at the king's table meant that such people were under the king's observation and control (cf. 2 Sam 9:7, 13; 1 Kgs 18:19; 2 Kgs 25:29). Some scholars have suspected that Barzillai had knowledge of iron smelting technology, which would be necessary for the king's army. However that may be, David's advice with regard to Joab and Shimei seems to offer convenient legitimation for two controversial assassinations by Solomon.

#### **The Fourth to Ninth "Last Words of David" (in Chronicles)**

Roughly two centuries after the completion of the Deuteronomistic History, the author of 1 and 2 Chronicles, known as the Chronicler, recorded his own versions of David's last words. The Chronicler sees the primary achievement of David and Solomon

as the construction of the temple and the establishment of the types of clergy that were active in his day: priests, Levites, Levitical singers, and Levitical gatekeepers. He omitted from the accounts of these two kings their most serious flaws—no Bathsheba, Uriah, Amnon, Tamar, Absalom, Abishag, or Adonijah diminishes the reputation of David, and the searing indictment of Solomon’s wives who led him into apostasy (1 Kings 11) is passed over in silence. The Chronicler includes none of the three farewell speeches of David from Samuel and Kings that we have been studying. Instead, in 1 Chronicles 22-29 the Chronicler presents a whole series of new farewell speeches of David that will be surveyed in the following paragraphs.<sup>9</sup>

#### **1 Chr 22:7-16 The Fourth “Last Words of David”**

7. David said to Solomon, “My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God. 8. But the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and you have carried out great wars. You shall not build a house for my name, for you have shed much blood on the ground before me. 9. See, a son shall be born for you. He will be a person of rest, and I will provide him rest from all his enemies round about, for Solomon will be his name, and peace and quietness I will give to Israel in his days. 10. He will build a house for my name, and he will be a son to me, and I will be a father to him. I will establish his royal throne over Israel forever.’

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<sup>9</sup> The translations of the Bible, as elsewhere in this article are my own. For justification of the text chosen and the translation, see my forthcoming commentary on 1 Chronicles in the Hermeneia Commentary Series. For detailed studies of these speeches, see Roddy L. Braun, “Solomon, the Chosen Temple Builder: The Significance of 1 Chronicles 22, 28, and 29 for the Theology of Chronicles,” *JBL* 95 (1976):581-590, Mark A. Throntveit, *When Kings Speak: Royal Speech and Royal Prayer I Chronicles* (SBLDS 93; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), and *idem*, “The Idealization of Solomon as the Glorification of God in the Chronicler’s Royal Speeches and Royal Prayers” in *The Age of Solomon* (ed. Lowell K. Handy; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 411-427, and Rex Mason, *Preaching the Tradition: Homily and Hermeneutics after the Exile* (Cambridge: University Press, 1990).

11. “Now, my son, may Yahweh be with you and may you succeed, and may you build the house of Yahweh your God just as he has spoken concerning you. 12. Only, may Yahweh give to you discretion and understanding—and may he commission you (as king) over Israel—to keep the law of Yahweh your God. 13. Then you will prosper if you are careful to do the statutes and the ordinances which Yahweh commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed. 14. See, with great effort I have provided for the house of Yahweh one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond weighing for they are so abundant; lumber and stone I have provided and you must add more to these. 15. With you is an abundance of workers: stone cutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of artisans, skilled in working 16. gold, silver, bronze, and iron—without number. Rise and get to work, and may Yahweh be with you.”

This first farewell speech of David in Chronicles (the fourth overall) is addressed to Solomon privately. Verses 7-10 look to the past and contain an oracle of Yahweh in vv. 8-10. They paraphrase the content of 1 Chronicles 17//2 Samuel 7, in which David’s plans for building the temple are rejected, while he is promised a son, Solomon, who is designated as the temple builder. In chapter 22, David receives the divine oracle as if he were himself a prophet (cf. 2 Sam 23:1-3) whereas in 1 Chronicles 17//2 Samuel 7 the oracle came to him through the prophet Nathan. David was barred from building the temple, not because he was too busy with his wars, as in 1 Kgs 5:17-19 (EVV 3-5), but because he had shed much blood in his wars. The charge of shedding blood in this context may refer to the previous chapter where David’s faulty census for military

purposes led to the deaths of seventy thousand people. The transition from David to Solomon goes smoothly in Chronicles, with no other rivals among David's sons evident. Solomon is called a person of rest (v. 9) while David in v. 3 is called a person of wars. In 2 Sam 7:1, 11 David achieves "rest" for Israel, but in Chronicles such rest is only achieved by Solomon. The name Solomon is given by divine revelation (per contra 2 Sam 12:24, where David himself gives Solomon his name) and it is provided with an etymological etiology by connecting it to the Hebrew word *shalom* or "peace." Verses 11-13 are an admonition about the future and seem to utilize a genre dealing with the induction of a leader into office or encouragement for a task, whose best parallel is in Josh 1:6-9. We note the formula of encouragement (Be strong and courageous), the description of the task to which the individual is inducted (temple building), and the formula of accompaniment: Yahweh is with you. As in 1 Kgs 2:2-4, discussed above, Solomon is promised prosperity if he is careful to do the statutes and ordinances of Yahweh. David's lavish provision of materials and workers for the temple in vv. 14-16 knows no bounds. The gold alone amounts to 3,365 tons or, at \$400 an ounce, more than forty-three billion dollars. Other material contributions are in similar amounts, and David urges Solomon to add more to these quantities! No doubt David's generosity toward the support of the temple is to serve as a model for the post-exilic community of the Chronicler's day.

### **1 Chr 22:17-19 The Fifth "Last Words of David"**

17. David commanded all the leaders of Israel to assist Solomon his son. 18. "Is not Yahweh your God with you, and has he not given you rest on every side? For he has delivered into my hand the inhabitants of the land, and the land has been subdued before

Yahweh and before his people. 19. Now set your heart and your spirit to seek Yahweh your God. Rise up and build the sanctuary of Yahweh God in order to bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh and the holy vessels of God to the house that will be built for the name of Yahweh.”

This preliminary exhortation to the leaders of Israel, a kind of private lobbying, encourages them to provide general support for Solomon and for his building of the temple. Verse 19 in particular urges the leaders to seek Yahweh (cf. 1 Chr 10:13-14), build the temple, and bring the ark of the covenant into the temple. David’s command about the ark was carried out by Solomon in 2 Chr 5:2-10//1 Kgs 8:1-9, making both David and Solomon responsible for this central event. The legitimacy and authority of the temple in Jerusalem are traced to the two kings of the United Monarchy.

### **1 Chr 28:2-10 The Sixth “Last Words of David”**

2. “Listen to me, my brothers and my people. I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of Yahweh and for the footstool of the feet of our God, and I had made preparations for building. 3. But God said to me, ‘You shall not build a house for my name, because you are a man of wars; you have shed blood.’ 4. Yahweh the God of Israel had chosen me from all my father’s house to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah to be leader, and within the house of Judah the house of my father, and among the sons of my father he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. 5. And from all my sons—for Yahweh has given to me many sons—he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel. 6. He said to me, ‘Solomon, your son—he will build my house and my courts for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father. 7. I will establish his kingdom forever if he is

resolute in keeping my commandments and my judgments, as at this day.’ 8. And now in the sight of all the assembly of Yahweh, and in the hearing of our God, [I say] keep and seek all the commandments of Yahweh your God so that you may possess the good land and leave it as an inheritance to your children after you forever. 9. And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing spirit for Yahweh searches longingly all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you abandon him, he will cast you off forever. 10. See now that Yahweh has chosen you to build a house for him as a sanctuary. Be strong and do it.”

David’s public address to the leaders contains divine oracles in vv. 3 and 6 and a second personal address to Solomon in vv. 9-10. The oracle in v. 3 repeats Yahweh’s decision against David building the temple because of the blood he had shed for that temple will be a “house of rest” for the ark (v. 2). David, on the other hand, is a “man of wars.” Solomon has been chosen to sit on the throne of the kingdom of Yahweh over Israel (v. 5). Solomon’s kingdom is the kingdom of God! Verse 6 designates Solomon as the temple builder and indicates that he has been chosen by Yahweh as his own son. No other writer in the Old Testament speaks of the election of any individual king after David although Deut 17:15 indicates that all kings of Israel are in principle chosen by Yahweh. In v. 7 the Chronicler makes the eternal establishment of the dynasty conditional on Solomon’s obedience (cf. again 1 Kgs 2:2-4). In 1 Chr 22:12-13 the success of Solomon himself was dependent on his obedience. David democratizes the admonition given to Solomon in 1 Chr 22:13 by insisting that the people as a whole keep the commandments of Yahweh (1 Chr 28:8). David articulates the positive and negative

consequences of the doctrine of divine retribution as it applies to Solomon's character (1 Chr 28:9). The word "perfect" in v. 9 seems to be a pun in Hebrew on the word Solomon. David urges Solomon to undertake the task of building the temple.

### **1 Chr 28:20-21 The Seventh "Last Words of David"**

20. David also said to his son Solomon, "Be strong and of good courage, and act. Do not be afraid or dismayed; for Yahweh my God is with you. He will not fail or forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of Yahweh is finished. 21. Here are the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God; and with you in all the work will be every volunteer who has skill for every kind of service; also the officers and all the people will be completely at your command."

This is the third farewell speech of David to Solomon in Chronicles (cf. 1 Chr 22:6-16 and 28:9-10). It begins with the formula of encouragement ("Be strong and of good courage") and continues with the formula of accompaniment ("Yahweh God my God is with you"). In Chronicles David assures Solomon that the people *actively* support Solomon in his work: "The officers and the people will be completely at your command." Both the people (v. 21) and Yahweh himself (v. 20) will be "with" Solomon.

### **1 Chr 29:1-5 The Eighth "Last Words of David"**

1. King David said to the whole assembly, "Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is young and inexperienced and the work is great; for the temple will not be for humans but for Yahweh God. 2. With all my strength I have provided for the house of my God gold for gold things, silver for silver things, bronze for bronze things, iron for iron things, and lumber for wooden things, and great amounts of red

carnelian, and [stones for] setting, colorful stones set into mortar to form a mosaic, and all sorts of precious stones, and stones of alabaster. 3. In addition to all I have provided for the holy house, I have treasure of my own of gold and silver, and because I take pleasure in the house of my God, I give it to the house of my God. 4. Three thousand talents of gold from the gold of Ophir, and seven thousand talents of refined silver for overlaying the walls of the chambers of the house, 5. and for all the work to be done by artisans, gold for the things of gold and silver for the things of silver. Who then will offer themselves willingly, consecrating themselves today to Yahweh?"

David's speech invites the people to give generously to the temple, following his own example (cf. 1 Chr 22:2-4). David's lavish preparations were required by the youth and inexperience of Solomon (cf. 1 Chr 22:5) and by the magnitude of the temple that was required by Yahweh (cf. 2 Chr 2:4 [EVV. 5]). Unlike Moses who merely commanded the people to give for the tabernacle, David attempts to *persuade* the assembly to be generous, as were their forebears who contributed to the tabernacle (Exod 35:21-36:7). The Chronicler may well be using the words of David to persuade his own audience to be generous in their support of the Second Temple.

### **1 Chr 29:10-19 The Ninth "Last Words of David"**

10. David blessed Yahweh before the whole assembly, and David said, "Blessed are you Yahweh, God of Israel our ancestor, forever and ever. 11. To you Yahweh belong greatness, and power, and honor, and splendor, and majesty, indeed all things in heaven and earth; yours is the kingdom, Yahweh, and you are exalted as head above all. 12.

Riches and wealth come from you, and you rule over all, and in your hand are strength and power, and it is in your power to make great and to give strength to all. 13. And now, our God, we give thanks to you and we praise your magnificent name. 14. For who am I and who is my people that we should have enough strength to make a free will offering like this? For from you comes everything, and from what comes from your hand, we have given you. 15. We are aliens before you and transients like all of our ancestors. Our days are like a shadow on the earth, and there is no hope. 16. Yahweh our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. 17. I know, my God, that you test the heart and take pleasure in uprightness. In the uprightness of my heart I have freely offered all these things, and now I have seen your people, who are present here, offering themselves joyfully to you. 18. Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, our ancestors, keep forever the inclination of the thoughts of the heart of your people and direct their heart toward you. 19. And give to Solomon my son a perfect heart to keep your commandments, your decrees, and your statutes, and to build the temple, for which I have made preparations.”

The final prayer of David in 1 Chronicles consists of three parts: praise of Yahweh for his riches and power (vv. 10b-12); thanksgiving for God’s generosity (vv. 13-17); and petitions for Yahweh to give the people and Solomon a perfect heart (vv. 18-19). The doxology appended to the Lord’s Prayer in many late manuscripts of Matt 6:13 is dependent on vv. 11-12. What the people give has previously come from God’s generous hand (vv. 14, 17). The thought of Paul is similar: “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you

boast as if it were not a gift?” (1 Cor 4:7). David credits Yahweh with providing the people and himself with the power to give freely. David’s prayer for the commitment of the people (vv. 18-19) no doubt includes the people in the audience for whom the Chronicler was writing. Such commitment can only come through divine assistance. Solomon’s God-given perfect heart—there is a pun in Hebrew between “Solomon” and a “perfect” heart—would enable him to keep the commandments and to build the temple. By mentioning once more his own preparations for building the temple, David emphasizes that the joint authority of both kings of the United Monarchy has been placed behind the temple. David’s admonitions to generosity and his prayer that the people might have a perfect heart are directed as much to the Chronicler’s audience as to the people supposedly assembled before David.

### **The Tenth “Last Words of David” (in a supplement to Chronicles)**

#### **1 Chr 23:27 The Tenth “Last Words of David”**

27. For according to the last words of David these were the number of the Levites from twenty years old and upward.

This verse, widely held to be secondary, interrupts the flow of thought between vv. 26 and 28 and ascribes Davidic authority to the change in age for the beginning of Levitical service asserted by the Chronicler in v. 24. According to v. 3, presumably taken from a source available to the Chronicler, the Levites were counted from thirty years old and upward,<sup>10</sup> but that age for the beginning of Levitical service was changed by the Chronicler to twenty years in v. 24, which seems to be the customary age for initial

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<sup>10</sup> The Book of Numbers reports that the age of Levitical service was from thirty to fifty years of age (Num 4:35-36, 39-40, 43-44, 47-48). But it also reports an alternate initial age of service at twenty-five (Num 8:24).

Levitical service elsewhere in Chronicles (cf. 2 Chr 31:17). The tenth “last words” of David put David’s authority behind that change in age.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that biblical authors ascribe ten “last words” or farewell speeches to David, but none to his royal successors. The three “Last Words” in the Deuteronomistic History paint a picture of the ideal king, articulate the retribution theology of the Deuteronomistic Historian, and enunciate David’s brutal advice to Solomon to get rid of his enemies.

The seven “Last Words of David” in Chronicles focus on Solomon as the chosen temple builder, David and the people as generous contributors to the building of the temple, assurance that Yahweh and the people are “with” Solomon, and equipment of Solomon with a perfect heart to keep Yahweh’s commandments and to build the temple. The very Last Word of David supports the Chronicler’s revision of the earliest age one could be called a Levite.

The biblical authors have utilized the parting words of Israel’s greatest king to advance their own theological agenda (Last Words 2, 4-10). While we may regret and even deplore David’s sinister advice to Solomon to get rid of his enemies (Last Word 3), we can rejoice in Last Word 1, in which David articulates a view of the human condition and of human government that is centered on justice, and which acknowledges that such virtue is only possible—for king or people--because of divine aid.

And what better last word would any of us want to leave to our family and to God’s people?