

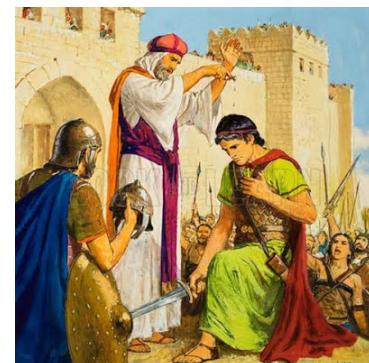
"ONE KING DIES . . . A NEW KING REIGNS"
1 Samuel 31:1-13 and 2 Samuel 1:1 - 2:32

NIV MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 75:7

But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.



"He chose David His servant,
And took him from the sheep pens;
From tending the sheep He brought him
To be the shepherd of his people Jacob,
Of Israel His inheritance.
And David shepherded them with integrity of heart,
With his skillful hands he led them."
Psalm 78:70-72 (NIV)



You can find all seventy of David's years wrapped up in these three verses.

First Samuel opens with the birth of a gifted baby, Samuel, and it closes with the death of a guilty man, King Saul. The early chapters cluster around the tabernacle where God spoke to young Samuel, and the closing chapters focus on a forsaken man to whom God refused to speak. Samuel prayed and God defeated the Philistines; Saul sought for God's help but He didn't answer, and the Philistines defeated Israel. First Samuel is the book of man's king and is a record of Saul's decline, defeat, and death. Second Samuel is the record of God's king, David, and it shows how God made a mighty monarch out of a shepherd boy.

... Today I have a story for you. You've done your homework and you know this story well, but let me read you more of the back story to this account of the death of one king and the anointing of a new king. I find the timing of this point in our story of the United Kingdom relevant and ironic when you consider we are a week away from a presidential inauguration. Regardless of your political perspective, we are blessed to live in a country that practices a peaceful transition of power.

... Warren Wiersbe in his Bible Commentary explained the depth of our lesson this week in such a clear narrative, that I know I cannot improve on that. Once again, I admit that I have plagiarized this lecture, primarily from Rev. Wiersbe with a few points inserted from the Life Application Bible. So, sit back and relax. Allow me to tell you the story from the front lines of Judah and Israel. ... Let's pray

A day of disgrace and defeat

Saul's military record is summarized in 1 Samuel 14. It's a commendable record that presents Saul as a conquering general and a national hero. He began his career as a great success: after all, the people did sing, "Saul has slain his thousands." It was after his failure to destroy the Amalekites that Saul began to go downhill. When David came on the scene, Saul's envy of the young man's success so obsessed him that the king became paranoid and dangerous. Saul had many good qualities, but none of them was humble, obedient faith in God. Because of his pride and disobedience, Saul lost everything.

- → Saul lost his army,
- He lost his life,
- He lost his honor, and
- He lost his crown.



Saul's soldiers were no match for the Philistine army with its large divisions and its many chariots. Some of the men deserted and many others died on the battlefield. The Philistines preferred to fight on level ground because they depended on their chariots, while Israel tried to lure them into the hill country around Mount Gilboa. Israel was outnumbered and outclassed, but even if they boasted having superior forces, they still would have been defeated. Saul's hour of judgement had come. Without Samuel's prayers and David's anointed leadership, the army of Israel was destined for defeat.

One of the first rules of ancient warfare was, "Kill the enemy king!" Saul was on the field with 3 of his 4 sons. For some reason, Ish-Bosheth was missing from the battle. (Perhaps he was the 'Designated Survivor' as is the basis of one of my new favorite TV dramas.) The 3 sons died first, then Saul was fatally struck by an arrow and asked his armor-bearer to kill him. The Philistines were notorious for abusing and humiliating victims, especially officers and kings. Saul feared that he would be tortured to death, so when the young man failed to respond to his plea, he fell on his sword and died. The young man immediately took his own life, and eventually all of Saul's bodyguards and officers around him met their death. It was a total victory for the Philistines.

Humiliating the prisoners and the dying and stripping the dead were the chief activities of a victorious army, for the spoils of battle were a big part of their wages for risking their lives. The Philistines took great joy in abusing Saul's body. They stripped off his armor and cut off his head, and after parading both from place to place in their land, they displayed them in their temples. The armor was put in the temple of their goddess

Ashtareth, and the head in the temple of Dagon. Finally, they publicly displayed the mutilated corpses of Saul and his sons on the outside of the city wall of Bethshan, a Philistine controlled city in the Jezreel Valley. For a Jew not to receive proper burial was both humiliating and sacrilegious, and for the body to be mutilated and then exposed was even more scandalous. The Philistines were letting their people and their idols know that they had won a great victory over their chief enemy, the people of Israel. Dagon had triumphed over Jehovah!

The account of Saul's death given to David by the Amalekite was primarily a lie. The man 'happened' to be at the battle but was obviously there to steal and loot, and he had taken the two insignias of royalty from Saul's dead body. He had not put Saul out of his misery because Saul had committed suicide and was dead when the man arrived. After removing the royal crown and bracelet, the Amalekite (who was likely a mercenary) should have safely removed the body from the field and protected it until it could have proper burial. He thought that his heroic acts would win David's approval, but they only brought him death.

→ Because of Saul's sins, he first lost his dynasty and then his kingdom, and finally he lost his crown.

"Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward." (2 John 8)

Saul's death was also the death of an ideal - Israel could no longer believe that having a king like the other nations would solve all their problems. The real problem was not the form of government, but the sinful king. Saul tried to please God by spurts of religiosity, but real spirituality takes a lifetime of consistent obedience.

→ Heroic spiritual lives are built by stacking days of obedience, one on top of the other. Like a brick, each obedient act is small in itself, but in time the acts will pile up, and a huge wall of strong character will be built - a great defense against temptation. We should strive for consistent obedience each day.



An hour of daring and devotion

While the Philistines were making merry over defeating Israel and humiliating Saul and his sons, the men of Jabesh Gilead heard about the tragedy and came to the rescue. King Saul's first great victory had been the delivering of Jabesh Gilead from the Ammonites, so the people of the city felt an obligation to vindicate Saul's memory. All of their valiant men traveled 15 to 20 miles at night to the city of Bethshan and took possession of the 4 mutilated and decaying bodies. In order to make this trip, they had to cross the Jordan River and go through enemy territory. Saul had not been a spiritual leader, but he was a courageous leader and the first king of Israel. Even if we can't

respect the man, we must show respect for the office. (This sounds like a relevant statement for us today – regardless of your opinion.)

The men risked their lives a second time and carried the bodies back to Jabesh Gilead. There they burned the bodies to remove the mutilated and decayed flesh, and they left the bones for burial. They didn't cremate the bodies, because cremation wasn't a Jewish practice. In times of emergency, the Jews would burn corpses that were so mutilated and decayed they couldn't be properly washed and anointed for burial, and then they would give honorable burial to the bones. After the people of Jabesh Gilead buried the bones, they fasted for 7 days. It was a tribute to Saul and his sons.

Saul often held court under a tree in Ramah, and now he was buried with 3 of his sons under a tree near Jabesh Gilead. Later, David disinterred the bones of Saul and Jonathan and had them buried in their family's tomb in Benjamin.

DAVID, THE KING OF JUDAH

For 10 years David was an exile with a price on his head, fleeing from Saul and waiting for the time when God would put him on the throne of Israel. During those difficult years, David grew in faith and godly character, and God equipped him for the work He had chosen for him to do. When the day of victory did arrive, David was careful not to force himself on the people, many of whom were still loyal to the house of Saul. He took a cautious approach, and we can't help but admire David for his wisdom and patience as he won the affection and allegiance of the people and sought to unify the shattered nation.

→ "So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands." (Psalms 78:72 NKJV)

The Lord prevented David and his men from assisting the Philistines in their battle against Saul and Israel, so David returned to Ziklag. There he discovered that the Amalekites had invaded and taken all the people and goods and had left the town in ruins. God in his providence led David to the Amalekite camp. David routed the enemy, delivered the women and children, and reclaimed all the goods as well as the loot the Amalekites had collected in their raids. He then returned to Ziklag and awaited a report from the battlefield.



On the day that David was slaughtering the Amalekites, the Philistines were overpowering Saul and his army at Mount Gilboa, where they killed Saul and 3 of his sons. The next day, while David was returning to Ziklag, the Philistines were humiliating Saul by desecrating his body and the bodies of his sons, and the Amalekite messenger

was starting off to bring the news to David. It took him at least 3 days to get to Ziklag, which was about 80 miles from the scene of the battle. So it was on David's third day in Ziklag that he received the tragic news that Israel had been defeated and that Saul and 3 of his sons were dead.

Scripture gives us 3 accounts of the death of Saul and his sons;

- 1 Samuel 31,
- The messenger in 2 Samuel 1, and
- The record in 1 Chronicles 10.

1 Chronicles 10:14 informs us that it was God who killed Saul for his rebellion, especially the sin of seeking guidance from a medium. Only with great difficulty can the reports in 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10 be reconciled with the report of the messenger; therefore, most likely the man was lying.

There is no question that the messenger had been on the battlefield. While he was searching for spoils, he found the corpses of Saul and his sons before the Philistines had identified them, and he took Saul's insignias of kingship, his golden armband and the gold chaplet he wore on his helmet. However, the Amalekite didn't kill Saul as he claimed, because Saul and his sons were already dead. But by claiming that he did, he lost his own life.

The Amalekite messenger must have been shocked and then afraid when he saw David and his men tearing their garments and mourning the death of Saul. He thought that everybody in Ziklag would rejoice to hear the news of Saul's death, knowing this meant the end of their dangerous fugitive way of life. He probably expected to be rewarded for bringing such good news, but he obviously didn't know the heart of David. In David's eyes, Saul was never his enemy and on the 2 occasions when David might have slain Saul, he made it clear that he would never lay hands on the Lord's anointed.

The messenger claimed he was an Amalekite, the son of a resident alien. If he had been living in the land of Israel, he surely would have known that the king of Israel was the anointed of the Lord. If a loyal Jew had found the 4 corpses, he would have sought to hide them and protect them from the enemy, but the Amalekites were the enemies of Israel, the very people Saul was supposed to wipe out. It's more likely the messenger was a true Amalekite but not a resident alien in Israel. He was more likely a 'camp follower' who made his living scavenging after the Philistine army. By claiming to be a son of a resident alien, the man was asking for certain privileges specified in the law of Moses, privileges he certainly did not deserve.

At evening, when the time of mourning had ended, David further interrogated the messenger and concluded that the man deserved to die. If the story he told was true, then the man had murdered God's anointed king and deserved death. If the story was not true, the fact that the Amalekite fabricated a tale about killing the king revealed depravity in his heart. The Jews had been commanded to annihilate the Amalekites, so

when David ordered the messenger to be slain, he was simply obeying the Lord, something Saul had failed to do.

In slaying the messenger, David vindicated Saul and his sons and demonstrated publicly that he had not been Saul's enemy and did not rejoice in Saul's death. This was a dangerous thing to do, for David and his men were still living in Philistine territory, and the Philistine king still thought David was his friend and ally. For David, taking his stand with the dead king of Israel could be considered an act of treason with the Philistines. But the Lord had vindicated David and David had vindicated Saul, and David wasn't afraid. The conduct of David and his camp, when reported to the Jewish people, would help to convince them that David indeed was chosen by God to be their king.

David's grief over the death of Saul and Jonathan was sincere, and to help the people remember them, he wrote a touching lament in their honor. He ordered this lament to be taught and sung in his ancestral tribe of Judah, and no doubt people in other tribes learned and appreciated it.

→ This lament came to be known as "The Song of the Bow" and was recorded in the book of Jasher, a collection of poems and songs that commemorated great events in the history of Israel. "Oh, how are the mighty heroes have fallen" is the major theme of the lament and the emphasis is on the greatness of Saul and Jonathan even in defeat and death. David celebrated their skill and bravery and their willingness to give their lives for their country. Like Hebrews 11, nothing is recorded in the song that speaks of any sins or mistakes in the lives of Saul and Jonathan.

To David these men were not just great soldiers, they were also gracious people who were beloved in life and in death loyal to each other and to the people. From his meeting with Samuel in the medium's house, Saul knew that he and his sons would die that day in battle, yet he entered the contest determined to do his best. Jonathan knew that his father had disobeyed God and sinned against David, yet he stayed at his side in the fight. Even though the army of Israel was defeated, David wanted the people to remember the greatness of their king and his sons.

In composing and teaching this lament, David may have had several purposes in mind. For one thing, he gave honor to Saul and Jonathan and taught the people to respect the monarchy. Since Saul was Israel's first king, the people might conclude that all their kings would follow his bad example and possibly ruin the nation, so David sought to strengthen the concept of monarchy. The song also made clear to everybody that David held no grudges against his father-in-law and sovereign. Finally, David set an example for all of us to follow in paying loving tribute to those who have died in battle to protect their country.

David was Israel's lawful king and couldn't remain in Ziklag since it was enemy territory. It's likely that the Philistine king Achish thought that David was still under his authority,

but David knew that he must return to his own land and begin to reign over his own people. David was in the habit of seeking the Lord's will when he had to make decisions, either by having Abiathar the priest consult the ephod or by asking Gad the prophet to pray to God for a word of wisdom.

David was from Judah, so it was logical that he go to live among his own people, but in which city should he live? God gave him permission to return to Judah and told him to live in Hebron, which was located about 25 miles from Ziklag. By moving there, David was back with his own people but still under the shadow of the Philistines. Hebron was important in Jewish history, for near the city was the tomb of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob and Leah. The city was in the inheritance of Caleb, a man of stature in Jewish history. Abigail, one of David's wives, had been married to a Calebite, and David had inherited her property near the wilderness of Maon. Hebron was probably the most important city in the southern part of Judah.

→ David made Hebron his capital because:

- It was the largest city in Judah at that time;
- It was secure against attack;
- It was located near the center of Judah's territory, an ideal location for a capital city;
- Many key trade routes converged at Hebron, making it difficult for supply lines to be cut during wartime.

When David settled in Hebron, his return to Judah was the signal for his people to recognize him as their leader, so the elders of Judah anointed David a second time and made him king. Had Saul's captain Abner also accepted God's will and submitted to David, a costly civil war would have been averted, but loyalty to the old regime and a desire to protect his own interests motivated Abner to fight David instead of following him.

While David was living in Ziklag, volunteers had come to him from the tribes of Benjamin, Gad, and Manasseh, so he not only had a large and experienced army but also a representation from some of the other tribes. Before long, David would win the allegiance of all the nation of Israel.

In his accession to the throne of Israel, David illustrates the career of Jesus Christ, the Son of David. Like David the shepherd, Jesus came first as a humble servant and was anointed king privately. Like David the exile, Jesus is King today but doesn't yet reign on the throne of David. Like Saul in David's day, Satan is still free to obstruct God's work and oppose God's people. One day, Jesus will return in glory, Satan will be imprisoned, and Jesus will reign in His glorious kingdom.

David was a man with a shepherd's heart who cared about his people, and one of his first concerns was the fate of Saul and the 3 sons who died with him. When he asked

the rulers of Judah about the burial of the royal family, they told him how the men of Jabesh Gilead had risked their lives to recover the four bodies and bring them back to Jabesh Gilead. It was a courageous endeavor, and David thanked them for their devotion to Saul and to the kingdom of Israel.

David used this occasion as an opportunity to invite the brave men of Jabesh Gilead to cast their lot with him. They had been valiant for Saul, and now they could be valiant for David. Some warriors from Gad had already joined David's army while he was in Ziklag, affirming their confidence that he was God's anointed king. Unfortunately, the people of Jabesh Gilead didn't choose to submit to David but instead followed Abner and Saul's weak son Ish-Bosheth.

The people of Jabesh Gilead allowed their affection for Saul to blind them to God's plan for the nation. They had a good motive, but they made a bad choice. How often in the history of the church have God's people allowed human affection and appreciation to overrule the will of God. Jesus Christ is King and he deserves our submission, loyalty, and obedience. To put human leaders ahead of God's anointed King is to create division and weakness in the ranks of the Lord's people. So we must be careful and mindful with our loyalties.

Now, David was an effective leader during the seven and a half years he ruled in Hebron. While Joab led the army of Judah, David watched and waited, knowing that the Lord would one day open the way for him to reign as king over all Israel. God called David not only to be the king of His people, but also their shepherd and spiritual leader. David had to wait on God's timing while patiently enduring the consequences of the selfish ambitions and reckless actions of leaders who were motivated by pride and hatred. David learned to build with the materials at hand and to trust God to use disappointments to the advantage of his people. (Did you catch that? God uses disappointments to our advantage. The purpose and timing of such things is up to Him and not us.)

Abner the kingmaker

In all dramas there are characters on opposing sides. Here are the characters in our drama: →

Character	Relation	Position	Whose side?
Joab	Son of Zeruiah, David's half sister	One of David's military leaders and, later, commander in chief	David's
Abner	Saul's cousin	Saul's commander in chief	Saul and Ish-Bosheth's, but made overtures to David

Character	Relation	Position	Whose side?
Abishai	Joab's brother	High officer in David's army	Joab and David's
Asahel	Joab and Abishai's brother	High officer - one of David's 30 select warriors or "mighty men"	Joab and David's
Ish-Bosheth	Saul's son	Saul and Abner's selection as king	Saul's

They key actor in this drama was Abner, Saul's cousin and the commander of his army. It was Abner who brought David to Saul after David killed Goliath and who, with Saul, pursued David for 10 years. Abner was rebuked and humiliated by David when he failed to protect the king, and Abner had no special love for David. The people of Israel honored David above Saul and eventually the nation would learn that David was God's choice as king of Israel. But David already had a commander in Joab. So when David became king, what would happen to Abner? Most of what Abner did during those seven and a half years wasn't for the glory of God or the strengthening of Israel, but for his own self-interest. He was taking care of number one!

The people of Judah obeyed God's will and anointed David as their king, but Abner disobeyed the Lord and made Saul's one remaining son, Ish-Bosheth, the king of "all Israel." Abner knew that David was God's choice, a gifted leader and a brave soldier, but he deliberately rebelled against the Lord and appointed Ish-Bosheth. Israel had asked for a king "like all the nations," and when a king died, the other nations appointed a king's eldest son to succeed him. Ish-Bosheth was all that remained of the royal family.

Scripture doesn't say much about Ish-Bosheth, but it's clear that he was a weak puppet ruler manipulated by Abner. He was certainly old enough to fight in the army with his father and brothers, but Saul left him at home to protect the dynasty. Saul and Abner both knew that God had taken the dynasty away from Saul. Knowing that he and his sons would die in the battle, Saul probably arranged to make his fourth son king. Ish-Bosheth may have been crowned by the general, but he was never anointed by the Lord. (I was right, he did serve as a designated survivor.)

Abner took Ish-Bosheth to Mahanaim, on the east side of Jordan. This was a Levitical city of refuge where he would be safe, and there Abner established a capital for "all Israel." David ruled over Judah for 7.5 years, while Ish-Bosheth reigned in Israel for only 2 years. The 5 year gap may be due to Ish-Bosheth's not assuming the throne immediately after Saul's death. Because of constant danger from the Philistines in the northern part of Israel, 5 years may have passed before Ish-Bosheth could begin his

reign. During that time, Abner, commander of his army, probably played a principal role in driving out the Philistines and leading the northern confederacy. Regardless of when Ish-Bosheth began to rule, his control was weak and limited. The Philistines still dominated the area, and Ish-Bosheth was intimidated by Abner.

There's a modern touch to this scenario, for our political and religious worlds are populated by these same 3 kinds of people.

- We have weak people like Ish-Bosheth who get where they are because they have 'connections.'
- We have strong, selfish people like Abner who know how to manipulate others for their own personal profit.
- We also have people of God like David who are called, anointed, and equipped but must wait for God's time before they can serve.

When Abner made Ish-Bosheth king, he was actually declaring war on David, and he knew it. By now Abner had all the tribes except Judah behind him and he felt he could easily defeat David in battle and take over the entire kingdom. Confident of victory, Abner called for a contest between the two armies to be held at the great cistern about 23 miles north of Gibeon. This was not unlike the challenge Goliath issued when he called for one of Saul's soldiers to fight him. However, Abner was rebelling against God, while David was God's chosen leader.

This is the first time we meet Joab, David's nephew and the commander of his army. The two armies met at the reservoir and 12 soldiers from the army of Benjamin faced 12 men from Judah - and all 24 men were killed! That day the battlefield received a new name - "the field of daggars." Joab and Abner wasted no time getting their troops in battle formation, and the battle that day was very fierce. Abner was defeated that day, a preview of things to come.

Now Joab, Abishai, and Asahel were David's nephews. Whether on his own initiative or at his brother's orders, Asahel went after Abner, for he knew that slaying the enemy general could mean confusing and scattering the whole enemy army.

The record makes it clear that Abner had no desire to harm or kill the lad, but Asahel was persistent. (He must have been quite the runner, and clearly faster than Abner.) First Abner told him to turn aside and take what he wanted from the dead enemy soldiers. Then he warned Asahel that if he killed him, this would create a 'blood feud' that could cause trouble for years to come. Abner knew Joab and had no desire to begin a possible life-long family conflict. When Asahel refused to give up the chase, the clever Abner killed him by using one of the oldest tricks of the battlefield. He stopped suddenly and allowed Asahel to propel himself right into the end of his spear. The butt end of a spear was often sharpened so the spear could be thrust into the ground and be ready for action. Asahel fell to the ground and died.

Asahel's two brothers, Joab and Abishai, must have been following close behind because they took up the pursuit of Abner, no doubt determined to avenge the blood of their brother. But Abner's troops rescued him, and he and the Benjamites retreated to the hill of Ammah. Abner knew he was beaten, so he called for a truce. He may have suspected that the death of Asahel would encourage Joab and Abishai to stop fighting and take care of his burial. It was Abner who initiated the battle, so he had only himself to blame. A scheming man, he had a plan in mind he believed would give him both armies without having to shed blood.

→ Joab knew the heart of David, that he wanted unity and peace, not division and war, so he blew the trumpet and stopped his troops from pursuing the enemy. He said to Abner, "God only knows what would have happened if you hadn't spoken, for we would have chased you all night if necessary." (V. 27 NLT) Abner and his men walked all night to return to Mahanaim, and Joab and his army returned to Hebron, stopping at Bethlehem along the way to give Asahel a proper burial. During that all-night march Joab and Abishai hatched a plot to avenge the death of their brother. (And we will learn about that in next week's lesson.)

The book of 2 Samuel tells David's story. David is crowned king over Judah and then king over all of Israel, praising God as he brings the ark of the covenant back to the tabernacle and exulting as he leads his armies to victory over all their enemies and completes the conquest of the promised land begun by Joshua. David was a man who accomplished much.

But David was human, and there were those dark times when he stumbled and fell into sin. Godliness does not guarantee an easy and carefree life. David had family problems. And greatness can cause pride. But the story of this fallen hero does not end in tragedy. Through repentance, his fellowship and peace with God were restored, but he had to face the consequences of the sins he committed. These consequences stayed with him the rest of his life as a reminder of his sinful deeds and his need for God. It's the same with us.

→ As you study 2 Samuel, look for David's God-like characteristics - his faithfulness, patience, courage, generosity, commitment, honesty - as well as other God-honoring characteristics such as modesty and penitence. Valuable lessons can be learned from his sins and from his repentance. You, like David, can become a person after God's own heart.