



2 SAMUEL
CHAPTERS 1-7

Study #1 – 2 Samuel 1

2 SAMUEL 1 | PROFIT FROM SIN?

The description of the transition from Saul to David in 1 Chronicles 11:1-3¹ suggests that the changeover was smooth and uneventful. However, the account described in 2 Samuel 1 details otherwise. We consider the chapter in 4 parts:

1. **Transition:** The record of the death of Saul and the victory of David (v 1)
2. **Testimony:** The account of how Saul died at the hands of an Amalekite (vv 2-10)
3. **Tactical Error:** The mourning for Saul and Jonathan with judgment upon the Amalekite (vv 11-16)
4. **Tribute:** The lament of David for Saul & Jonathan (vv 16-27)

Transition (v 1)

The period of Saul's reign makes way for the rise of David as Israel's new ruler, the one who the narrator tells us has struck down the Amalekites. The tragic death of Saul has been told in 1 Samuel 31 with the taking of his own life. Leadership transition is in play.

"After the death of Saul" could be an introduction to the book of 2 Samuel, as the events described therein will be significant for all Israel as David takes the throne. Saul was the Lord's anointed (1 Sam 2:10) and though one commentator described his reign as a 'failed experiment' he was none the less the God-appointed king of Israel, with solemn responsibilities. His death dashed the hopes of many who had believed as king he might usher in a new era for the nation. Saul held great promise as a leader, but his ultimate refusal to listen faithfully and consistently to the word of God led to his downfall. Yet we note through the chapter that David will give due honour and respect to the reign of Saul and recognise his achievements as the first king of Israel.

The contrast in kingship is important for our understanding of Saul and David's reigns. Saul was chosen in response to the rebellious demand of the people, while David is selected as a man by God who is "after his own heart." (1 Sam 13:14). The victory David achieves over the Amalekites is contrasted with Saul's failure to earlier obey God's instructions concern the same opponents (1 Sam 28:18). The new king-elect is reversing his predecessor's failure.

The book of 2 Samuel opens with David achieving victory for Israel, yet unaware of the fate of its present king. The narrative unfolds as an Amalekite arrives.

Testimony (vv 2-10)

There are two accounts of the death of Saul. The narrator's description is outlined in 1 Samuel 31. Here in 2 Samuel 1 we have the second account, from an Amalekite. And both cannot be true. As the man recounts the story, the narrator includes three times the phrase "the young man who brought this report" (vv 5, 6 & 13), inferring the account was just that, a report. We must take the narrator's account in 1 Samuel 31 as the record of what actually happened.

Similarly, we can assume that what the narrator shares with us in v 2 is accurate. The Amalekite had come from Saul's camp. He presented as one observing a grief (signalling bad news). He gave David honour as he entered into his presence (as if he knew this was the new king?).

From v 3 we read of the exchange between the Amalekite and David. The circumstances described are questionable, for we as readers know the true story of Saul's death from 1 Samuel 31. David knew of the battle to the north (Ziklag was about a 3 day journey to the south), but he did not know the

¹ 1 All Israel came together to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood. ² In the past, even while Saul was king, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD your God said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"

³ When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, he made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel, as the LORD had promised through Samuel.

outcome. Yet even David's line of questioning suggests he thought the account of the Amalekite needed critiquing.

Though the Amalekite claims he landed the fatal blow (v 10) and brought the crown and band to David as evidence, it is much more likely that he was simply an opportunist scavenging among the dead. He expected to be rewarded for his actions by David. He believed the king-in-waiting would be so desperate to hear news of Saul's death that his story would be met with approval, and he might gain a reward for acting according to the king's wishes.

We know the man was lying, and like all the best lies they are close enough to the truth to be believable.

Tactical Error (vv 11-16)

The grief of David and his men at the death of Saul is recorded by the narrator in vv 11-12, as the exchange with the Amalekite moves to the background. Deep sorrow issues from David and his men at hearing this news.

The account then takes a turn when David enquires of the man's background (v 13). The Amalekites were of course those against whom David had just achieved victory (v 1). They represented a nation in opposition to God's will and had a long history of being enemies of Israel (Exodus 17:16). The Amalekite believed his act of honour could grant him favour before David, but his miscalculation would be cost him dearly. It would be a misjudgement of his own cunning, and a misjudgement of David's character.

David's question of v 14 (rhetorical) implies that the Amalekite should have been fearful of striking down Israel's king, the 'Lord's anointed'. Saul was both chosen by God and his representative king. Even though he was ultimately rejected by God, his authority could only have been granted, or removed, by God alone. We are aware of David's reticence to take Saul's life, even when Saul had demanded his.

It seemed only the Amalekite had failed to understand the status of kingship Saul held. He came with dust on his clothes and lies on his tongue, and his attempt at deception had brought him undone. And the judgment concerning his deception is swift and comprehensive (confirmed by the assessment of David in 2 Sam 4:10). David's righteous character would not tolerate one who did not revere and respect God's anointed king.

Tribute (vv 17-27)

David's genuine grief is echoed in the lament he pens for Saul and Jonathan, which is to be taught to the people of Israel, such is the significance of their leadership. The mighty have fallen (v 19), but this is not news the enemies should hear lest they gloat (v 20). V 21 speaks of a permanent curse on the place of the fallen. Saul and Jonathan were great warriors, admired by those they led and for whom they bled (vv 22-23). Saul's kingship brought blessing for Israel (v 24), while Jonathan's kinship was a genuine blessing for David (vv 25-26).

Some conclusions

2 Samuel 1 is probably not the way we would have chosen to introduce the upcoming reign and rule of David. We might have been happy to have the chapter commence from v 16. But the narrator has been deliberate in the ordering of his material, and we need to be deliberate in considering the message for us today.

1. **There is no profit from sin.** We may want to ask whether the punishment was commensurate with the crime? Did David act too hastily? What about forgiveness?

While we may have many justifiable questions about the lessons that may be learnt from this encounter, the key takeaway is that sin does not pay. Whatever we believe we might gain from calculated acts of sin (and that is surely why we commit them) the benefits are short-sighted and short-lived, even though we are often convinced otherwise. Hebrews 11:25 calls them 'fleeting pleasures'.

What's more, when we do believe we have profited from the sin of deception, we falsely become convinced it's a valid strategy, and seek to increase its benefit. Even though it takes more lies to cover up lies, we begin to build a life of duplicity and compromise which will eventually bring us undone. In God's Kingdom we must remember his word prevails, and no one will ultimately get away with anything (Hebrews 4:13). The Lord does not reward unrighteousness.

- 2. All leadership requires humility.** David is not a petulant power monger. The lament that forms the second half of the chapter recognises the appropriate grief that follows the loss of Saul and Jonathan. David's expression of sorrow for Israel's first king (to be taught to others) seeks to recognise and honour the good that has been lost.

The word 'eulogy' means 'to give thanks' and provides the appropriate dictum for honouring a life. Though David was quick to bring judgment upon the Amalekite, it is striking to note that the narrative prioritises his deep grief for the fallen, shared with those present, before any further steps are taken (vv 11-12). Rather than present a sense of entitlement or privilege, David's lament in the second half of the chapter tells us he is conscious that leadership carries authority and influence that should be rightly respected and upheld. Saul was God's anointed king. Jonathan was a sacrificial and servant-hearted friend. To see the good in both was to show grace in grief. Ultimately this is the right platform to realise that as leaders come and go, rise and fall, God will continue his sovereign work in his world until the return of his Anointed One.

GETTING STARTED

1. Share what you think the common view of 'sin' is amongst your neighbours and friends.

INTO THE TEXT

Read 2 Samuel 1:1-16

2. Read 1 Samuel 31:1-6. Summarise the account of Saul's death.
3. Considering 2 Samuel 1, what are the variances between the narrator's account in 1 Samuel 31 and the story from the Amalekite?
4. The narrator does not tell us the motive of the Amalekite for creating his version of events. What do you suggest he might have sought to gain?
5. David does not appear to be aware of the conflicting accounts of Saul's death, even though he appears suspicious of the Amalekite's story. What is the reason for David's judgment in v 16?
6. What does it mean to be called 'The Lord's anointed' (see 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 5:3)?
7. How does the title 'The Lord's anointed' point forward to Jesus as God's king (see Luke 4:18; Acts 4:26-27)?

Read 2 Samuel 1:17-27

8. Why do you think the narrator included the extensive lament of David that was to be taught to the people of Judah?

TAKEAWAY

9. What does the account the Amalekite teach us about the cumulative deceptiveness of sin?
10. What relief and remedy does the gospel bring (see 1 John 1:8-9)?
11. How could this continually transform our church (see Ephesians 4:32-5:2)?