

2 Samuel by Tommy Lee

Chapter 1

When last we saw David (back when Pastor Rick was taking us through 1 Samuel, before we studied Revelation), he was in Ziklag (1 Samuel 30.26), waiting to hear the outcome of the Philistine invasion of Israel. Remember, King Saul had been trying to kill David for some time. But recall also that David always honored Saul (see, especially, 1 Samuel 24.6 & 26.9), steadfastly refusing to put out his hand against the Lord's anointed king, even when given golden opportunities to do so. And now, as he awaits news of the battle—*"on the third day,"* v.2, always a day of reversal and revelation in the Bible, pointing to the ultimate day of reversal and revelation, Jesus' third day—an Amalekite comes into camp, bearing Saul's crown and armlet (v.10). The Amalekite reports that *"by chance"* he *"happened to be on Mount Gilboa"* (v.6) in the midst of a fierce battle, and stumbled across King Saul, who asked him for a favor. More likely the Amalekite was looting corpses on the battlefield, came across Saul, took the crown and armlet, and now hopes to ingratiate himself to David. This was a miscalculation. David honors the king. And now here is the king's professed murderer...

Chapter 2

In chapter 1 David honored the fallen (Saul and Jonathan) with a public lament, and *"he said it should be taught to the people of Judah"* (1.18). David is a Judean (as is Jesus, "Great David's Greater Son"... see Genesis 49.8-12 for the kingly prophecy concerning this tribe), and now the tribe of Judah is the first to receive David as king (v.4), as the true successor to King Saul. But note how King David is careful to continue honoring King Saul (see vs.4b-7). However, David's claim to be the true successor to the throne is not without rival (see vs.8-10). Thus, in vs.12-32, we see the beginnings of a "Civil War" in Israel. The tribe of Judah followed David (v.10); all the other tribes followed Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul (vs.8-9). It's Abner, the commander of Saul's army (see 1 Samuel 14.50), versus Joab, the commander of David's army. Abner has come to Gibeon (v.12), just north of Judah's border, to conquer Judah for Ish-bosheth. As in the David vs. Goliath story, the two sides send champions to fight one another, in order to avoid mass bloodshed. But a "real" battle followed anyway, and it was *"very fierce"* (v.17). Here we are further introduced to Joab. Read the details carefully.

Chapter 3

Yesterday we saw that Abner (the commander of Saul's army) killed one of the brothers of Joab (the commander of David's army), even though he obviously had no wish to do so. He was hoping to avoid a blood feud! After that killing, Joab made appearances that he was willing to act reasonably and sensibly; he agreed to a truce. But when we get to v.27 of today's reading, the heart is revealed. Abner sees the way things are going in this war (v.1), and desires to change sides. It may have been for selfish motives, but nevertheless it reminds us of God's sovereignty. The Lord wants David to reign, and David *will* reign; God can even turn the hearts of powerful men, as a means to that end: *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will"* (Proverbs 21.1). David truly despised Joab's unjust murder of Abner, and he publicly honored and mourned Abner (vs.28-39). Fast-forward to 1 Kings 2.5,6 if you'd like to see the rest of the story.

Chapter 4

We are still reading under the theme of 3.1: *"There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker."* In the aftermath of Abner's defection and subsequent murder, the failing house of Saul is weakened ever further. In today's reading Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul (2.8,9), who has been seeking to hold onto the remnants of his father's former kingdom, is assassinated. This means the total collapse of the house of Saul. The information in v.4 is meant to tell us that there is now no one left to carry on this war. The only close relative left is Ish-bosheth's crippled nephew, Mephibosheth. People in the ancient world liked their kings to be strong and mighty; no one will rally around Mephibosheth (who is the son of Jonathan, David's friend, and will appear again in chapter 9). The reader who remembers chapter 1 will know that the two murderers are making a big mistake in assuming that David will reward them for killing his rival. David speaks well of Ish-bosheth, and executes the confessed assassins.

Chapter 5

Three big things in chapter 5: #1: The nation is finally unified, as all Israelite tribes acknowledge David as their king. Note that David did not *conquer* the northern tribes; they came asking him to be their king, for the three reasons given in vs.1&2: relationship, their history with David, the Word of God. #2: David captures Jerusalem, making it his capital. Jerusalem was already an ancient city, one which Israel had never been able to fully hold (see Judges 1.8,21). It was also strongly fortified (thus the Jebusites' confident boast!), but David's men attacked by way of a water shaft and won the day. Archaeology confirms, by the way, that ancient Jerusalem's water supply came from outside the city walls... and a number of shafts and tunnels have been discovered. #3: David completely defeats Israel's old enemy, the Philistines. Notice that in both vs.19 & 22 David inquired of the Lord. And note that God always answered, as opposed to the silence he eventually gave to unfaithful Saul (1 Samuel 28.6). The information in vs.13&14 is given without commentary, but keep an eye open for the trouble that comes of it.

Chapter 6

The reader has not really heard much of anything about the ark of the covenant since the big episode in 1 Samuel 4.4-7.2. This is because Saul didn't really care for God, and hence he didn't really care for prophets or priests or the ark—*which was the ultimate symbol in the Old Testament for the manifest presence of God*. But David has great interest in God, and therefore he works closely with prophets and priests and treats the ark with great reverence and honor. He wants to bring the ark to Jerusalem, the new capital of a reborn Israel! But in transporting the ark he adopted the manner of pagans (1 Samuel 6), rather than following the Word of God Himself (see Exodus 25.12-25; Numbers 4.15). Yes, how we worship matters. It's not just our motives that count. Our conformity (or lack of conformity) to the Word of God matters greatly. This is true all over the Bible, and it is still true for how we're planning to worship this coming Sunday. Lessons from today's chapter: we need to understand God's presence, desire God's presence, have a healthy fear of God's presence, and finally enjoy God's presence.

Chapter 7

Today we come to what is definitely the most important chapter in the two books of Samuel, and what is also arguably one of the key passages for understanding the whole of the Bible: God makes *"an everlasting covenant"* with David, as David will later refer to it (23.5). Indeed, in David's prayerful response, he sees this covenant as *"instruction for mankind"* (v.19). So... let us be instructed! The chapter begins with discussion of David's plans to build a *"house"* for the Lord (vs.1-5), by which he meant a temple. But after considering that idea, the Lord tells David—through the prophet Nathan—that HE (the Lord) is actually going to make DAVID a *"house"* (v.11), by which he meant a monarchical dynasty. David will be the father of a line of kings who would succeed him in Jerusalem. And of one particular son of David, it is said: *"He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever"* (v.13). The Messiah—the final and forever king of this whole world—would be a son of David... a promise fulfilled in Jesus, "Great David's Greater Son." Read and sing the hymn *"Hail to the Lord's Anointed!"*

Chapter 8

The chapters we are currently reading are the zenith of David's reign as king, in many ways. In vs.1-14 we see David conquering one enemy after another, as a strong picture of the *"son of David"* (Matthew 1.1) who will one day sit on the throne after him, forever—the Lord Jesus. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, summarizing the teaching of Scripture, says that Christ will execute the office of a king in these ways: *"in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies."* And in this way, chapter 8 gives us a picture of the Christ who is to come. He conquers us by his grace. He conquers his unrepentant enemies by his judgment. One way or the other, he will conquer all. *"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God"* (Romans 14.11). This would be a good time to sing Psalm 2. The justice of David's reign (v.15) is yet another picture, pointing to the reign of Christ. See Psalm 45.6; all of Psalm 72; Isaiah 9.7; 11.1-5... and David's final words in 2 Samuel 23.3b,4.

Chapter 9

This is one of the most beautiful pictures of *"the kindness of God"* (v.3) that the Bible has to offer. The reader was introduced to Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, back in 4.4. He's one of the few surviving members of Saul's family, and because of a *"fall"* (see 4.4), he is now *"lame."* He's in hiding, a long way away from David. Why? Because in the ancient world the first thing on the new king's "to do" list was to kill off all the members of the old king's family, so that critics of the new king can't start rallying around them, becoming a threat to the new regime. But remember, David made a covenant with Jonathan (1 Samuel 18.3; 20.8,16; 22.8; 23.18), and part of that covenant was David's promise to show kindness to Jonathan's family after David inherits the throne (1 Samuel 20.15,42). As the kingdom is now established, David looks to fulfill his covenant vow. What does it mean to show *"the kindness of God"* (v.3)? Well, how has God shown kindness to you, Christian? He seeks you out, brings you to himself, restores all that you lost because of sin, adopts you, brings you to his table, and makes you an heir.

Chapter 10

In yesterday's chapter, David showed great *"kindness"* to Mephibosheth, of the house of Saul; this *"kindness"* was the big theme in that chapter, which contains all three uses of the word *"kindness"* in this book (9.1,3,7). Today's chapter begins with David showing kindness again, this time to the house of Nahash (who had been Saul's enemy in 1 Samuel 11, but had been an ally of David, as he says today in v.2). But that kindness is not trusted. Hanun, the son of Nahash, deals dishonorably with David's ambassadors, insulting and humiliating them. From an "application" point of view, this is analogous to how the world often treats Christians, who are sent as ambassadors of the kindness of Christ. See John 15.18 & 1 John 3.13. In such a case, know that it is not we who are being rejected so much as Christ himself. And trust that, in the end, the Son of David will vindicate his true servants. From a "narrative" point of view, this chapter shows the birth of the war that reveals something tragic about David and sends a faithful Israelite soldier named Uriah to his death. This war won't end until 12.29-31.

Chapter 11

Yesterday evening my wife and I enjoyed a longish walk with our 10-year-old daughter. During our conversation, the 10-year-old said, *"Our society spends too much time looking at their phones. We're way too phoney."* Which, naturally, I thought was genius, and began immediately to plan a book in my head (which I know I will never write). Phoney / phony portrayals of our lives on social media would get an imaginary chapter. But even more needed would be the hypothetical chapter on phoney / phony women on pornographic sites. Other theoretical chapters vaguely presented themselves as well. But in today's chapter we see the evolution of David's sin which illustrates the great danger of phoney / phony women. The casual glance at a beautiful woman becomes lust. Lust then becomes adultery. Adultery becomes lying. Lying becomes murder. An indulgence of "internal sins" is so very dangerous. The conscience gets hardened. Wandering thoughts become calculated acts. In one of his books John Bunyan speaks of how the "Eye-Gate" is an entrance into "Man-Soul." Read Job 31.1. Then Matthew 6.13.

Chapter 12

Back in chapter 7, God's covenant with David included these words: *"I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you"* (7.14,15). And now we enter into that part of the story where we see that David's sins will bring him—and others—a great deal of pain and misery. As a faithful Father, God disciplines sinful behavior; yet his love is never taken away. Verses 11&12 are fulfilled through David's son Absalom (see 16.22). Verse 14 is fulfilled in this very chapter. But note here the great difference between Saul and David when they sinned. Saul only attempted to deceive the prophet sent to rebuke him (1 Samuel 13 & 15). But David honestly repents before the Lord (v.13). To enter into the grace of that repentance more deeply, see Psalms 32 and 51, especially noting the title of 51. We also see that God has not forgotten his promise to David. Solomon, who won't be mentioned again until 1 Kings 1, is born in vs.24,25.

Chapter 13

From an application point of view, we see several things: Amnon and Jonadab illustrate the kind of "friendships" to avoid (see 1 Corinthians 15.33; Proverbs 1.10) and to counsel our children to avoid. Secondly, just like in 2 Samuel 11, where we saw that a prolonged glance at a beautiful woman burned its way through lust, adultery, lying, all the way to murder, so here we see similar progressions of sin. Amnon's lust becomes deceit, rape, then loathing (compare Matthew 5.28). Absalom's hatred becomes deceit, then murder (compare Matthew 5.21,22). Sin always begins in the privacy of our hearts, but it eventually surfaces in our actions. Thirdly, David's failure to deal with his children's sins only provokes more sin (see v.21: David was angry, but did nothing. See also 1 Kings 1.6 for a confirming comment regarding David's parenting weakness). But from a narrative point of view, we can't miss the beginnings of the fulfillment of 12.11: *"Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house.'"* May we learn wisdom, and run to Christ. Today and every day.

Chapter 14

We saw in the last three verses yesterday that after Absalom had been in exile for three years, David's heart began to soften toward him. And that is just the opening for which Joab, commander of the army, had been waiting. (He probably wanted Absalom to succeed David on the throne. Also see 1 Kings 1.7; Joab was always choosing the wrong son.) So Joab decides to "pull a Nathan." (Remember Nathan's "parable rebuke story," 12.1-9?). The proposed "moral" of the story here in chapter 14 is that the good of a whole family / nation outweighs the dictates of convention in the punishment of a single individual. Therefore, the *"woman of Tekoa"* argued—and David inadvertently agreed—that Absalom should be restored from exile. But... very much unlike our God, when he restores sinners from exile and condemnation, David did not fully welcome Absalom back. He said yes and no at the same time, which understandably embittered Absalom. The gospel is very different. As the woman rightly says in v.14, God *"devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast."* Yes, hallelujah, he does. Amen!

Chapter 15

The end of yesterday's chapter stressed how attractive Absalom was (vs.25-26) and how arrogant he was (vs.28-32). Early in our chapter today we see that he also possessed natural leadership skills. If only he had the heart and character to channel that ability righteously, he could have made a wonderful king. Rather, he stokes and manipulates discontent, to stage a deceitful and treacherous rebellion against his father, David, whom he should have honored (Exodus 20.12). As I prepare this Cultivate (in late October), I'm also preparing a sermon on David's Psalm 31. In that Psalm David is lamenting a great terror of affliction which sounds a great deal like what we're reading here in 2 Samuel 15. And in the midst of that lament, he says this: *"my strength fails because of my iniquity"* (Psalm 31.10). Why does David not have the moral strength to deal with all the problems in his family (rape, deceit, murder, insurrection, etc.)? Because of his iniquity. Because of his adultery. Because of multiple wives giving birth to competing children. Sin has consequences; David's moral authority is weakened and eroded. See Galatians 6.7.

Chapter 16

In yesterday's chapter we saw David send the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem (15.24-26). Unlike the Israelites in 1 Samuel 4.3,4, David had no interest in trying to use the ark as some sort of "magic box," hoping to manipulate God into fighting for him. David was faithfully ready to accept whatever God's will was in this matter. We see that same readiness in today's chapter: Abishai is ready to cut off Shimei's head for all of these curses he's piling on David, but David calmly leaves the whole matter in the hands of God (vs.5-13; see Romans 12.19). But we must *fault* David for something we see in today's chapter. Proverbs 18.17 says, *"The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him."* Christian, we should always wait to hear both sides of a matter before rushing to judgment. David forgets this, as we often do, in vs.1-4. Ziba—as will become clear to the reader later, 19.24-30—is misrepresenting Mephibosheth (the crippled son of Jonathan from 2 Samuel 9) as a traitor. And he's doing so for obvious reasons (v.4). What harm we bring to other people by not following Matthew 18.15.

Chapter 17

Psalm 33: *"For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."* What we see in today's chapter is a perfect illustration of these truths. Ahithophel's counsel was actually very sound military strategy, but—as we read in v.14—*"the Lord had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the Lord might bring harm upon Absalom."* In fact, Absalom's decision to ignore Ahithophel's advice so sealed David's ultimate triumph that Ahithophel, foreseeing the end, went ahead and executed himself (v.23). He was also, it seems, a proud man who could not abide his sudden loss in status (see 2 Samuel 16.23). This story also illustrates both the power of prayer (see 1 Samuel 15.31) and the value of wise and decisive action (see 1 Samuel 15.34). A great, ugly mess has come of David's sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 12.10), but God is ruling over all. And he eventually brings good of it: Christ himself! (see Matthew 1.6).

Chapter 18

Ahithophel's last counsel, which was refused, included these words: *"You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace"* (17.3). He clearly saw that the death of *"only one man"* would settle this whole rebellion, one way or another. Either David or Absalom must die. In today's reading we see that Joab shared this perspective, in spite of the king's command (vs.9-15). The issue of eternity is also settled, for *"all the people,"* by one man or another: either Adam or Christ. Every human being is united to one or the other, in sin or in grace (Romans 5.12-21). And the grace of Christ is foreshadowed in **v.33**: *"would that I have died instead of you."* We see another hint of that gospel story in vs.19-23: two men are racing, and one outruns the other. (In this culture the choice of messenger reflected the content of the news the messenger carried. Ahimaaz thought he carried good news, but Joab knew that David was only focused on Absalom, so he chose a foreign Cushite—whom Ahimaaz outran.) In John 20.1-4 we see another race, with one outrunning another. And there David's Son had fulfilled **v.33**.

Chapter 19

On the other side of the war there are many relationships David must negotiate wisely. **1. His Own Army**, whom he was in great danger of offending as he mourned his enemy's death rather than thanking and celebrating his own soldiers. But David listened to Joab's rebuke, and gave his people the gift of his presence. **2. Those Who Supported Absalom**, to whom he needed to show himself gracious and forgiving for the sake of re-establishing a unified kingdom. But not so gracious and forgiving as to anger those who had remained loyal to him! Note his decision to replace Joab (Absalom's killer) with Amasa (who had been the commander of Absalom's army), as the new commander of his army; this would certainly communicate grace and forgiveness. **3. The Tribe Of Judah**, which had been divided by the war between David and Absalom. David had to win them back over, with reassurances. **4. Shimei**, who had bitterly cursed David (16.5-13). He is forgiven. **5. Barzillai**, who had been loyal to David (17.27-29). He is rewarded. **6. Ziba and Mephibosheth**, who told different stories (16.1-4; 19.24-30).

Chapter 20

In verses 40-43 of yesterday's chapter we saw there was some real tension and friction between "Israel" (the northern part of the country) and "Judah" (the southern part of the country, the tribe to which David belonged). Eventually these would become two separate nations (1 Kings 12.16-24), but in today's chapter that tension and friction only leads to a fairly pathetic and short-lived revolt. The northern tribes were *literally half-hearted* about restoring David to his throne (19.40), in spite of their claim to a greater "share" in David—a claim that was met by fierce words from the tribe of Judah (19.43). So... the timing is ripe for Sheba (20.1) to lead his rebellion. Although all he really did was retreat, wait to be besieged, and get his head cut off by a peaceful and wise people who don't want their town and people destroyed (see Ecclesiastes 9.13-16; Matthew 5.9). We see once again that Joab is a man of firm action but with a savage and ruthless heart, and he wants his old job back. The reader's outrage in this chapter must be remembered when he or she gets to 1 Kings 2.5-6 and reads David's last words concerning Joab.

Chapter 21

At the end of the book we meet a montage of different episodes from throughout the reign of David, all of which—one way or another—illustrate the relationship with David that God promised back in 7.8-16. He gives guidance, loyal friends, love, etc. In vs.1-14 we are reminded of the covenant Israel made with the Gibeonites back in Joshua 9. The story didn't make it into the selective history of 1 & 2 Samuel, but at some point King Saul had violated that covenant. And we're here reminded of just how binding covenant vows are and just how serious the consequences of breaking such vows are (see Ecclesiastes 5.4-6). The wrong must be put right. God takes covenants very seriously. This story also illustrates the powerfully serious and "public" nature of sin. There is no such thing as "private" sin; our sin affects others, by example, by influence, by consequence, etc. May we live in constant repentance of sin, and may we daily renew our covenant vows. Verses 15-22 show us some scenes from David's wars with the Philistines, which prepares the reader for the wonderful gift we find in chapter 22...

Chapter 22

We said yesterday that the last section of chapter 21 showed us some scenes from David's wars with the Philistines, which prepares the reader for a wonderful gift found in chapter 22. What is that gift? *"And David spoke to the Lord the words of this song on the day when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies"...* (22.1). The next chapter will refer to David as *"the sweet psalmist of Israel,"* and now we get to enjoy that gift to God's people. The Psalm we find in chapter 22 is basically the same as Psalm 18; it's a Psalm of Thanksgiving, wonderfully providing us with a model prayer/song to use in our own worship of God. Much of David's life was a struggle against enemies, but the Lord proved worthy of all the praise given to him in chapter 22. Verses 1-7 describe what God had been to David. Verses 8-20 show God's response to David's cries for help. Verses 21-25 refer to David's general love for God. Verses 26-37 celebrate God's covenant faithfulness. Verses 38-46 recall the victories God gave to David, over his enemies. Verses 47-51 conclude the whole with renewed praise.

Chapter 23

Some gems found in this chapter: 1. First, note the very last words (v.39): a poignant reminder that David was not a perfect ruler. 2. But a perfect ruler was coming into the world, and he would appear through the house and line of David, according to God's everlasting covenant made with David (vs.2-5). Since that time the Promised One has come (Matthew 1.1). And, in fact, he's coming again! 3. David acknowledges the Coming One as all of his help and all of his desire (v.5). 4. There will be evil people who oppose this coming king, and they will have to be handled with care. But their rebellion is ultimately futile; their end has already been declared (vs.6,7). 5. All of this has been firmly revealed by the Spirit of God (vs.2,3a). 6. One way that God helps his servants is through the gifts and love and sacrifices of his other servants (vs.8-39). 7. Note the heroic exploits of these *"mighty men"* (v.8), in their service to King David. They were devoted, brave, loyal, determined, and ready to lay down their lives in the service of their king. Such should be the hearts of the servants of King Jesus, Great David's Greater Son.

Chapter 24

At first this seems like an odd conclusion to the book, but two things: 1. The story continues in 1 Kings, which Cultivate will eventually engage. 2. It's actually a very fitting conclusion, with an emphasis on repentance, faith, and forgiveness, wrapped up in a strong forward-leaning "origin story" of the site which the future temple will one day occupy. The story begins with David numbering his people (for military purposes), which was a violation of God's command that Israel's kings not glory in their armies (Deuteronomy 17.16, etc.), and also the path to becoming a conceited and self-focused Nebuchadnezzar (see Daniel 4.30, etc.). But it was God who built up David's kingdom (2 Samuel 7.8-16; Psalm 20.7), not David himself. And now God will touch, in judgment, the very object of David's unseemly pride. But again David immediately repents of his sin (v.10) and makes the sacrifices that embody his faith in the coming Sacrifice of Christ (see 1 John 1.7). The *"threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite"* (v.16) becomes the place of God's presence, of worship, of sacrifice and offerings, of mercy and of prayer... the future temple site!

-Reflecting on 2 Samuel-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 2 Samuel. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 2 Samuel before we move forward?

"This God—his way is perfect; the word of the Lord proves true; he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." 2 Samuel 22.31