

The Weight of the Crown

How the Mighty Have Fallen

2 Samuel 1

Mark Vroegop

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said: "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. "You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions. "You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. "How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! "Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. "How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!" (2 Sam. 1:17-27).

Many years ago, I heard John Piper instruct pastors on the importance of preparing their people for suffering. He said, "The time to prepare your people to suffer is before they suffer." His point was that pastors should build a high view of God and his sovereignty into their congregation's understanding of God so that when hardship comes, their faith holds strong. That's true and needed.

But there's another category that I think we also need to consider: "The time to prepare your people for success is before they are successful." Frankly, I've not heard a lot of thoughtful sermons on that topic—a theology of success. There is something deeply God-honoring about a Christian who is a good steward of their gifts, works hard, embraces humility, and experiences the favor of God. But then what?

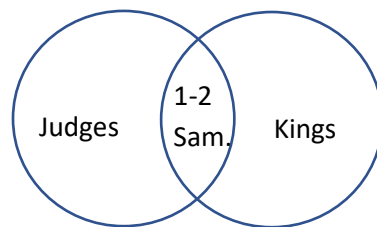
Suffering tests your faith. But so does success. Glorifying God in the valley and on the mountaintop are both essential considerations. In some respects, it might be instructive to remember that circumstances change but glorifying God remains constant.

David waited approximately fifteen years to be anointed king, and he was likely on the run from Saul for between five and seven years. And as we start back into our study of 1 & 2 Samuel, David receives the news that Saul is dead. That path to the divinely promised throne is now clear. And in this opening chapter, we get a glimpse of David's response. It's instructive.

Review of 1 Samuel

Before we jump into our text, let me remind you of a few things related to where we've been in 1 Samuel. We started our journey in this book on January 21 of this year, and I suggested to you that 1 & 2 Samuel were "gray zone" books. Mark Sayers defines "gray zone moments" as "... the overlap of two eras. They contain the influence of both the passing and the forming era; this makes gray zones confusing and contradictory."¹

It's an important record of a major transition in the history of Israel. The book traces the sovereign hand of God through the lives of Samuel, Saul, and David. It's the record of the transition from an alliance of tribes with judges who bring about reform to the time of kings as Israel establishes herself as a nation.



First & 2 Samuel helps us see the providential hand of God at work with messy and complicated people. It shows us the weightiness of leadership and the priority of a heart for God. It's the record of how God works in surprising ways. The book begins with Hannah's prayer after the birth of Samuel. The most important verse is "*The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength*" (1 Sam. 2:4). It's the theme woven throughout both 1& 2 Samuel.

We learned of Samuel's ministry as a prophet and the last judge of Israel. The people of Israel began to feel threatened by the neighboring nations, so they demanded a king. God is rejected. Saul is chosen. His reign is a disaster. David is anointed as king, and Saul hunts David for years.

First Samuel concludes with David being rejected by the Philistines as they approached a battle with Saul. He and his men return to Ziklag where they learn that their wives and children had been taken captive. It's here that while facing a revolt from his own men, David "strengthened himself in the Lord his God" and leads a victorious rescue mission. While David and his men remain in Ziklag, the battle between Israel and the Philistines takes place on Mount Gilboa. It's here that Jonathan dies. Saul is wounded in battle and takes his own life.

Second Samuel focuses on the reign of David, and it begins with an opening verse that is similar to other historic moments. Second Samuel starts with "After the death of Saul . . ." (v. 1). It's interesting that Joshua 1:1 says, "After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord . . .", and Judges 1:1 says, "After the death of Joshua. . . ." Second Samuel starts in the same way. The first chapter continues by chronicling

¹ Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders*, (Chicago: Moody Publishers: 2022), 23.

the story of a messenger who delivers the news of Saul's death. The narrator, however, is not merely telling us information. He's showing us David's response. This is the focus of 2 Samuel. While 1 Samuel focuses mostly on Samuel and Saul, 2 Samuel directs our attention toward David.

In this first chapter, we see David's application of justice and expression of grief.

Justice

How would you respond if someone brought you news that your accuser and hunter was defeated? How would you respond if you had been on the run for over five years only to learn the one who pursued you was dead? How would you respond if the last hindrance to your advancement was finally removed?

It's interesting that the narrator answers this question by showing us David's response. But there's also another agenda: to be sure that David is not associated with the killing of Saul.

Verse 1 makes it clear that David is still in Ziklag, a two- to three-day journey from the battlefield. He's returned from rescuing their wives and children from the Amalekites. Take note of this because it seems that there is an immediate contrast that is being established between Saul and David.

You may remember 1 Samuel 15 when Saul was commanded by Samuel to strike the Amalekites. He violated God's command by not killing Agag and keeping the best of the spoils of war. This is the moment when Samuel killed the Amalekite king himself and told Saul:

The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you (1 Sam. 15:28).

And now here we are years later. David attacked the Amalekites, and we get a picture of David's sincere respect for the commands of God through this story. He resists what appears to be a manipulative person trying to curry favor with him.

In verses 2-10, we learn the following:

- v. 2 - On the third day, a messenger from Saul's camp arrives in deep mourning, and he falls at David's feet.
- vv. 3-4 – The messenger tells David that he's from the camp of Saul and that the Israelite army has been defeated. Jonathan and Saul have been killed.
- v. 5 – David seems a bit skeptical, so he asks how the man knows that Jonathan and Saul are dead.
- v. 6-10 – the messenger recounts his version of what transpired:

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. 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” (2 Sam. 1:6-10).

Now, we have the benefit of knowing what actually happened. First Samuel 31 told us that Saul took his own life, and his armor bearer did so as well after he saw that Saul was dead. So, it’s apparent that this messenger is lying. Remember, however, that David doesn’t know this. This is the first news that he’s received about the battle.

By bringing the royal crown and the armlet, the Amalekite messenger no doubt hopes to ingratiate himself to David. It’s amazing what people will do to curry favor with people they think are going to be powerful or those who are powerful. But it’s equally disturbing that leaders allow people to do this. When power is your only goal, you’ll do or allow just about anything.

The messenger probably anticipated rejoicing from David and a commendation. But instead (vv. 11-12), David and his men began to weep and mourn. They realized the tragedy of the moment regardless of what it meant for them personally.

Next, David inquired where the messenger was from, and he rebukes him: “How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?” (v. 13). If you remember back to 1 Samuel, this principle was the reason that David refused to kill Saul even though he had two opportunities.

The execution of the messenger is ordered: “Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, ‘I have killed the Lord’s anointed’” (v. 16).

This opening narrative to 2 Samuel shows us David’s perspective on the death of Saul and Jonathan. It highlights that David has not usurped the throne by being involved in the death of the king. David’s detractors would have no basis to claim that he took the throne of Israel by force. What’s more, we see that David’s God-centeredness causes him to value adherence to biblical principles in this moment.

You could imagine a different scenario where David and his men rejoice. They feel relieved and justified. And with crown in hand, David could have honored the messenger with a promotion into his future kingdom. That would be a familiar, transactional playbook.

But it’s not how David’s ascent to power happens.

Lament

The second half of this chapter is a recorded lament written by David in honor of Saul and Jonathan. Verse 17 says, “David lamented with this lamentation” This was David’s way of memorializing his grief. But there’s something more here. Verse 18 says, “it should be taught to the people of Judah, it is written in the Book of Jashar,” a collection of historical documents for the people of Israel.

I’ve defined lament as “a prayer in pain that leads to trust.” It’s how God’s people talk to him when they are heartbroken. It’s an intentional expression of blunt sorrow and trust in God. But it also serves as

guardrails to help God's people think correctly and theologically when sorrow has taken over. David intended this lament to be a teaching opportunity for future generations.

A few observations about this lament:

- Its thematic phrase is "How the mighty have fallen!" It's found at the opening (v. 19) and the conclusion of the lament (vv. 25, 27).
- The use of the word "how" connects to the longest lament in the Bible: Lamentations. "How lonely sits the city that was full of people" (Lam. 1:1). "How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!" (Lam. 2:1).
- David complains about any celebration in Philistine cities (e.g., Gath or Ashkelon) (v. 20), and he curses the location of Saul and Jonathan's death (v. 21).
- While Saul's faults and failings were many, David honors the good and commendable aspects of Saul's reign. He recognizes that grace is greater than the weaknesses of human leaders (v. 22).
- He honors their relationship as father and son, along with their military success (v. 23).
- David invites weeping by those who have prospered under Saul's reign (v. 24).
- After repeating the theme of the lament (v. 25), David celebrates his close relationship with Jonathan (v. 26). Richard Phillips says this about David's lament: "In his grief, David simply states that his relationship with Jonathan had been more important to him than any of the relationships he had known with women."²
- The lament concludes as it began: "How the mighty have fallen and the weapons of war perished" (v. 27).

This is the concluding mood as it relates to Saul's reign. There's a deep irony here that we shouldn't miss. In 1 Samuel 8, the people demanded a king saying, "that we may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (1 Sam. 8:20). The first king of Israel ends his reign defeated and disgraced.

Israel's rejection of God as their ruler has led to this sorrowful moment. Saul's reign did not bring security and safety. David's rise to the throne begins in this failure and uncertainty. But we also see glimmers of hope as the anointed one (David) is a different kind of man and leader. He's a man of principle and passion. "*The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength*" (1 Sam. 2:4).

Lessons

This opening chapter is an interesting way to start our journey into the reign of David. You'll see that it's complicated and imperfect. But as we launch into this next season, what are a few lessons we might draw from this text?

² 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), 24.

1. Suffering isn't the only test of your theology; success tests what you believe as well.

After Hannah's prayer for a child was answered, she said, "The Lord makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, and he exalts" (1 Sam. 2:1). This text reminds us that the sovereignty of God rules over hardship and honor, over sorrow and success, over bruising and blessing. So, let us be mindful that suffering tests your character, but so does success. Getting what you want or longed for is a moment to remember the words of Paul to an arrogant church in Corinth: "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

2. Waiting is fueled by the weightiness of God.

First Samuel recorded the years of waiting in David's life. Scholars estimate that it was about fifteen years from his anointing to the time that he assumed the throne. Despite multiple opportunities to violate God's word and take matters into his own hands, David waited on God's timing.

I wish I'd found this quotation when I was working on my book on waiting.

By giving the Lord weight, allowing him to loom large in his vision, David was able to wait through years of danger and difficulty in the wilderness. He was able to wait for the Lord to open the way to the throne rather than take it by force. He was able to wait, in other words, for the Lord's timing.³

3. We wait and long for Jesus, our perfect and powerful king

Samuel has shown us the rise and fall of King Saul. We'll see the same thing in David. Second Samuel chronicles the messy, complicated, inconsistent, and glorious reign of David. It's an imperfect high point in Israel's history. But it points to the reign of another King, one promised in the Old Testament.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (Isa. 9:6-7).

This is who Jesus is! And those who know him as Savior and Lord find their life in him.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

³ V. Philips Long, [*1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), ed. David G. Firth, vol. 8, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2020), 284.

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:3-5).

Man of sorrows what a name
for the Son of God, who came
ruined sinners to reclaim:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Lifted up was he to die;
"It is finished" was his cry;
now in heaven exalted high:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

When he comes, our glorious King,
all his ransomed home to bring,
then anew this song we'll sing:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!ⁱ

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

ⁱ Hymn by Philip Paul Bliss, 1875