

II Samuel – Part 1

In the Aftermath – II Samuel 1-4

Drama and Excitement! Two things that make a great story...and the history of Israel has plenty to go around! I Samuel introduced us to Israel's first king, Saul, the drama of a king gone mad with a schizophrenic personality, and David, his successor. One minute, the king loves David, and the next, he is chasing him around the country and trying to kill him.

As we've chased Saul and David through the mountains, hills, and valleys of history, we can't help but notice the huge difference between these two men whose lives are so closely intertwined and powerful, yet so opposite from one another. Saul's tragic last days (I Sam. 29:1-11 and 30:1-31) are separated by David's fortunate release from the battle that the Philistines would wage against Israel. But, while that is occurring, Amalek's army has taken Ziklag, where David and his men live.

Saul sits within a life filled with dark thunderclouds, while David's life is surrounded by bright victory. The fall of Saul leaves Israel bleeding at the feet of the Philistine enemy, in contrast to David sending the spoils of his conquests to the elders of Judah. Saul's headless, dishonored body hangs rotting in the sun on the wall of Bethshan, while David sits as conqueror in Ziklag. In contrast to Saul's reliance on himself, because resisting God only brings defeat and despair, David's trust in God shows that obedience to His Spirit will give us direction and victory.

Only minute details are recorded about the battle that led to the deaths of Saul and his sons and to Israel's defeat; even the actual battle site is omitted. Attention is given, however, to the darkness that broods over Saul in the face of a short, hopeless struggle between the two nations, fierce in their hatred of each other, and their memories of defeat from previous battles. The words of Samuel's spirit must have unnerved Saul even further. Whatever else was tormenting Saul's soul—remorse, sorrow, humiliation—he was not softened by repentance, but remained fierce and proud even in his despair, just as he had in his prosperity.

With no real break in the story of Israel's kingdom, II Samuel picks up the narrative three days after the death of Saul and focuses on the reign of David, "the man after God's own heart" (I Sam. 13:14). I Samuel showed that this didn't mean all would be sunshine and roses. It wasn't necessarily easy, nor did everything go well. It didn't indicate moral perfection, lack of human lust, murder, or escape from the consequences of sin. Even heroes fail sometimes! But, while Saul refused to acknowledge God during his triumphs and tragedies, David shows a willingness to repent from his sin and seek God's strength to follow Him.

In the first half of II Samuel, David is at the height of his success, leading his people in victory after victory. His kingdom, established and stabilized by Saul, is expanded. The future looked bright...but then, he faced some challenges. He slept with a married woman and then murdered her husband. His son leads a rebellion to overthrow him, and he must go to war against him. But God is faithful, even when David isn't.

I. The King is Dead

David's life has been guided by the Lord. Do you think he must have wondered when he would be king, ruling this kingdom that he has fought so many battles over? Was he just quietly biding his time, waiting for God to remove Saul? Was he excited? Anxious? Or was he just too busy trying to save his life and provide for those who depended on him to worry about it? He never seems to question when it will happen.

Waiting for something to happen can feel like an eternity! David's life shows his patience, faith, and reliance on God's timing. As a teen, he was anointed by Samuel, the prophet, to be the next king (I Sam. 16:12-13), but it didn't happen right away. So, he went back to caring for his father's sheep. Saul was having a dark period in his life and needed comfort, so David played music for him. He became Saul's armorbearer ...but he still wasn't the king. When he began to have more fame than Saul and had to run for his life, there were opportunities to kill Saul and claim the throne by force, but David chose to wait for God's timing, refusing to harm the Lord's anointed. (I Sam. 24:6). The psalms that he wrote reflect this waiting and trust in God's faithfulness. (Ps. 27). Although he waited for more than ten years, his waiting was not passive; it involved an active trust and courage, relying on God's timing.

Three days after Saul's death, a man who had escaped from the battle near Gilboa, about 80 miles north, came to David in Ziklag. He had just returned from slaughtering the Amalekites. (I Sam. 30). If Saul had done as God had told him to do (I Sam. 15:3), the Amalekites wouldn't have attacked David's city! Now, another Amalekite, who had apparently been with Saul's army and now wants to gain favor from David, came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and earth upon his head. (II Sam. 1).

Beginning with II Samuel 1:1-16, the writer constructs this scene as a chiasm to draw our attention, not only to the Amalekite's story, but also to David's reaction to it. Bookending this passage is the Amalekites' death (**A-A'**: the death of Saul and also of the Amalekites, mirrored by the death of the Amalekite that brings the news of Saul's death). Sandwiched between these two verses, David does his due diligence in questioning the Amalekite (**B-B'**); he wants to be sure of his story before he responds.

The Amalekite claimed he killed Saul at Saul's own request (**C**). Did the man lie, taking credit for Saul's suicide, or exaggerate his role in Saul's death? When comparing the battlefield scene with the Amalekite's story, there are discrepancies. I Samuel 31 records that Saul chose to take his own life rather than be tortured or humiliated by the Philistines. Although he refused, Saul had asked his armor bearer to kill him, not the foreigner. The armor bearer took his own life after seeing Saul die, but the Amalekite made no mention of him. Saul "fell on his sword," but the Amalekite said he killed him with his spear. Due to the great length of a spear, compared to that of a sword, a suicide would not have been attempted using a spear if you also had a sword.

Undoubtedly, the Amalekite thought David would be pleased that someone had killed the king. He proudly stood there holding the king's crown and bracelet to present to David. Obviously, he was seeking glory and honor at the expense of Saul, like that which Doeg had received by killing the priests at Nob (I Sam. 22:18), but David was not pleased. He had consistently refused to kill Saul, the Lord's anointed. (I Sam. 26:10-11). But even though the king's crown and bracelet weren't proof that the Amalekite had killed him, David believed Saul was dead.

In response to hearing the news (**C'**), David and his men tore their clothes in mourning, and wept and fasted until the evening. Again, David questioned the

Amalekite, “How were you not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” (**B**) before performing his first act as king. It was a judicial act. Instead of a rich reward, the Amalekite received a death sentence: “Your blood be upon your head, for your mouth has testified against thee.”

II. *The Eulogy*

Despite all of Saul’s hostility toward him, David was generous in his memorial eulogy toward Saul and his son Jonathan. He knew how the Philistines would rejoice over his death, and he didn’t want them to hear about it. In the eulogy, David cursed Gilboa, the place where Saul died. When the people of Israel reforested its lands, they planted millions of trees everywhere except for Mt. Gilboa because of David’s lament. Its rocky barrenness today stands out amid the other mountains that are lush and green.

David praised the bravery of Saul and Jonathan that continued even when others quit fighting. He recalled the prosperity that Saul brought to the people, “who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.” All of Saul’s admirable qualities and his accomplishments are praised, but his failures are never mentioned. Most of all, David sorrows over the loss of his true and faithful friend Jonathan. (II Sam. 1:17-27).

III. *Next Steps*

Once David had done all he could for the memory of Saul, he turned to the Lord and asked what he should do now: “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? Where shall I go?” (II Sam. 2). With the Lord’s blessing, David, his two wives, and his men and their families moved to Hebron in the territory of Judah. Here he is crowned king by the men of Judah. Although the Philistines now controlled much of Israel’s territory west of the Jordan (I Sam. 31:7), they believed that David was still friendly to them, so allowed him to become king over Judah. They may have thought that this would help to divide and weaken Israel even further.

Hebron was a good choice for David’s capital. High in the mountains, it was relatively safe from enemy chariots which were not effective in mountainous terrains. As a leading city of Judah, Hebron had a distinguished history. Abraham built his first altar there (Gen. 13:18), and it had become a center of worship and a city of refuge designated by Joshua. Since it was a very productive and fruitful area, many of the Genesis patriarchs had lived there and been buried in a cave that Abraham had bought upon Sarah’s death. Caleb, one of the two spies who had encouraged Israel to take Canaan, a prince of Judah at the time, had chosen this area for his inheritance after wresting it from the possession of the giants at 85 years of age.

Since the tribes east of Jordan were still free, David quickly tried to win their support. (II Sam. 2:1-7). When David discovered that the men of Jabesh-Gilead had rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines and given them a decent burial, he commended them and promised to reward their faithfulness. This official recognition built loyalty, something David coveted in his ranks.

Eleven tribes still needed to be won over before David would be anointed king over all Israel. By this time, it was common knowledge that the Lord had chosen him, but there were rebels determined to have their own way. Chief among them were those connected with the house of Saul, Saul’s relatives, and the tribe of Benjamin. Abner, Saul’s cousin, had served as commander of his army and had escaped across the

Jordan after the Philistine war before David had cemented his right to rule. He was devoted to his own interests.

Abner knew that David should have the kingdom, but he thought he would make a try for it. He quickly appointed Saul's son, the 40-year-old Ishbosheth, as king over all Israel (except Judah) and set up his capital in Mahanaim, east of the Jordan. (II Sam. 2:8-9). Abner had no respect for Ishbosheth's leadership. Although Ishbosheth was king, he was only a political puppet; Abner was the real power.

David's general was his nephew Joab (I Chr. 2:13-16). He and his two brothers were part of David's 600 mighty men who followed David into exile. Though ruthless and unprincipled in many ways, he was unswervingly loyal to David. He did not hesitate to disagree with David, and David always seemed a little hesitant to discipline him. Instead of focusing on David, these next few chapters of II Samuel will focus on these two opposing generals.

Abner's opposition to David, combined with Ishbosheth's weak character, plunged Israel into a civil war that lasted over seven years. Hostilities between the rivals opened at the strategic town of Gibeon, situated along key trade routes with impressive defensive structures and a water management system. It played a significant role in the area's political landscape. Since Abner wasn't satisfied with Ishbosheth only ruling eleven tribes, the two generals agreed to meet at the pool of Gibeon to decide the issue through a trial by combat, similar to the type of battle that David fought with Goliath—a small group would determine the outcome.

The pool of Gibeon was a large reservoir or tank that stored the overflow from an underground spring in the rocky hillside, about 120' long and 100' wide. The hostile forces positioned themselves on opposite sides of the pool, facing one another, and watching each other's movements. Twelve men from each general were sent to determine the battle. They fought ferociously in close hand-to-hand combat, hanging on to their opponent's head while thrusting their sword into his side until Abner's men were beaten and dead. The limited contest soon became a fierce battle.

Joab's two brothers, Abishai and Asahel, were both there. While the rest of the men fought, Abner fled from Joab. Asahel, a fast runner, pursued him and soon caught up. When Abner saw him, he told him to stop and grab someone's armor if he was going to fight him. Out of respect for Joab, Abner wanted it to be a fair fight, but Asahel refused to quit. Finally, Abner struck him with the blunt end of his spear, and he died.

Joab and Abishai, with the rest of their army, pursued close behind Asahel until evening. Abner gathered men from the tribe of Benjamin and regrouped at the top of the hill. In the morning, Abner appealed to Joab to call off their bitterness and cease the hostilities, rather than cause more bloodshed. Joab blew his trumpet, and the battle ended, with 360 of Abner's men dying before they returned to Mahanaim. Only 19 men, plus Asahel, of David's men were lost. While Joab and Abner had long been rivals, with Asahel's death, their rivalry turned to hatred.

III. *David Increases; Saul Decreases*

"Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker." (II Sam. 3). During the next two years, there were constant outbreaks of hostilities between the two camps, although Scripture records none of the details like that of

Gibeon. Victory consistently went to David's men and weakened Abner's position. Meanwhile, David took more wives; each of the six bore him a son.

Abner continued to demonstrate his authority over the house of Saul. Ishbosheth even accused Abner of sleeping with Saul's concubine, Rizpah. In the East, this custom signified that he was laying claim to the throne by claiming the king's harem. So, when Ishbosheth accused him, Abner flew into a rage! He felt that he deserved better than to be called on the carpet and criticized when he had protected Saul's family all this time.

Angry and frustrated, Abner realized that Israel could not be rebuilt on the weak foundation of Ishbosheth. If this was how Ishbosheth would treat him, Abner told him he would leave and help God make David king over the whole country. Ishbosheth was speechless! So, Abner abandoned Ishbosheth and went to curry favor with David.

After contacting David, Abner promised to work on his behalf, but David demanded proof of his loyalty. He wanted his wife, Michal, back from Paltiel, the man Saul had given her to. He didn't need another wife but used her as a political pawn. Michal would attach Saul's house to David and be considered a token of surrender by Saul's camp. When Michal was brought to Abner, he spoke to the elders of Israel and those of the tribe of Benjamin, reminding them that God had anointed David "to save My people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines and out of the hand of all their enemies." He would help David fulfill God's purpose.

Abner met with David and told him his plans to deliver all Israel to him. David was glad that the fighting would cease and sent Abner away in peace to accomplish what he had promised. Joab, however, was out raiding and had not heard what had been done. When he was told Abner's words, he didn't believe it. He knew Abner to be a deceiver, so he felt he had come there as a spy. He sent men to bring him back to Hebron without telling David his plans or concerns.

Joab had no personal plans to take the throne. He was jealous only of his position as commander-in-chief and didn't want Abner coming in and taking that away from him. There was also the matter of avenging his brother Asahel's death. His motive for bringing Abner back to Hebron was to rid himself of his rival, so when he returned, Joab took him aside as if to have a private conversation with him and killed him.

Interestingly, when David heard of it, he didn't kill Joab for the deed as he had done with the Amalekite who said he had killed Saul; he was too weak to act against his own family. David declared that he and his kingdom were guiltless for the deed, and mourned for Abner, calling him a prince and a great man. He cursed the family of Joab and his father's house, with physical issues, death, and poverty for their part in Abner's death. David insisted that the people tear their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn for Abner. He himself followed the bier. Following this, most of Israel's leaders readily transferred their allegiance to David.

IV. Securing the Kingdom

When Ishbosheth heard that Abner was dead, he was frightened. Two men, Baanah and Rechab, brothers and captains of Ishbosheth's bands, came to the palace as though they were going to get some wheat from the storage. These men were not Israelites, but Amorites or Canaanites, whose father was from a Gibeonite city. (Josh. 9). Instead of getting grain, they found Ishbosheth taking his afternoon nap, assassinated him, cut off his head, and escaped, running to David with their trophy.

In effect, they thought they were giving David the gift of the kingdom. But David was displeased over this unwarranted death and had Baanah and Rechab put to death, showing that he would not take the throne through murder.

Saul's kingdom collapsed after Ishbosheth's murder. The royal rule had come to an end as Samuel had prophesied. (I Sam. 13:13-14). In a parenthesis (II Sam. 4:4), the author relates that all that remained of Saul's line was Mephibosheth, a badly crippled child through Jonathan. (II Sam. 9).

The time had finally come for David to become king of all Israel. "So, all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD: and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years." (II Sam. 5:1-4). God gave David the promised kingdom by allowing the opposition to destroy itself.

Conclusion:

How do you handle things that require patience? Patience isn't weakness; it is strength under control. David is a wonderful picture of true patience. Sometimes we think God is slow, but as we have seen, it's not slowness, but strategic. God knows exactly when something should take place, something we have no clue about. He sees the big picture and knows how it will all fit together.

Waiting seasons are not, and should not be, wasted seasons. In Psalm 27:14, David wrote, "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." While he waited, strength was built, just like it will be for us. Patience protects us from foolish decisions and taking shortcuts, which lead to regrets. It builds emotional control and trust in God's timing. He will give blessings to those who wait on Him.

How do we build patience? 1) Slow down our reactions. Not everything requires split-second decisions. 2) Submit your timeline to God—it's always better! 3) Stay faithful while you wait. This isn't inactivity but obedience without results yet. 4) Practice daily gratitude; it anchors our heart in God. 5) Remember God's track record. He's always been faithful before, so it will be no different this time.

Have you been trying to rush God? Take a moment to define a problem in this area and give it to God. He promises to answer when we ask—just remember it will be in His perfect timetable.

"But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint" (Isa. 40:31).

Servant King (II Samuel Part 2)

- 1)** Read II Samuel 5-8. How does King David change the focus of the nation of Israel?
- 2)** What does II Sam. 5:12 tell us about who God is?
- 3)** How did David seek to bring God's presence back to Israel? What went wrong?
- 4)** How did David seek to bring God's presence back a second time? What happened? What was Michal's problem? Was she justified in her comments? What was her punishment?
- 5)** Once things had settled down on the battlefield, what did David want to do? What was his reasoning? What was God's answer?
- 6)** What promises did God give David in his covenant? (II Sam. 7:12-26). Mark this passage as a key verse(s) if you haven't already done so.

Conclusion:

When God's people carried the ark into battle, they were victorious. When the enemies of Israel stole the ark and kept it in their territory, they suffered. David wanted to set up a new capital for his kingdom and for worship in Israel, in a place called Jerusalem.

The ark was being held at someone's house, and it was close to the borders of one of Israel's greatest enemies, the Philistines. David planned to bring the ark closer to his home, closer to the new capital of the kingdom, and further away from the Philistines. He set off with 30,000 fit young men to bring the ark back. David probably brought this large army both as a sign of strength and prosperity, and as a genuine means of protecting the ark. However, even though 30,000 men were brought to protect the ark, it only took one man to mess things up.

The Ark became unstable and Uzzah reached touched it to steady it...and that was the last thing he ever did. God struck him dead. It was just the automatic reflex we all do when we see something about to topple over...but his instincts should have been on reverencing and obeying God and His holy Law. His instincts were more man-centered than God-centered. Since the Ark represented the very presence of God, it was not like any other object. It carried the holiness of God, and God had given very specific instructions that no one was to touch it. Only the high priest could even see it except for one time a year!

So, when Uzzah touched the Ark, God punished him. God had demonstrated time and time again that it didn't need protection from humans. Remember, how even an unholy idol fell down before it after the Philistines stole it? (I Sam. 5).

How often do we look at the things of God with a ho-hum attitude instead of reverencing what it stands for? I don't mean worshipping them but handling them with a proper thought to God. When we take the elements of communion, it is only a ritual to you? Do you truly search your heart for unconfessed sin or feel you're "good enough?" God wants us to be holy in our dealings with the things of God, as well as our own life.

He tells us "What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Cor. 6:19-20). Do you reverence your body as God's by not eating or drinking things that can harm it or bring unholiness to it? Do you dress your body to honor God? Do you see or read or listen to things that would profane your thinking? Remember, your body is His temple. His presence dwells within you as He did in the Ark of the Covenant.