BookGist Summary

Gangstas and the Laws of Kings: Whose chess piece are you?

by Dayvaughn Mays

Key Takeaways

• The book's central question—"Whose chess piece are you?"—asks readers to consider whether gang members are exercising independent judgment or being used by leaders to advance a violent organization's interests.

• The author argues that gangs can function like kingdoms, with leaders, codes, recruits, territory, resources, and punishments, but that this structure does not make them legitimate or beneficial to their communities.

• Leadership should be measured by service, justice, self-control, and accountability—not by reputation, force, wealth, or the ability to command followers. The book uses biblical kings such as David, Solomon, and Rehoboam to illustrate contrasting models.

• The book challenges the attractions of gang life—belonging, status, money, protection, and excitement—by emphasizing its consequences: incarceration, death, trauma, financial costs, and harm that spreads to families and neighborhoods.

• Drawing on biblical passages, the author presents self-discipline, wise counsel, study, and adherence to moral law as alternatives to impulsive behavior and self-made street codes.

• Gang recruitment, especially the use of children and teenagers for dangerous tasks, is treated as a major point of intervention. The author urges adults to offer young people education, trades, family support, and constructive roles instead.

• Conflict prevention requires leaders to address tensions early, seek counsel, communicate carefully, and practice repentance and forgiveness; retaliatory violence, the author argues, prolongs grief rather than restoring what was lost.

• The book calls for readers to examine the effects of their choices on partners, children, relatives, and neighbors, while encouraging communities to build pathways toward lawful work, learning, and responsible leadership.

• The author uses the gang crackdown in El Salvador as a provocative case study, asking what communities should do when violence persists. The discussion raises questions about public safety and government power but does not provide a detailed policy comparison.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is aimed especially at current and former gang members, young people exposed to gang recruitment, parents, mentors, community activists, and religious or neighborhood leaders who want to discuss violence, accountability, and prevention. Readers interested in the author's personal experience of Denver street life and his use of biblical passages to question gang status and leadership may find its direct, conversational approach engaging. It can also serve as a discussion starter for groups seeking to connect moral reflection with practical conversations about mentoring, education, conflict prevention, and leaving gang life. Readers should approach the book as a personal, faith-centered argument rather than as a comprehensive social-science study or policy guide. Unlike research-oriented books on gangs, it does not systematically assess the evidence behind its explanations or compare interventions in depth; unlike many general self-help books, it makes scripture and biblical kingship its main framework. Its candid voice and strong moral stance may prompt useful discussion, while some of its claims—particularly on gender, race, social programs, and theology—are broad or judgmental and merit critical examination.

Chapter Summaries

Who Wants This Gang Life?

The author opens by confronting readers with the costs of gang involvement: prison, early death, crowded emergency rooms, grieving relatives, court and hospital bills, and lost opportunities. He uses irony to contrast those outcomes with education, work, marriage, travel, and family life, asking why anyone would choose a path that can make a cell seem like a substitute for a home. The questions are grounded in his own account of growing up in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood, where movies and neighborhood rituals made gang life look

frightening but exciting to him as a child. The account connects that experience to Denver's 1993 "Summer of Violence," the presence of gangs in several neighborhoods, and the lasting effects of shootings, feuds, and fear. The chapter also questions the appeal of being a "Baller": money and possessions can create status, but may bring jealousy, conflict, arrest, or death. The author contrasts criminal celebrity with community service and urges readers to consider what kind of example they are setting. His practical challenge is to replace recruitment into violence with support for young people, families, education, and neighborhood responsibility.

Do We Even Know What a Gangsta Is?

This chapter defines "gangster," "law," "king," and "chess" before asking whether gangs resemble kingdoms that use young or inexperienced people as pieces in a leader's strategy. Through biblical examples, including Nimrod and Abimelech, the author distinguishes building an organized community from building power through bloodshed, theft, or deception. He argues that having rules and meetings does not by itself make a gang's structure just or sustainable: illegal enterprises remain vulnerable to arrest and internal conflict, and their apparent order can conceal harm to the surrounding community. A recurring theme is the need for counsel and self-examination. The author contrasts wise leadership and accountability with people who justify harmful conduct by claiming to acknowledge God, while citing passages that warn against boastfulness, group pressure, and doing whatever seems right in one's own eyes. He also discusses how street status, money, protection, and belonging can attract members, and compares the lure of visible prosperity with its less visible costs. The chapter encourages readers to ask what they serve, whether their choices align with their values, and whether a gang's influence creates safety and opportunity—or fear, violence, and division.

Why Do People Want a King and Why Do They Wish to Be Ruled Over?

Using the biblical account of Israel asking for a king in 1 Samuel, the author explores why people seek a powerful leader: they want judgment, protection, direction, and someone to fight on their behalf. The passage also warns that a ruler may take people's labor, resources, and freedom. The author applies this tension to gang leadership, arguing that followers may accept control without fully considering what the leader can demand or what responsibilities come with authority. He contrasts a human ruler's limits with the book's religious claim that God is the ultimate king and that earthly leadership should be judged by character rather than appearance. The chapter turns the idea of rulership inward: before trying to control a group, a person should learn to govern their own anger, impulses, and behavior. The author presents moral instruction as a guide for that work and emphasizes that people have different roles and abilities; not everyone should seek the crown. Examples of David, Solomon, and Gideon illustrate leadership as a responsibility requiring judgment, humility, and service rather than status. Readers are invited to ask whether they need a gang leader to supply guidance or

resources that could be found through family, mentors, faith, education, or lawful community support.

Rules of Engagement

This section adapts several biblical requirements for an Israelite king into questions about gang leadership. It asks whether a leader was chosen by a legitimate process, belongs to the community he governs, avoids excessive materialism, resists distractions that compromise judgment, and studies the laws he expects others to follow. The author uses the biblical limits on horses, wives, and wealth as metaphors for the risks of ego, outside influences, sexual entanglements, and personal enrichment. He repeatedly asks whether a gang's leader follows the same rules imposed on members and whether the organization's code protects people or mainly preserves the leader's power. The chapter also stresses that the king's obligation is not simply to issue commands: he must know the law, remain accountable to it, and avoid setting himself above the people. The author supports this with the instruction that a ruler should keep a copy of the law and read it throughout life. His poems restate the same ideas in street-oriented language, connecting wealth and status to temptation and warning that a leader's private choices can influence an entire group. The practical takeaway is to evaluate leadership by its process, discipline, and service—not by charisma, strength, or possessions.

Bloodline or Election

This chapter asks how leadership is established and transferred: through family ties, election, reputation, or force. The author compares the biblical idea of a ruler emerging from among the people with questions about whether a gang leader genuinely represents the neighborhood and whether members have any say in who leads. Readers are prompted to examine an organization's purpose, rules, finances, treatment of women, and expectations of members. Biblical examples of both harmful and just rulers underscore that authority can produce very different outcomes, and that not all people called "O.G." are alike. Succession and accountability are central concerns. The author asks what happens when a leader dies, steps down, has no heir, or loses the people's trust; a change in leadership may also mean a change in rules. He contrasts hereditary succession with the possibility of removing a leader for misconduct and emphasizes the importance of wise advisers. Biblical women who served as queens, judges, and prophets are cited to establish that leadership is not limited to men, though the author also makes gendered claims about leadership styles. The section closes by directing readers toward constructive former members and resources for leaving gang life, rather than treating prison or death as the only possible ending.

O.G.s and Repeat Offenders

The author challenges the status attached to becoming an "O.G." by asking what the title is actually earned through: fights, drug sales, shootings, arrests, or repeated returns to jail. He contrasts a reputation built on criminal experience with the responsibilities of leadership

shown in biblical stories, particularly David's administration of justice and Solomon's request for wisdom to govern. A worthy leader, in this framework, seeks understanding, listens to advisers, teaches the law, and serves the people; a leader who prizes ego, anger, or personal gain puts followers and the wider community at risk. The section connects repeated offending to the cycle of bad counsel, peer pressure, intoxication, pride, and refusal to accept correction. It challenges the street code against "snitching" by citing biblical duties to tell the truth and not bear false witness, while distinguishing truthful testimony from lying or accusing the innocent. The author also condemns taking revenge into one's own hands and argues that unequal or partial justice can deepen resentment. His proposed "set trippin with the intellect" redirects collective energy toward learning and self-improvement rather than criminal planning. The chapter's core question is whether a person wants the harms and responsibilities associated with the title—or can redefine influence as service and prevention.

Enemies

This chapter focuses on the people who bear the consequences of gang conflict, including relatives and friends who may not have chosen to participate. A member can accumulate unknown enemies, and if that member is killed or imprisoned, those threats may remain around the family without the supposed protection of the gang. The author argues that a person's service to a group affects the household even when family members do not support that involvement. Biblical proverbs about greed, pride, and troubling one's own home frame the argument that illicit money and status can bring danger into the very place a person hopes to protect. The author asks readers to look beyond visible markers of success—cars, a large home, money, or children with different partners—and consider whether their conduct is creating security or conflict for those close to them. He invokes the image of a wise person building a household and contrasts it with behavior that undermines family trust. Rather than treating enemies as an unavoidable badge of status, the chapter invites members to examine the rules and choices that produce them. Its actionable point is to assess the real risks to loved ones, including after a member is no longer present, and to consider whether loyalty to an organization is worth transferring danger to a family.

Gangsta Women, Weak Women and Prostitutes

This chapter examines relationships, family life, sexual behavior, and the influence partners can have on one another. Drawing on biblical stories about Eve, Solomon, Ahab, and Jezebel, the author argues that choices within a relationship can redirect a person's values and affect an entire household. He encourages readers to consider whether a partner supports responsibility, education, and family stability or contributes to conflict and criminal behavior. The chapter also criticizes prostitution and commercialized sex, including pimping, strip clubs, and online sexual content, and cites biblical passages that condemn exploitation and the use of people for profit. The author's language about women is often judgmental and relies on rigid expectations about femininity, dress, and a woman's role in the home; those views

should be read as the author's perspective rather than as neutral description. At the same time, the chapter argues that women have substantial influence and cites women such as Deborah and Esther as examples of leadership. It also says that people involved in prostitution can change, using Rahab's story to illustrate the possibility of a new life. The broader point is to evaluate relationships by mutual respect, honesty, and their effects on family and community, rather than by appearance, money, or short-term attention.

Recruitment

The author identifies recruitment as a crucial way to interrupt gang life: if new members stop entering, existing members may eventually age out or leave, though some will remain involved for life. He is particularly concerned about adults assigning dangerous tasks to children and teenagers, whose judgment and physical development are still maturing. The chapter describes how inexperienced young people may take escalating risks to prove themselves, with incarceration or death among the likely outcomes. It calls this exploitation a serious responsibility for older members and urges adults to recognize their role in sustaining the cycle. Instead of recruiting youth into gangs, the author proposes directing them toward trades, education, creative work, healthcare, business, and other useful occupations. He argues that young people need practical instruction—not just entertainment—including literacy, mathematics, financial knowledge, taxes, and lawful ways to build resources. The chapter also discusses family guidance, the consequences of adult behavior across generations, and the importance of teaching moral and spiritual values while allowing young people to make their own choices. The author's central action step is to replace the pipeline from neighborhood neglect to prison with mentorship, skill-building, and opportunities to contribute.

Conflict Resolution

This chapter argues that gangs and communities can reduce violence by addressing disputes before they escalate. The author contrasts communication with weapons and uses biblical proverbs to emphasize that harsh words can inflame anger while a measured answer may calm it. Leaders are presented as responsible for recognizing rising tensions and acting early; failing to intervene can make them accountable for consequences they could have helped prevent. Pride, uncontrolled anger, and confidence without wisdom are described as recurring dangers, while wise leadership requires humility and a willingness to consult others. The section also stresses the importance of healing after violence. Repentance and forgiveness, the author argues, do not erase loved ones or losses, but can stop grief from becoming a new round of retaliation. He contrasts continued visits to prisons, hospitals, and funeral homes with attending graduations, weddings, and family celebrations. The chapter's religious discussion of death and the soul reflects the author's beliefs and broadens his appeal for mercy; it should not be mistaken for an evidence-based account of bereavement or an agreed theological position. The practical message is to prevent disputes where possible, seek counsel, tell the

truth, and create room for accountability and healing.

El Salvador Had a Gang Problem. This Is What Happened

The author presents El Salvador's post-2022 gang crackdown as a case study and asks what readers would do if faced with entrenched gang violence: hide, flee, renounce membership, or fight the state on behalf of the gang. The section describes the state of emergency after a deadly spike in murders, the suspension of some rights, mass arrests, prison overcrowding, and the opening of a large high-security prison. It also reports the government's claim that homicide numbers fell and notes that the crackdown was popular among many Salvadorans who were weary of violence. From there, the author asks whether a similar response could work in North America and whether communities should support or reject gang activity. He connects the discussion to concerns about education, financial hardship, substance abuse, sexual conduct, and entertainment that he believes normalizes violence. The section does not offer a sustained analysis of the crackdown's legal or human-rights costs, nor does it weigh alternative public-safety policies; it uses the example chiefly to provoke moral reflection. It returns to the book's central question: whether gang members see themselves as kings and soldiers, or as people whose choices help determine the future of their neighborhoods.

Notable Quotes

> *"“Whose chess Piece are you?”"*

> *"“One act of violence creates many victims, not just the one that was attacked.”"*

> *"“The real fight is to acquire knowledge, wisdom and understanding to realize what kingdom or gang you serve willingly or not.”"*

> *"“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”"*

> *"“The beginning of strife is like releasing water; Therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.”"*

> *"“We will never be able to get past the gang violence if we do not repent, forgive and heal.”"*

> *"“We need ethical medics and character edits”"*

Full Summary

The question “Who wants this gang life?” is posed through a series of deliberately ironic choices: helping fill prisons, sending young people to early graves, crowding emergency

rooms with frightened families, and steering promising students toward drugs and violence. Gang membership may bring attention, but the author compares that fame to a social-media moment the person may not live to witness. College, trade school, marriage, family, and seeing grandchildren are set against a cell, restitution, and a life cut short.

The author recalls wanting the gang life as a child growing up in Denver's Park Hill. At about nine, he found the film Colors and real-life "blood parties" frightening but exciting: older teenagers and men throwing gang signs, wearing bandanas, drinking, smoking, and fighting. He and many of his brothers and friends were drawn into the same atmosphere. In Denver's 1993 "Summer of Violence," the city recorded 74 homicides; gang-linked crimes included six homicides, 142 aggravated assaults, 29 simple assaults, and 18 robberies. Clubs, house parties, schools, parks, and recreation centers could all feel dangerous. The violence extended across neighborhoods, including Park Hill, Montebello, Aurora, and the west side, where the Inca Boyz were a prominent gang. The author describes how recruitment and conflict made ordinary community life feel unsafe, and how people still carried bitter memories years later.

Part of the appeal, he argues, is the image of the "Baller": someone with money, cars, jewelry, territory, and access to places or people others desire. Some ballers earn their status through legitimate business or professional sports, but the figures most celebrated in music and movies are often hustlers or criminals. Gang leaders can acquire the same glamour, but wealth and power bring jealousy, greed, disputes, and sometimes civil war. The author connects "Baal," a word associated with mastery and dominion, to the danger of idolizing such figures: a person's influence becomes destructive when people treat him as a replacement for God or a model to follow. Communities need responsible parents, relatives, and mentors, he says, rather than leaders who command admiration through fear.

He distinguishes gangs from organizations that serve their communities. The Black Panthers, in his view, fed, protected, and educated people facing oppression; he does not classify them as a stereotypical street gang. By contrast, he says, gangs such as the Crips, Bloods, 18th Street, Gangster Disciples, and Vice Lords are now associated with violence, revenge, drug money, and power, even though many members may have good hearts or come from stable homes. He suggests that people should examine what draws them in: a need for belonging, recognition, protection, or authority, or a leadership void at home and in the neighborhood. Some gangs impose racial boundaries, while the author also notes that organized racist groups can hold political influence. His point is not to divide people by race, but to ask whether the organization's actual conduct serves peace or harms its neighbors.

To define what is at stake, the author draws on dictionary descriptions: a gangster belongs to a permanent, structured criminal organization, while a gangsta can mean a member of an inner-city street gang or a performer of gangsta rap. A law is a binding community rule; a king

is a monarch or paramount chief; chess is a contest in which pieces serve the goal of checkmating the opposing king. The book's central question follows: do gang leaders use young, inexperienced members as chess pieces to advance their own aims? The author says gangs see themselves as kingdoms, demanding respect within and beyond their territory. But structure alone does not make a kingdom just. He invokes Nimrod's kingdom and warns that a city built through bloodshed and wrongdoing has a corrupted foundation. He also cautions against claiming God's approval for criminal behavior: acknowledging God while boasting about violence is, in his view, a way to evade responsibility. Self-examination and wise counsel matter because people can convince themselves that their own choices are right.

The chapter on kings begins with Israel's demand for a ruler "like all the nations." In First Samuel, Samuel warns that a king may take sons for chariots and war, daughters for royal service, the best fields and harvests, servants, livestock, and a share of the people's produce. Israel insists anyway, wanting someone to judge the people and fight their battles. The story illustrates how people may desire the security and identity of a ruler without understanding the cost of being ruled. Leadership can serve a community, but a toxic leader can exploit it.

The author argues that people should first learn to govern their own behavior. Scripture's challenge to Cain—that he must rule over sin—leads to the claim that ruling one's spirit is greater than taking a city. Law, study, and instruction provide a standard for self-control; making private rules without wise counsel can lead to preventable ruin. A gang may have codes and punishments, but those do not make its rules righteous. The author contrasts loyalty to a gang with loyalty to a moral law, asking what members are actually "down for": killing, stealing, selling drugs to relatives, or turning a blind eye to crime. He also argues that people can seek belonging through family and constructive work rather than a violent organization.

"Rules of Engagement" applies biblical rules for Israelite kings to gang leadership, using them as questions rather than claiming that gang leaders are appointed by God. First, Deuteronomy says a king should be one whom God chooses from among the people. The author asks whether a gang leader was chosen or simply appointed himself. Second, the king must be a brother, not a foreigner; he asks whether a gang leader belongs to the neighborhood and culture he claims to represent, or whether outsiders are directing the group.

Third, a king must not multiply horses or return to Egypt. The author interprets this as a warning against materialism, pride, and alliances that lead people away from their principles, then asks whether a leader's possessions or influence expose followers to danger. Fourth, a king must not multiply wives, because they may turn his heart; Solomon's many wives serve as the biblical example of a ruler whose attachments diverted him from his obligations. The author asks whether a leader's preoccupation with romantic partners creates distraction and disorder.

Fifth, the king must write and read the law throughout his life, so he does not become arrogant or turn aside from it. The comparison is to a gang leader who studies the organization's code: does he obey the same rules he enforces on others? Finally, the king must not amass excessive silver and gold. A ruler consumed by money may put personal riches ahead of the kingdom he is responsible for. The author's questions press beyond status: does wealth serve the community, or has the pursuit of it taken command?

The questions about kingship lead to a more practical test: who has the right to lead a gang, and how is that person chosen? The author asks whether an O.G. is a "brother of royal blood," invoking the biblical instruction that a king should come from among one's own people. But belonging by birth or neighborhood does not establish that a leader is just. The model held up instead is a ruler who acts wisely and administers justice. The key question is what the O.G. represents: personal advantage, or the welfare of those under his authority? A leader, the author argues, should serve people rather than simply command them.

Readers are asked to examine the organization itself: how people join, what duties they are given, what code they follow, how the group supports itself, and what role women hold. They should also ask whether family and friends share its values, whether it has an O.G., and what results follow from choosing that leader. The examples are sharply contrasted: one king does evil and leads Israel into sin, while David reigns over Israel and administers justice to all his people. The author stresses that O.G.s are not all alike. Some former gang members dedicate themselves to changing street life for children and ending violence driven by material gain. People who want to leave, or simply seek advice, can look for resources in libraries and online; former O.G.s, too, need help with correction, which need not end in prison or death.

Leadership also depends on followers and the discipline expected of them. The author points to biblical accounts of reckless men gathering around leaders such as Abimelech and Jephthah, and asks whether a gang settles disputes with violence or words. The standard of discipline is not merely punishment; accepting correction can bring honor, while rejecting it can lead to disgrace and death. Women, the author adds, can lead as judges, prophets, and queens. Esther becomes queen, Deborah judges Israel, and a wise woman intervenes with Joab. He associates women's leadership particularly with wisdom and a nurturing spirit, and asks what happens when a leader dies, steps down, or has no heir. The arrival of a new king may mean that the former ruler's rules are ignored; leadership can also be taken away for failing to keep a covenant. Is a gang therefore accountable to its people, or is it a dictatorship in which removal comes only through death?

A leader's choices of counsel matter as much as succession. The author contrasts Rehoboam's older advisers, who tell him to serve the people and answer them kindly, with the younger men he grew up with, who urge him to make their burden heavier. A leader must also decide who counts as an enemy and whether followers are expected to inherit the leader's

feuds—even when the supposed enemy is their own blood relative. Who has the authority to declare peace? Since gang truces can fail when one side never wanted peace or someone violates the agreement, the author asks what responsibility leaders bear for their followers. He invokes the image of the worthless shepherd who abandons the flock, then returns to the principle that a ruler should serve the people and speak good words to them.

The next challenge is the meaning of becoming an O.G. Is the leader a repeat offender? Does the title promise respect, or does it bind a person to repeated violations of God's law and human law? The author asks why anyone wants to rule others and uses the ant as a contrast: it gathers supplies without a captain, overseer, or ruler. Can a person sustain himself and make his own decisions? Kingship, he says, is both powerful and burdensome. David seeks to dwell in God's house, while Solomon asks for an understanding heart so he can judge the people and distinguish good from evil. Their examples make wisdom and justice—not wealth, long life, or the defeat of enemies—the proper concern of leadership.

The king's job is to enforce law and administer justice, but an O.G. may use rules for his own benefit rather than for his followers. Can people question the leader or offer advice? The king can make damaging decisions by ignoring counsel, as David does when Joab warns against a course that may bring guilt on Israel. The author also asks who made and enforces laws such as "three strikes," then compares human imprisonment with God's correction: affliction can expose wrongdoing and prompt repentance, but refusing correction can end in death. Biblical passages describing people who will not grieve, listen, or turn back become, for the author, examples of the cycle repeated by offenders who keep returning to jail, fighting, or driving under the influence. He asks whether the O.G. is proud of that record, or carries the title reluctantly.

The chapter also challenges the street rule against informing. A witness who tells the truth may be called a snitch, yet would the same person want a witness to speak if his own mother had been robbed and assaulted? The author sees a double standard in condemning testimony while demanding justice for oneself. Biblical law, as he presents it, requires honesty from witnesses; false testimony can condemn an innocent person or free a criminal. At the same time, he distinguishes truthful testimony from taking the law into one's own hands, and emphasizes that judgment should not favor the poor or powerful. Partiality breeds resentment, while justice must be impartial. Gangs, he says, generally fight over rivals, robbery, drug turf, and street rules rather than seeking a political takeover. He calls for discussion, love, understanding, and reverence for God instead of a violent seizure of power.

The consequences of these loyalties reach beyond the member. The author warns that serving a gang can expose family and friends to danger from enemies they may not even know about. If a member is imprisoned or killed, those enemies remain, while the person who might have protected the family is gone. A household may appear successful, with children,

money, cars, and a large house, yet still inherit pain and danger brought home by the member's choices. Biblical examples describe a king troubling Israel through wickedness, and proverbs warn that pride, greed, and wicked income bring trouble into the household. The author asks whether a person realizes that family members become involved in the consequences of gang service whether they support it or not. Friendship and family bonds, he suggests, should be protected rather than sacrificed to a kingdom whose conflicts can follow people into their homes.

The author next examines the roles women play around gang life, asking whether a man wants a partner who reinforces the street's aggression or a "helper" who can help build a household. His discussion measures women by modesty, wisdom, education, and their influence on family life. The biblical examples are not limited to men: Esther is a queen, Deborah a judge and prophet, and a wise woman in Second Samuel speaks effectively to Joab. Yet the author also warns that a woman can either build her house or pull it down. Eve's choice to eat the forbidden fruit and give it to Adam, Solomon's many wives turning his heart toward other gods, and Jezebel urging Ahab toward wrongdoing illustrate, in his account, the influence a partner may have on a ruler. His criticism of "weak women" centers on materialism, attention-seeking, and the pursuit of status and possessions; he argues that beauty and wealth cannot make a person righteous. He condemns prostitution and the men who finance it, while distinguishing the possibility of change from a fixed identity: Rahab, once a prostitute, is spared and lives among Israel. For the author, wisdom and discipline can redirect a life, though anyone can return to destructive habits.

Recruitment, he argues, is where prevention can most directly break the gang cycle. If recruitment stops, active members will grow older and may leave, although some will remain committed to the end. The author contrasts the few older gang leaders with the many younger "soldiers" and "little homies" expected to do their work. In the biblical census, men counted for military service were twenty years old and above. That standard becomes a warning against putting children and teenagers into dangerous roles: a boy does not have a man's judgment, and using minors as accomplices is, in the author's view, a form of abuse. He recalls Gideon ordering his young son Jether to kill two captured kings; the youth is afraid and refuses, illustrating the difference between a child and an experienced adult. Young recruits, driven by ego and the wish to prove themselves, can go too far, ending up dead or incarcerated while those who used them remain in charge.

The author connects vulnerability to a lack of guidance, including the absence of fathers in many young men's lives, but does not claim that every gang member has the same background. Instead, he asks why young people are recruited into crime when their energy could be directed toward trades and useful roles. Electricians, nurses, plumbers, welders, carpenters, teachers, writers, artists, and technicians are among the possibilities he names. He argues that education should include reading, mathematics, financial understanding,

business skills, and knowledge of how taxes support public institutions and infrastructure. Rather than valuing entertainment above learning, adults should help children prepare to participate in the wider economy and community. Parents, whom he calls kings and queens of the household, have a duty to teach moral law and a sense of responsibility. The actions of one generation affect the next, but the author also stresses personal choice: Ezekiel's teaching, as he reads it, means a child is not condemned to repeat a parent's wrongdoing. Each person can reject the inherited pattern, repent, and choose a different path.

Conflict prevention requires more than declaring a truce after violence has begun. A soft answer can turn away anger, the author notes, while words can wound like a sword; speech can lead toward life or death. Leaders should therefore address disputes while tensions are still small, since strife can spread like water once released. A person who starts a quarrel is not thereby strong, and a leader who ignores warning signs or lets pride and anger govern is responsible for the damage that follows. The contrast is between a ruler who seeks counsel and one who trusts his own ego. David, though a warrior and king, accepts that his men must protect him when he grows faint and tell him not to return to battle. Rehoboam makes the opposite choice: he rejects the elders' advice to serve the people and speak gently, listens instead to younger advisers, and threatens to increase the burdens imposed by his father. His harsh answer deepens the conflict. The lesson is that authority depends on the people a leader serves, and leadership calls for humility, careful communication, and the wisdom to step aside when necessary.

Even when people have suffered loss, the author argues, retaliation does not restore the dead or end grief; it creates more victims and keeps the cycle alive. He urges repentance, forgiveness, and healing without asking families to forget those they have lost. Instead, he asks them to imagine choosing graduations, weddings, and baby showers over repeated visits to prisons, hospitals, halfway houses, and morgues. He also challenges the claim that revenge is owed because a loved one was killed, drawing on biblical passages that place life and death in God's hands. His spiritual explanation of death and the soul is an argument for releasing vengeance, not for pretending that loss is painless. Mercy, he says, must be practiced by those who seek mercy themselves. A king who rules through lovingkindness and truth preserves his throne; someone who refuses correction hardens into further wrongdoing.

The final case the author raises is El Salvador's crackdown on gangs. After 87 people were killed between March 25 and 27, 2022, the government declared a state of emergency. The measures suspended certain rights, including rights of association and legal counsel, and expanded detention powers. By July 2024, authorities had arrested 81,110 people accused of gang affiliation; about 5,000 had been released by May 2023. The crackdown caused severe prison overcrowding, and El Salvador had the world's highest incarceration rate by 2023. The government attributed a fall in homicides—from 1,147 in 2021 to 496 in 2022, a reported decrease of 56.8 percent—to the campaign. It also opened CECOT, the Terrorism

Confinement Center, designed for 40,000 prisoners. The author notes that the crackdown was popular among Salvadorans exhausted by gang violence, then asks whether a similar response is needed in North America. He does not settle that question with a simple prescription; instead, he challenges people to decide whether they will support or rebuke gang activity and what kind of future they want for their communities.

His final appeal returns to the image of gangs as kingdoms, with kings and queens, armies, dues, rules, and punishments. Having those structures does not make them just or worth serving. The author asks people to examine their own part in the system: whether they are directing others toward education and peaceful lives, or functioning as pieces moved by a leader’s ambitions. Communities, he insists, need ethical leadership, honest conversation, and adults who help young people build rather than destroy. The future can be shaped by the skills people develop and the care they show, so the next generation need not inherit a life organized around violence. What remains is the question: whose chess piece are you, and what will you help build in its place?

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