

2 SAMUEL—WEEK 1

BIG SHOES



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Bathing Bathsheba by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656)
On display in the Neues Palais in Potsdam, Germany*

David's path to being king has taught him a lot. He understands that his anointing is a huge deal. Thus, he respects Saul to a surprising extent and puts to death an Amalekite who claims to have killed him.

David assumes the throne absent any bossy attitude. Mercy and reliance on the LORD will be his style.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

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Thank you.

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2 Samuel, Week 1 — Big Shoes
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1 2 Samuel 1:1–16 (ESV)

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. 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. David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." 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." Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" 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."

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. And 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." David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. And 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.'"

The Amalekite is lying; Saul killed himself. This guy thinks he can be a big shot for bringing big news and playing a big role. He expects to be treated like "somebody" for all this.

Instead, his plan backfires spectacularly, and he's put to death. That seems a bit extreme, but is it?

It would be if Saul had been elected instead of anointed. Then this would be all about King Saul. He'd be just a person, and his life would be his to do with as he wishes. Ending it wouldn't be such a big deal. Thus, David killing the Amalekite for helping Saul commit suicide would be extreme.

But Saul isn't just himself; he's anointed. He's chosen by God. He carries God's stamp. As such, his life means more. He is God's representative.

Treating him like just another king misses the point that this is God's universe and He is Lord over all.

This is a subtle but important lesson. Christians should see all things from a kingdom perspective.

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/item/15863-christian-eyes>

2 2 Samuel 1:17–27 (ESV)

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!”

David isn't just mourning the death of two men; he's mourning the death of *Your glory, O Israel*. Three times he says, “*How the mighty have fallen!*” He's referring to Saul and Jonathan when he says at the end, “*the weapons of war perished!*”

Over and over, we have seen David show seemingly undue respect for Saul. It's not about who Saul is, but what he is. The death of Queen Elizabeth II, England's longest reigning monarch, occasioned great mourning too. But hers was an inherited crown. That's nothing compared to an anointed one.

Saul gets what he does not deserve. That seems odd until we remember that's what we get in the gospel.

This respect for the anointed one factors in to David and Jonathan's relationship too. In this passage, David calls Jonathan's love *extraordinary*.

But Jonathan knew that the kingdom had been taken from Saul and that David had been anointed by Samuel to be the next king.

So, while David deserved some respect, what he got from Jonathan was extraordinary.

3 2 Samuel 2:1–7

It happened after this that David inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?”

And the LORD said to him, “Go up.”

David said, “Where shall I go up?”

And He said, “To Hebron.”

So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. And David brought up the men who were with him, every man with his household. So they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.

Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, “The men of Jabesh Gilead were the ones who buried Saul.” So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead, and said to them, “You are blessed of the LORD, for you have shown this kindness to your lord, to Saul, and have buried him. And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing. Now therefore, let your hands be strengthened, and be valiant; for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”

Notice how carefully, even gingerly, David takes over the kingdom. It’s the exact opposite of a “take charge” CEO who comes in and cleans house.

First, David checks with the LORD to see if he should go into any city at all, and after getting a green light, he then asks, “Which one?”

Only with God’s approval does David decide where to settle. It sounds like he’s not ready to be king.

Actually, it’s the opposite. David is showing that he’s a natural at this.

After ascending to the throne, David’s first action is to commend the men who buried Saul. This commendation isn’t some formulaic thank you letter; it’s a detailed commendation explaining why what they did was good and praying detailed blessings on the men who did it. David even promises rewards.

And now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you. I also will repay you this kindness, because you have done this thing.

When people are out of their depth, it shows—like a guy who acts a little too macho. Conversely, David checks with God when everyone else doesn’t want him to take the time to do it. He commends people for helping honor a rival.

David is showing signs of being comfortable with his calling.

4 2 Samuel 2:8–23 (ESV)

But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise." Then they arose and passed over by number, twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David. And each caught his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim, which is at Gibeon. And the battle was very fierce that day. And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Now Asahel was as swift of foot as a wild gazelle. And Asahel pursued Abner, and as he went, he turned neither to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Is it you, Asahel?" And he answered, "It is I." Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and seize one of the young men and take his spoil." But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. And Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I lift up my face to your brother Joab?" But he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the butt of his spear, so that the spear came out at his back. And he fell there and died where he was. And all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, stood still.

Who is Ish-bosheth? And why didn't he die in 1 Samuel 31:2? *And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul.* (ESV)

We don't know how Ish-bosheth escaped death, but he's obviously not the cream of the crop. He's not even mentioned in the genealogy of Saul in 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39 (unless he's Eshbaal there). And notice that today's passage never shows Ish-bosheth doing or even saying a single thing.

He's just a puppet. This is all about Abner. Everyone knows that David is supposed to be the next king.

Abner is propping up Ish-bosheth in an ill-fated quest for power.

Big evil leads to big grief, and seeking power in this way is big evil. Abner's scheme has divided Israel. Now he's started a civil war. As always, battle by champion (or ten champions) doesn't settle anything.

The death toll will be significant. And for what?

5 2 Samuel 2:24–32

Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner. And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Ammah, which is before Giah by the road to the Wilderness of Gibeon. Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit, and took their stand on top of a hill. Then Abner called to Joab and said, “Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?”

And Joab said, “As God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren.” So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore. Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron; and they came to Mahanaim.

So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David’s servants nineteen men and Asahel. But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner’s men, three hundred and sixty men who died. Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father’s tomb, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.

So, after setting up a ridiculous puppet king, plus starting a rebellion against the LORD’s clearly chosen one, Abner has finally been chased down by a superior force. Time to get what’s coming to you, Abner.

But he talks his way out of it, saying, “*Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?*”

Suddenly it’s, “We’re all brothers here, right?”

Civil wars can lead to incredible bloodshed. So, Joab decides to favor mercy over justice here.

Unfortunately, this doesn’t put an end to this conflict. As we will see, letting Abner off the hook doesn’t change his character. Bloodshed will continue until Abner is no more.

This is a horrible lesson we seem to learn over and over—a cease fire only delays the bloodshed. Ending a civil war in total victory for one side leads to a difficult reunion/reconstruction, but cease fires are worse. They don’t resolve things any better than battle by champion.

A 1991 cease fire in Iraq left Saddam Hussein in power, which just put off the worst conflict.

A 1961 cease fire in Cuba left Castro in power, which led to decades of refugees fleeing and dying.

A 1953 cease fire in Korea left the Kim dynasty in power, which led to them developing nuclear weapons.

Lord have mercy.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. How has your perspective changed over time?
2. Do the benefits of the gospel intimidate or embarrass you?
3. Are you comfortable with your calling?
4. Have you known someone who craved power or advancement?
5. When is a cease fire correct?

Items for prayer: