

The Life of David

David Hears of Saul's Death

2 Samuel 1:1-16

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Scripture

First Samuel and Second Samuel were originally written as one book. They were eventually divided into two books. First Samuel essentially deals with the life of Saul, and Second Samuel deals with the life of David. The end of First Samuel describes the death of King Saul. The beginning of Second Samuel describes David hearing of Saul's death.

Let's read about David hearing of Saul's death in 2 Samuel 1:1-16:

¹ After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. ² And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. ³ David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." ⁴ And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead." ⁵ Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" ⁶ And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. ⁷ And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' ⁸ And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' ⁹ And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' ¹⁰ So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was

on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.”

¹¹Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. ¹²And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. ¹³And David said to the young man who told him, “Where do you come from?” And he answered, “I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite.” ¹⁴David said to him, “How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” ¹⁵Then David called one of the young men and said, “Go, execute him.” And he struck him down so that he died. ¹⁶And David said to him, “Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the Lord’s anointed.’ ” (2 Samuel 1:1-16)

Introduction

Death sometimes has a profound impact on survivors.

You may know of Adoniram Judson. He became one of the greatest American Baptist missionaries, spending forty years serving the Lord in Burma. He was born in 1788 in Malden, MA. Judson entered the College of Rhode Island & Providence Plantations when he was sixteen, and graduated as valedictorian of his class at the age of nineteen. While studying at college, he met a young man named Jacob Eames, who was a devout deist and skeptic. Judson and Eames developed a strong friendship. During this time, Judson began to embrace the ideas of the French philosophers. One his twentieth birthday, Judson broke his parents’ heart with the news that he had abandoned the Christian faith of his childhood, and that he was moving to New York City to pursue a life of pleasure working in the theatre.

While looking for a permanent place to live, Judson stayed in an inn. During the night, Judson heard a man in the room next door who was dying. The man next door was in terrible distress.

Judson wondered whether the man was prepared to die. Moans passed through the walls, and he could hear the man's restless struggling. What would his agnostic friend Eames say to dismiss his anxiety and remove his concerns about eternity? Was the man next door a Christian? Or was he, like Judson, one who had despised the prayers of his parents and rejected the gospel for a worldly "freedom"? After a while, he began to think about what would happen to him when he died, and he tried to answer "Christian superstition" with the clever answers of Eames.

Finally, dawn arrived, and the terrible sounds from the room next door ended. Judson gathered his things, and decided to put the dreadful sounds of the night out of his mind. As he left the inn, however, he saw the innkeeper and asked him about the man in the room next door.

The innkeeper said, "He is gone, poor fellow! The doctor said he would probably not survive the night."

Judson asked, "Do you know who he was?"

"Oh yes," said the innkeeper. "He was a young man from the college in Providence. His name was Eames, Jacob Eames."

Adoniram Judson was stunned! He could hardly move. He was not immediately converted. Eventually, he would be converted and become one of the greatest American missionaries. Over the next few months, however, he thought about that dreadful night and wrestled with his own sinful heart. "But," as Richard Phillips writes, "one thing is sure: the presence of death had crossed the path of his life and changed him forever."¹

David was another person whose life was dramatically changed by the news of a death. We know that Saul died on Mount Gilboa. However, David did not yet know this news. He had just returned to Ziklag after successfully attacking and defeating the

¹ Richard D. Phillips, *2 Samuel*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2018), 5–6.

Amalekites, and recovered his wives, children, and everything else that belonged to him and his army.

A major transition was now about to take place. King Saul had died. God had promised that David would become the new king over Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 16:12-13). John Woodhouse makes the comment that “in the course of listening to the story of David in the book of 2 Samuel we will discover many facets to the way in which this story illuminates the story of Jesus and the life of faith in him. *The central idea is the kingdom of God.* David’s story and Jesus’ story are about the kingdom of God”² (emphasis mine).

What is the kingdom of God? I like the definition by Woodhouse, which is, “God’s kingdom is both his *rule* as king (in this sense “kingdom” means “*kingship*”) and the *realm* that is under his rule. To say that the theme of the Bible is the kingdom of God is to recognize that the Bible is about God’s rule and the bringing of all things under his rule.”³

God created the world to be his visible kingdom on earth. Adam disobeyed God, and plunged humanity and creation into sin. But God promised that he would yet bring blessing to the world. He would do so through a chosen nation, which would be the seed of Abraham. Yet, after many generations, the people of God wanted to be like all the other nations around them, and they demanded a king like all the other nations. That king was Saul (cf. 1 Samuel 10:1, 24; 11:15). But Saul failed because he was not regenerate. But God would not abandon his people, and he promised that he would provide them with a king after his own heart (cf. 1 Samuel 13:14). That king was David. As Woodhouse notes, “In contrast to Saul, he was not chosen *by the people for themselves* (1 Samuel 8:18; 12:17, 19), but he was a king provided *by God for himself* (1 Samuel 16:1).”⁴

² John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 16.

³ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 18.

⁴ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 19.

The Life of David

As we begin to learn about the reign of King David in 2 Samuel, we are led to believe that God's king will at last rule over God's people in God's way. In other words, in the reign of King David, we expect to see him ruling and reigning over the kingdom of God. And we do see that—but not completely. Even David fails to be God's king who rules God's people in God's way. Eventually, after David's death, the kingdom started by David divides and falls.

So, one is led to ask: where is the kingdom of God? God has promised a kingdom that will never fail and never end. God has promised a king to sit on his throne forever. Where is he? The answer to this question is answered for us by the Prophet Jeremiah in Jeremiah 33:14–15, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.” That king is Jesus!

Now, back to David. I think Woodhouse makes a very helpful insight about David's reign. He writes the following:

Before we begin to read the story of David's reign it is important to see that it is, in a significant sense, pivotal in the Old Testament's presentation of the kingdom of God. At the risk of oversimplification, we can say that everything in the Old Testament before David (Genesis to 1 Samuel) is leading up to his reign, and everything after David (1 Kings to Malachi) looks back to David's kingdom and confirms the expectation that this was the beginning of something of monumental importance for the whole world.⁵

Second Samuel opens with David hearing about Saul's death. How does David's reign over the kingdom of God begin? Does he seize it by his own effort? Or does he wait for God's gift?

⁵ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 18.

Lesson

Second Samuel 1:1-16 shows David hearing of Saul's death. Let's use the following outline:

1. The Problem with Telling Lies (1:1-10)
2. The Appropriateness of Expressing Grief (1:11-12)
3. The Necessity of Having Fear (1:13-16)

I. The Problem with Telling Lies (1:1-10)

First, let's look at the problem with telling lies.

Verse 1 says, **“After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag.”** David was waiting anxiously for word of the battle of the Philistines against the Israelites. He knew that the Philistines had an overwhelmingly powerful force, and that the Israelites were facing a formidable and powerful enemy.

Then, on the third day, for it was about a three-day journey from Mount Gilboa to Ziklag, a man came to David. He told David that he had escaped from the battle. **And David said to him, “How did it go? Tell me.” And he answered, “The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead”** (1:4). David asked how he knew this. The young man said to David, **“By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, ‘Here I am.’ And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ I answered him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’ And he said to me, ‘Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.’ So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took**

the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord” (1:6-10).

Now, we know from 1 Samuel 31:4 that Saul died by suicide when he fell on his own sword. So, this young man speaking to David was telling lies. It seems that by falling to the ground and paying homage to David, he was trying to get some reward for himself. He probably knew that God had chosen David to be the next king over Israel. How he “by chance” just happened to be on Mount Gilboa in the heat of battle seems far-fetched. More likely, he came upon Saul after the fighting had died down and saw Saul’s crown and armlet, and he took them. Then he hurried to David to see what he could get for himself by telling David that Saul was dead. He embellished his story by saying that he had killed Saul, thinking that David would be pleased and reward his action.

But, as we know from his response in verses 13-16, David was not fooled by the lies of this young man. The problem with telling lies is that they are eventually exposed. They eventually come to light. The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

My favorite illustration of this truth is about a robbery that occurred when I was an associate pastor at the first church I served. Early one Monday morning, our custodian called me and said that there had been a break-in at the church the previous night. I hurried over to church. The thieves had stolen about fifty dollars in cash, a TV set, a VCR recorder, and my senior pastor’s portable Dictaphone. I learned that the thieves had broken into the local middle school, and one or two other places as well. The police believed that the thieves were young men looking to steal items to sell in order to buy drugs. Later that very same day we heard that the thieves had been caught. Of course, they denied any knowledge of the robberies. That is when it was discovered that when one of the thieves took the Dictaphone and put it in his pocket, he unwittingly turned it on. The entire robbery at our

church was captured on tape! No one from the church even had to go to court. They simply played the Dictaphone recording of the robbery! “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).

The problem with telling lies is that God sees it. In God’s kingdom, everything is seen by him. Every lie, every deed, every thought is seen and known by God. So, let us not tell lies.

II. The Appropriateness of Expressing Grief (1:11-12)

Second, let’s note the appropriateness of expressing grief.

I think that what David did next probably surprised the young man, the Amalekite. He may have expected David to give some expression of joy that—finally!—Saul would no longer try to kill him. Or, at last, that—finally!—he would now be coronated. But, instead of that reaction, we read in verses 11-12, **“Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.”**

David’s grief **for Saul** was genuine. Nowhere in all of Scripture do we read of David ever saying anything inappropriate to Saul. Yes, Saul hunted David for more than seven years. Yes, Saul made at least sixteen attempts to kill David. Nevertheless, David was genuinely sad for the death of Saul. Like God, David took no pleasure in the death of anyone (Ezekiel 18:32). Moreover, Saul was unregenerate and so his death was especially tragic, as he had no further opportunity to repent and turn to God in faith.

Moreover, David grieved **for Jonathan**, Saul’s **son**. Some may think that David would have been glad to see Jonathan dead, because that would erase any opposition to David acceding to Israel’s throne. But, David did not see it that way. Indeed, neither had Jonathan. Jonathan had been the first to recognize and

acknowledge that David was going to be the king over Israel after Saul. And he rejoiced in that knowledge. David and Jonathan had hoped that Jonathan would serve at David's side. But that was not to be. So, David grieved for Jonathan.

Finally, David grieved **for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel**. This could be seen as believers within the nation of Israel. David grieved, as a true shepherd, for the people of God who had suffered at the hands of God's enemies.

It is appropriate to express grief. When people die, whether believers or unbelievers, it is appropriate to grieve at their passing from this world. It is appropriate to grieve for those who do not have saving faith, for they will spend eternity in hell, as will Saul. It is appropriate to grieve for those who do have saving faith, and whom we love dearly, as with Jonathan. And it is appropriate to grieve for believers and churches who suffer at the hands of God's enemies. We live in a world that is hostile to God and the people of God, and true shepherds and believers grieve for the people of God who suffer at the hands of God's enemies.

III. The Necessity of Having Fear (1:13-16)

And third, let's observe the necessity of having fear.

And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" (1:13a). You may recall that David had already asked him this question in verse 3. There he wanted to know where his journey to David had originated. Now, David wanted to know his ancestry. **And the young man answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite"** (1:13b). A **"sojourner"** is something like a "resident alien." Woodhouse notes, "Resident aliens did not enjoy all the privileges of Israelite citizens, but they were entitled to justice under the Law. They were also subject to its penalties."⁶ As a **sojourner**, the man should have known God's laws.

⁶ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 48.

So, **David said to him, “How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?”** (1:14). David was adamant that the Lord’s anointed was to be honored, even if he acted in ways that were dishonorable. On two occasions, David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but refused to do so (1 Samuel 24 and 26). The Amalekite assumed that David would be glad that Saul was dead so that David could become king. David assumed that one should fear destroying the Lord’s anointed. So David ordered one of his young men to kill the Amalekite (vv.15-16).

It is necessary in the kingdom of God to have fear. There is such a thing as a healthy fear, a godly fear, a fear that preserves us from sinning. Davis tells of a Polish prince who always carried a picture of his father next to his heart. At certain times he used to take it out, look at it, and say, “Let me do nothing unbecoming so excellent a father.”⁷

It is necessary to have fear—a fear that is grounded in love for so excellent a heavenly Father.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David hearing of Saul’s death in 2 Samuel 1:1-16, let us live our lives according to the principles of the kingdom of God.

The beginning of Second Samuel is not an upbeat chapter. However, it is in God’s Word for our instruction. Second Samuel is very important because it teaches us about the inauguration of the kingdom of God under David. And as we learn about it, we learn that we are to live our lives according to the principles of the kingdom of God. We do so by asking ourselves: Do I always tell the truth? Do I express grief over the loss of others? And do I have a godly fear of displeasing my heavenly Father? Amen.

⁷ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, 18–19.

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The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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