

THE MAN BETWEEN

The Man Between, Threshold, Headship, and the Crushed Head

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Published by The Bible Hour.

ISBN: 979-8-9900305-3-4

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AI Assistance Disclosure: AI tools were used to assist with drafting, editing, research support, and language refinement. All final content was reviewed, edited, and approved by the publishing team.

First published 2026.

Printed in the United States of America.

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Threshold, Headship, and the Crushed Head

A Brief Biblical Theology Through 1–2 Samuel

Dr. David Tilma



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A Brief Biblical Theology Through 1–2 Samuel

There is a moment in 1 Samuel 17 that we have all heard a hundred times. A shepherd boy walks into a valley with five smooth stones, faces a giant, and wins. We tell our children the story. We put it on Sunday school felt boards. We use it as a metaphor for whatever giant we happen to be facing this week — a difficult boss, a scary diagnosis, a financial crisis. David and Goliath has become shorthand for "underdog wins."

But the more time I spend with this text — exegeting it in Hebrew, tracing its vocabulary, following its literary connections backward and forward through the canon — the more convinced I am that we have been reading it too small. The biblical author is not telling us a story about courage. He is not even primarily telling us a story about David. He is telling us a story about the whole Bible. He is showing us, in one stunning narrative, how God has been saving His people from the very beginning and how He will finally save them in the end.

To see it, we must learn to read three threads at once: threshold, headship, and the crushed head. These three ideas converge in 1 Samuel 17 with a force that is difficult to overstate. But they do not begin there, and they do not end there. They stretch from the opening chapters of

Genesis to the final pages of Revelation, and the books of Samuel sit at the center of the arc — the place where the pattern is most fully displayed in narrative form. Once you see these threads woven together, you can never read the Bible the same way again.

What follows is an attempt to trace these threads — carefully, exegetically, and with appropriate humility. Some of what I will suggest is well-established in biblical scholarship. Some of it is constructive biblical theology — the work of reading the canon's own internal connections and following where they lead. I will try to be honest about the difference. But I am convinced that the connections are real, that the biblical authors intended them, and that they represent the author's intent (both the author of 1–2 Samuel and THE author).

A PROMISE IN A GARDEN

It begins, as everything does, in Genesis. After the serpent has slithered into the garden and the world has come undone, God speaks a promise. He addresses the serpent directly:

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
(Genesis 3:15, ESV)*

This is the first gospel sermon ever preached, and it has been called the protoevangelium — the "first good news." Notice carefully what God promises. The conflict will continue. There will be a long struggle between two seeds, two lines, two kingdoms. But the outcome is settled. The seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head. The serpent will manage only a wound to the heel. The decisive blow will come from above, and it will fall on the head.

The Hebrew verb here — shoof (שׁוּף) — is used for both the crushing and the bruising. But the targets are different: rosh (רֹאשׁ) (head) versus akev (עֲקֵב) (heel). One blow is fatal; the other is painful but survivable. The asymmetry is the whole point. The serpent will wound. The seed will destroy.

Already in Genesis 3, three threads are introduced that will run through the rest of Scripture. There is a threshold — Eden's gate, soon to be guarded by cherubim and a flaming sword, the first sacred boundary in the Bible. There is headship — Adam stands as the representative of all humanity, and his failure becomes ours; the entire human race falls in its federal head. And there is the promise of a

crushed head — the serpent's defeat is guaranteed, and it will come through a descendant of the woman.

From this moment on, the Bible traces the story of how God keeps that promise. And the story is told, repeatedly, at thresholds.

Let's observe one more detail before we leave Eden. After the fall, God stations cherubim at the east gate of the garden with a flaming sword that turns every direction (Genesis 3:24). The threshold is now guarded. The way back into God's presence is blocked. Sacred space has a boundary, and that boundary cannot be crossed without consequence. This is the beginning of threshold theology — the idea that the liminal space, the boundary, the doorway, is the place where divine power is displayed, where judgment falls, and where redemption is enacted.

Even in Genesis 4, the threshold reappears. God warns Cain: "Sin is crouching at the door" (Genesis 4:7). The Hebrew *petach* (פֶּתַח) — "doorway, opening" — places sin in the posture of a predator at a threshold. The serpent's seed is always trying to cross the boundary. The threshold is always contested.

BLOOD AT THE DOORWAY

Fast-forward several centuries. Israel is in Egypt, enslaved and suffering. God is about to deliver them, and He chooses to do it in a way that no one would have invented. He commands every Israelite household to slaughter a lamb and to apply its blood to the doorframe of the house — the doorposts and the lintel. That night the destroyer will pass through Egypt, and only the homes marked by blood will be spared.

*"Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you."
(Exodus 12:22–23, ESV)*

Stop and notice what is happening here. God could have saved His people in any number of ways. He could have hidden them, transported them, made them invisible. Instead, He saves them at the threshold of their own homes, and He saves them by blood. The doorway becomes the altar. The home becomes a temple. The destroyer — that shadowy figure called ha-mashchit (הַמַּשְׁחִית) in the Hebrew — cannot cross the boundary marked by lamb's blood.

The Hebrew of Exodus 12 is saturated with threshold language. There are mezuzot (מְזוּזוֹת) (doorposts) and mashkoph (מַשְׁקוֹף) (lintel) and petach (פֶּתַח) (doorway), and

there is a fascinating word — saph (שַׁף) — that can mean either "basin" or "threshold." Some scholars, notably Umberto Cassuto in his commentary on Exodus, have argued that the saph here may refer to the threshold itself — that the blood was caught in the hollow of the doorsill, marking all four boundaries of the doorway. Whether or not that reading is correct, the entire scene is dripping with threshold theology. Blood, doorway, doorposts, lintel — every word is liminal.

And throughout both testaments, we see the same pattern repeated: the threshold is where the battle is fought, and blood is the means of victory. The destroyer in Egypt is, in some real sense, the seed of the serpent. He moves where the serpent moved — across boundaries, into sacred space, against God's people. And he is stopped, as he will always be stopped, at the threshold marked by blood.

One more detail worth noting: the instrument of application is hyssop (Exodus 12:22). This humble plant — used for sprinkling blood on the threshold — will reappear at the cross. In John 19:29, a sponge of sour wine is lifted to Jesus on a hyssop branch. The same instrument that applied the lamb's blood to the doorframe appears at the moment the true Lamb's blood is shed. John is writing threshold theology.

A PATTERN BUILDING TOWARD SAMUEL

Once you start looking for thresholds in the Old Testament, you find them everywhere. Israel crosses the Red Sea — a watery threshold from slavery to freedom. They cross the Jordan — another watery threshold into the promised land. They walk around the walls of Jericho — a city that is itself a threshold — and the walls collapse. The tabernacle they carry is a series of nested thresholds, each one more sacred than the last: courtyard, holy place, holy of holies.

And along the way, heads start getting crushed.

In Judges 4 and 5, a Canaanite general named Sisera flees from battle and finds shelter in the tent of a woman named Jael. While he sleeps, she drives a tent peg through his temple. The song of Deborah in Judges 5:26 celebrates it: "She struck Sisera; she crushed his head; she shattered and pierced his temple." The Hebrew word is *machatsah* (מַחֲצָה) — "she crushed." A woman crushes the enemy's head. Genesis 3:15 is being enacted — the seed of the woman, acting through a woman, crushes the head of the oppressor.

In Judges 9, a tyrant named Abimelech is besieging a city when a woman drops a millstone from the wall and crushes his skull. Abimelech, dying, begs his armor-bearer to finish him so it won't be said that a woman killed him. He understands the shame of dying as the serpent's seed dies — head-crushed by the seed of the woman.

The pattern is building. The promise from Genesis 3 is not abstract. It is being acted out in history, again and again, in real time. The seed of the woman crushes the serpent's head. And often, it happens at a threshold — a wall, a tent doorway, a contested boundary.

Threshold, Headship, and the Crushed Head

By the time we reach 1 Samuel, the pattern is ready to climax.

THE BOOK OF THRESHOLDS

Before we get to David and Goliath, we need to see that the books of Samuel are, from their opening sentence to their closing scene, a sustained meditation on thresholds. The author of Samuel is theologically obsessed with liminal spaces — doorways, gates, valleys, river crossings, and the in-between zones where divine encounters and judgments occur. This is not accidental. Samuel is the book of transition — from judges to monarchy, from Saul to David, from tent to temple, from chaos to covenant. And transitions happen at thresholds.

The book opens with a woman at a doorpost:

*"Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was
sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of
the temple of the LORD."
(1 Samuel 1:9, ESV)*

The Hebrew here is *mezuzat* (מְזֻזָּה) — "doorpost." The same vocabulary from the Passover narrative. Hannah prays at the threshold of the tabernacle, and her prayer transitions Israel from the era of judges to the era of monarchy. The new era begins at a threshold. And notice: Eli sits at the threshold too. He is the threshold-keeper — the priest whose job is to guard the sacred boundary. But as we will soon learn, Eli has failed in this role. His sons have profaned the threshold. The priesthood is compromised. The threshold is unguarded.

A few chapters later, Eli dies at a threshold. When the news comes that the Ark has been captured by the Philistines, Eli is sitting "by the side of the gate" (1 Samuel 4:18). He falls backward off his seat and breaks his neck. The failed priest dies at the threshold — falling backward, away from the

sacred space he was supposed to guard. Hold that image — a man falling backward at a gate — because the next chapter will show us a god falling forward at a threshold. The directional contrast is deliberate. Eli falls away from God's presence; Dagon falls toward it, involuntarily worshipping.

Between these two scenes — Hannah's prayer at the doorpost and the closing scene of 2 Samuel — the narrator will place threshold after threshold, each one revealing something about God's character, human faithfulness, and the coming King. The book will close, in 2 Samuel 24, with David at a threshing floor — the threshing floor of Araunah, which will become the site of the temple. A threshing floor is a threshold space, a place of separation and encounter, open to the sky, elevated above the surrounding terrain. Samuel opens with Hannah at the tabernacle doorpost and closes with David at the future temple site. The entire book is framed by threshold encounters. It is an *inclusio* that whispers: pay attention to the boundaries.

DAGON AT THE THRESHOLD

Now we come to one of the most theologically rich scenes in the entire Old Testament — and one that is often passed over too quickly. In 1 Samuel 4, the Philistines capture the Ark of the Covenant in battle. They drag it to the city of Ashdod and set it up in the temple of their god Dagon, like a trophy. They want everyone to know that their god has defeated Israel's God. The Ark is placed beside Dagon — as if the two were equals, or worse, as if Dagon were the victor and the Ark his prize.

But the next morning, when the priests come to open the temple, they find something unexpected:

*"And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place."
(1 Samuel 5:3, ESV)*

The Philistines prop Dagon back up. Perhaps they tell themselves it was an accident — an earthquake, a gust of wind, a poorly balanced statue. They set him upright and go about their business. But the next morning removes all ambiguity:

"But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of

Dagon in Ashdod to this day."
(1 Samuel 5:4–5, ESV)

This scene demands careful, patient attention, because it is doing far more theological work than it first appears. It is, in fact, the template for everything that follows in 1 Samuel 17.

First, notice the posture. Dagon falls face downward — the Hebrew is *nofel al-panav artzah* (נָפַל עַל־פָּנָיו אֶרְצָה). This is the posture of worship and submission. Throughout the Old Testament, falling on one's face is the response to divine presence (cf. Numbers 16:4; Joshua 5:14; Ezekiel 1:28). The false god is involuntarily worshiping before the presence of Yahweh. He has no choice. Every knee bows — even the knees of idols. What the Philistines intended as a display of Dagon's superiority has become a display of Dagon's submission.

Second, notice the progression. On the first night, Dagon merely falls. On the second night, he is dismembered. God gives the Philistines one night to interpret the sign. They refuse. So the second night brings escalation. This is a pattern we see throughout Scripture — God gives space for repentance, and when it does not come, judgment intensifies. The first fall was a warning. The second fall was a verdict.

Third, notice the decapitation. Dagon's head and hands are cut off. The head represents authority, identity, and rulership. The hands represent power, action, and agency. Dagon is stripped of both. He is reduced to a stump — a trunk without agency, a body without a head. This is not random violence. This is systematic theological dismantling. The false god is de-headed and de-handed.

His authority is removed. His power is nullified. He cannot rule (no head) and he cannot act (no hands). He is, in the most literal sense, nothing.

Fourth, notice the location. The head and hands are lying on the threshold — the Hebrew *miphtan* (מִפְתָּן). Not on the floor of the temple generally, but specifically on the threshold. The doorway of Dagon's own house becomes the place of his humiliation. His own sacred boundary becomes the monument to his defeat. In the ancient Near East, the threshold of a temple was considered the most sacred part of the building — the boundary between the profane world and the divine presence. For Dagon's dismembered parts to lie on his own threshold is the ultimate desecration. His sacred space has become his graveyard.

Fifth, notice the memorial. The text adds that "to this day" the priests of Dagon do not step on the threshold. They have created a permanent ritual of avoidance. They acknowledge the power that was displayed there, but they do not understand it. Their response is superstitious fear, not covenant faith. They know something happened at the threshold, but they cannot interpret it. They avoid the threshold rather than submitting to the God who acted there. This is the difference between religion and faith — religion avoids the threshold; faith crosses it.

Sixth, and most importantly, notice who did this. No human being fought Dagon. No Israelite champion entered the temple. No warrior swung a sword. Yahweh's presence — embodied in the Ark — defeated the false god without lifting a human hand. This is pure divine action. The Ark did not need a warrior. It needed only to be present. The

presence of the true God is sufficient to decapitate the false god at his own threshold.

Now hold all of this in your mind — the face-down posture, the decapitation, the threshold location, the divine victory without conventional weapons — because we are about to see every single element repeated in 1 Samuel 17. The narrator is setting up a deliberate parallel. Dagon's defeat is the template for Goliath's defeat. The author wants us to read the two scenes together.

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We come now to the heart of the matter.

The Philistines and Israel are arrayed for battle in the Valley of Elah. Between the two armies stands a single figure. The Hebrew text introduces him with a phrase that is far more theologically loaded than most English translations convey:

"And there came out from the camp of the Philistines a champion named Goliath of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span." (1 Samuel 17:4, ESV)

The word translated "champion" is *ish ha-benayim* (יִשׁ הַבְּנָיִם) — literally, "the man of the between-spaces." The term *benayim* is a rare dual-form noun from the root *ben* (between). It refers to the no-man's-land, the contested zone, the threshold space between two armies. Goliath is not defined by his strength or his size in this phrase. He is defined by his position. He is the man who occupies the liminal space. He is the threshold-dweller. He is the man who stands where no one else dares to stand.

This is the language of representative combat — what scholars call *monomachia*. The fate of two nations rests on one individual. Goliath stands in the *benayim* as the federal head of Philistia. If he wins, Israel serves the Philistines. If Israel's champion wins, Philistia serves Israel. The rules are explicit:

"Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and

*kill him, then you shall be our servants
and serve us." (1 Samuel 17:8–9, ESV)*

This is headship made visible. One man represents many. One man's victory or defeat is imputed to the whole. The benayim is not just a physical space — it is a theological space. It is the place where representation is enacted, where federal headship is tested, where the fate of nations is decided. It is, in the deepest sense, a threshold — the contested boundary between two kingdoms, two peoples, two gods.

*"He had a helmet of bronze on his head,
and he was armed with a coat of mail,
and the weight of the coat was five
thousand shekels of bronze."
(1 Samuel 17:5, ESV)*

The phrase "coat of mail" translates shiryon qasqassim (שָׁרְיוֹן קַשְׁקָשִׁים) — literally, "armor of scales." The word qasqassim is used elsewhere in the Old Testament primarily for fish scales (Leviticus 11:9–10; Deuteronomy 14:9–10) and for the scales of great sea-creatures. In Ezekiel 29:4, the same root describes the scales of Pharaoh depicted as a great river-monster — a chaos-creature, a Leviathan figure. In Job 41:15, it describes the impenetrable scales of Leviathan itself — the great sea-serpent that represents cosmic chaos and evil.

Goliath does not just look big. He looks serpentine. He is a walking embodiment of the serpent's seed, clad in dragon-like armor, standing in the threshold, taunting the people of God. The author of Samuel wants us to see this. He is showing us a serpent in scale armor, a Dagon in human form — the Philistine god's theology made flesh. Where Dagon was a statue, Goliath is the living champion. Where

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Dagon stood in a temple, Goliath stands in the benayim.
The connection is intentional.

FAITH CROSSES THE THRESHOLD

For forty days, the Philistine came forward and took his stand, morning and evening (1 Samuel 17:16). Forty days — the biblical number of testing. The same duration as the flood, Moses on Sinai, Elijah's journey, Jesus' temptation. The threshold is contested for a full period of testing, and no one will cross it. Saul, the king who is supposed to be Israel's federal head — the tallest man in Israel, chosen precisely for his physical stature (1 Samuel 9:2; 10:23) — stays in his tent. Physical stature without faith is useless at the bēnayim.

Then a shepherd boy arrives. He has come to bring food to his brothers — cheese and bread, an errand from his father. He is not a soldier. But he hears the giant's taunts, and his response is not fear but theological outrage:

*"What shall be done for the man who kills
this Philistine and takes away the
reproach from Israel? For who is this
uncircumcised Philistine, that he should
defy the armies of the living God?"
(1 Samuel 17:26, ESV)*

David's objection is not military. It is covenantal. Goliath is outside the covenant. He has no standing before Yahweh. He is, in the language of Genesis 3:15, the seed of the serpent. David's faith is not self-confidence; it is God-confidence. He sees the bēnayim not as a place of danger but as a place where God's honor is at stake — and where God's honor has always been vindicated.

When Saul offers David his armor, David refuses it — he will not fight in the armor of failed kingship.

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And then David crosses the threshold:

"When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:48, ESV)

He runs. He does not hesitate. He does not creep. He runs toward the benayim, toward the contested threshold, toward the serpent in scale armor. This is what faith looks like — not the absence of danger, but the willingness to cross the threshold because of who God is. Where Israel cowered for forty days, David sprints. Where Saul hid in his tent, David charges. The threshold that paralyzed the faithless is the very place the faithful run toward.

David's speech before the battle is the theological center of the entire chapter:

"You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand." (1 Samuel 17:45-47, ESV)

Notice several things. First, David announces the decapitation before it happens. He is not merely predicting the outcome. He is declaring the Genesis 3:15 verdict. The serpent's head will be crushed. Second, notice the purpose clause: "that all the earth may know that there is a God in

Israel." The bēnayim is a theater — a stage where the true God is revealed before the watching world. Third, notice the theological principle: "the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's." This echoes the Dagon narrative perfectly. The power is not in the instrument. The power is in the God who acts through weakness.

THE STONE, THE FOREHEAD, AND THE FALL

Then comes the moment:

"And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground." (1 Samuel 17:49, ESV)

A stone strikes the forehead of the serpent's representative, and he falls face-down — the Hebrew is wayyippol al-panav artzah. Compare this with 1 Samuel 5:3: nofel... al-panav artzah — fallen face-down on the ground. The construction is nearly identical. The parallel is unmistakable. Dagon fell face-down before the Ark. Goliath falls face-down before David. The false god and the false champion die the same death, in the same posture, by the same divine power.

And notice: the stone strikes the forehead — metsach (מֵצָח). Not the chest. Not the arm. The forehead — the head. Genesis 3:15 promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. David's stone finds the one exposed place on the scale-armored giant: his forehead. The head is struck. The serpent falls.

The text then adds a remarkable editorial comment: "There was no sword in the hand of David." The narrator wants us to feel the parallel to 1 Samuel 5. No human weapon defeated Dagon — just the presence of the Ark. No conventional weapon defeats Goliath — just a stone and a sling. The theological heart of the story: the battle is the LORD's.

Then the decapitation:

*"Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled."
(1 Samuel 17:51, ESV)*

David kills the giant with the giant's own weapon. He uses the serpent's sword to sever the serpent's head. This detail is not incidental. It is deeply theological. The enemy's weapon is turned against him. The instrument of death becomes the instrument of liberation. This will echo forward into the New Testament, where Christ destroys death by dying:

*"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."
(Hebrews 2:14, ESV)*

And then the federal consequence: the whole army flees. Not because they were individually defeated. They flee because their head has fallen. Their representative is dead. Their federal champion lies face-down with his head severed. When the head falls, the body falls with it. This is headship theology in narrative form. This is imputation made visible.

Israel's victory is total — and Israel did nothing to earn it. They stood on the hillside and watched. Their representative crossed the threshold, crushed the serpent's head, and the victory was credited to them. David's victory is Israel's victory. The head's triumph is the body's triumph.

THE HEAD CARRIED TO JERUSALEM

One more detail deserves attention:

*"And David took the head of the Philistine
and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put
his armor in his tent."
(1 Samuel 17:54, ESV)*

This is a strange detail, because at this point in the narrative, Jerusalem does not yet belong to Israel. It is still a Jebusite city. David will not conquer it until 2 Samuel 5. So why does the narrator mention it here?

Because the narrator is thinking typologically. He is connecting Goliath's severed head to the future city of God. The trophy of the serpent's defeat is carried to the place where God's throne will be established. The head that was crushed in the bēnayim is displayed in the city of the great King. This is anticipatory — it points forward to a day when the serpent's defeat will be complete and the King will reign from Zion.

THE PATTERN CONTINUES THROUGH SAMUEL

The David-Goliath narrative is the climax, but it is not the end. The pattern of decapitation at thresholds continues through the rest of 1–2 Samuel with a consistency that is difficult to dismiss as coincidence.

Saul's death mirrors both Dagon and Goliath. In 1 Samuel 31, Saul falls on his own sword on Mount Gilboa, and the Philistines cut off his head and put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth. Saul — the king who refused to be the true federal head, who would not cross the benayim — ends his life decapitated. His armor goes to a pagan temple, just as the Ark was once placed in Dagon's temple. The narrator is making a theological judgment: Saul dies the death of Dagon. The failed head suffers the serpent's fate.

Ish-bosheth, Saul's son and would-be successor, is murdered in his bed and decapitated, his head brought to David at Hebron (2 Samuel 4:7–8). Absalom, who tried to usurp David's throne, dies suspended between heaven and earth — his head caught in the branches of an oak — in his own grotesque benayim. He is not a true head. He is a pretender. And pretenders to headship die at thresholds in this book.

Five named figures lose their heads in 1–2 Samuel: Dagon, Goliath, Saul, Ish-bosheth, and Sheba. Every single one is a figure who either claims false headship or represents the serpent's power. Every single one dies at or near a threshold. The narrator is using head-loss at thresholds as a theological signature for divine judgment on false representation.

DAVID'S OWN THRESHOLD FAILURES

But David is not a perfect type. The narrator is honest about this, and the threshold motif reveals it with devastating clarity.

In 2 Samuel 11, David is on his rooftop — a liminal space between heaven and earth, between public and private — when he sees Bathsheba. The man who once ran toward the bēnayim in faith now crosses a moral threshold in lust. The contrast is devastating. In chapter 17, David crossed the threshold to bring life and liberation. In chapter 11, David crosses the threshold to bring death and destruction.

And immediately, the threshold motif exposes him. Uriah — a Hittite, a foreigner, a man who should have less covenant loyalty than David — refuses to cross his own threshold. He sleeps at the petach (פתח) — the doorway — of the king's house rather than going home to his wife while his brothers are in the field. The outsider keeps the threshold faithfully. The Israelite king violates it. The narrator is using threshold theology to judge David — and to show us that David, for all his faithfulness in chapter 17, is not the final answer. We need a better Man Between.

**THE INCLUSIO: FROM DOORPOST TO
THRESHING FLOOR**

The book of Samuel opens with Hannah at the doorpost of the tabernacle (1 Samuel 1:9) and closes with David at the threshing floor of Araunah (2 Samuel 24:18–25). Both are threshold encounters. Both involve prayer and sacrifice. Both transition Israel to a new era. Both mark the place where heaven and earth meet.

The threshing floor where David builds his altar will become the site of Solomon's temple (2 Chronicles 3:1). The book of Samuel ends at the threshold of the temple — the place where the veil will hang, where the holy of holies will rest, where the presence of God will dwell among His people. Threshold to threshold. Prayer to sacrifice. Barrenness to abundance. The whole story is told between two sacred boundaries.

THE TRUE MAN BETWEEN

All of this — every threshold, every crushed head, every act of representation — points beyond itself. David is a type, but he is not the fulfillment. He crosses the benayim in faith, but he also crosses moral boundaries in failure. He crushes the serpent's head, but he cannot crush his own sin. He represents Israel in the valley, but he cannot save them eternally. The book of Samuel leaves us with a longing: we need a true Man Between.

We need a representative who will cross every threshold faithfully, who will crush the serpent's head finally, whose victory will be imputed to His people permanently.

That brings us to the cross.

When Jesus walked into His final week, He crossed the same Kidron Valley that David crossed in flight (compare 2 Samuel 15:23 with John 18:1). He went to a garden — the second Adam undoing the work of the first, returning to the threshold where humanity first fell. He was lifted up between heaven and earth — the true benayim — suspended on a cross between two criminals. A crown of thorns — the very thorns that came up from Eden's curse (Genesis 3:18) — was pressed into His head. The seed of the woman was bruised on the heel by the serpent. And in being crushed, He crushed the serpent's head forever.

At the moment Jesus died, the temple veil — the great threshold between God and humanity, the boundary that had stood since the tabernacle was first erected — was torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). The threshold that had been guarded by cherubim since Eden was now opened by blood.

Threshold, Headship, and the Crushed Head

*"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."
(Hebrews 2:14–15, ESV)*

Christ defeated the serpent with the serpent's own weapon — just as David killed Goliath with Goliath's own sword. Death was turned against itself. The enemy's instrument became the means of his undoing.

And the federal consequence is the same as in the Valley of Elah. When the head falls, the body is freed. Christ's victory is imputed to His people. We did not fight. We stood on the hillside, paralyzed, for far longer than forty days. But our representative crossed the threshold. Our federal head crushed the serpent. And His victory is credited to us:

"For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:19, ESV)

This is the gospel in the language of headship. This is 1 Samuel 17 fulfilled. This is Genesis 3:15 kept. The Man Between has come, and He has won.

And Jesus, in His own words, became the threshold itself:

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." (John 10:9, ESV)

Christ did not just cross the threshold for us. He is the threshold. He is the true Man Between — between God and

THE MAN BETWEEN

humanity, between heaven and earth, between life and death. He is the federal head whose victory is imputed to His people. He is the seed of the woman who has crushed the serpent's head. He is the Stone the builders rejected, the cornerstone of a new temple, the rock cut without hands that crushes every false kingdom (Daniel 2:34). David's stone was a whisper. Christ is the shout.

THE THRESHOLD COMMUNITY

Paul writes to the Roman church and says something startling:

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." (Romans 16:20, ESV)

Did you hear that? Under your feet. The promise of Genesis 3:15 is not just about Christ acting alone in the past. It is about the people who are united to Christ acting in the present. We are the seed of the woman now, by union with Him. We are head-crushers. We are threshold-crossers. We carry the victory of the Man Between into every dark and contested place.

The church gathers regularly at the Lord's Table — the new Passover meal. We eat the bread and drink the cup "in remembrance" of the Lamb whose blood marks our threshold. Christ our Passover has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:7). We are baptized — crossing through water as Israel crossed the Sea and the Jordan. We put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6) — not Saul's armor, but God's own provision for the benayim we face daily.

This means something for how we live. Every threshold in your life — every fearful conversation, every act of obedience, every hard step into a hostile world — is a place where Christ has already won. The serpent's head is already crushed. The destroyer cannot cross where Christ's blood is applied. When you stand at the edge of your own benayim, paralyzed like Israel was for forty days, you do not face it alone. Your federal Head has already crossed. His victory is your victory. His blood marks your doorway. His hand has crushed the head that taunts you.

THE MAN BETWEEN

We do not run toward our thresholds in our own strength. We run because He ran first. We cross because He crossed first. We are not David — we are Israel on the hillside, watching our champion fight. But because He has won, we advance. Because the head has fallen, the body moves forward. Because the representative has conquered, the represented inherit the spoils.

THE OPEN GATES

And the day is coming when every threshold will finally open. John saw it in his vision: a city with no temple, because God Himself is the temple. A city whose gates are never shut:

*"And its gates will never be shut by day —
and there will be no night there."
(Revelation 21:25, ESV)*

The threshold theology of the whole Bible resolves there — in the open gates of the New Jerusalem. No more contested benayim. No more serpent at the door. No more destroyer passing through. No more veil between God and His people. The cherubim who guarded Eden's gate have stepped aside. The threshold is open, permanently, because the head has been crushed, permanently. The dragon — that ancient serpent (Revelation 12:9) — has been thrown into the lake of fire. Genesis 3:15 is complete.

From Eden's closed gate to Jerusalem's open gates — that is the arc of the Bible. And 1 Samuel 17 sits near the center of that arc, showing us in vivid narrative what God has been doing all along and what He will finally accomplish in Christ. The Man Between stands in the valley, a stone in his hand, and the whole story of redemption is contained in that single moment.

CONCLUSION

So the next time you read about a shepherd boy with a sling, slow down. You are not reading a children's story. You are not reading a motivational tale about facing your fears. You are watching the gospel enacted in the Valley of Elah. You are watching a stone strike a forehead. You are watching a serpent in scale armor fall face-down at a threshold. You are watching Genesis 3:15 keep its promise. You are watching a federal head win a victory that will be credited to a people who did not fight.

And you are being shown, in narrative form, what Christ has done for you and what the end of all things will be.

The Man Between has come. The serpent's head is crushed. The threshold is open.

Walk through.

Psalm 24

A Psalm of David

- 1** *The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,*
- 2** *for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.*
- 3** *Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?*
- 4** *He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.*
- 5** *He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.*
- 6** *Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob.*
- 7** *Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*
- 8** *Who is this King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle!*
- 9** *Lift up your heads, O gates!
And lift them up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*
- 10** *Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts,
he is the King of glory!*

(ESV)