

Aquifer Open Study Notes (Book Intros)

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2 Samuel

David's rise to power over all the tribes of Israel was filled with violence, political struggles, and plots. David was not a perfect king. He committed adultery (having sexual relations with another person's spouse). He then committed murder to hide his adultery. This brought trouble and division in his family and in the nation.

Yet God remained committed to David and his descendants. He protected David during many challenges to his rule. God also forgave David and restored him when he sinned.

Setting

While Saul was still king, Samuel anointed David as Israel's next king ([1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)). However, David did not become king for several years. During this time, Saul was jealous and angry with David. Saul tried many times to kill David. But David never fought back when he had the chance. Instead, David trusted in the Lord's plan and timing.

David's rule brought major changes to Israel, both inside and outside the nation. In an internal sense, the people started to regard themselves as a united nation. During Saul's rule and the early part of David's rule, the nation was not fully united. The twelve tribes mainly identified themselves by their tribes rather than as a nation. By the end of David's rule, a sense of national unity had formed. This prepared for times of prosperity during the rule of King Solomon.

During David's rule, Israel's position with its neighbors improved greatly. The threat from the Philistines, which was plain in the book of Judges and during Saul's rule, mostly disappeared because of David's effective leadership (see, for example, [2 Samuel 5:17-25](#); [21:15-22](#); [23:9-17](#)). David's rule brought peace and stability to Israel's borders.

Summary

For seven and a half years after Saul and Jonathan died, David was only king of Judah ([1:1-27](#)). During two of those years, Saul's only son who survived, Ishbosheth, ruled the northern tribes. This caused a violent civil war. David became stronger while Ishbosheth weakened. In the end, they killed Ishbosheth and his top commander, Abner, by assassination. David did not want this ([3:22-4:12](#)).

After Ishbosheth's death, the northern tribes' leaders pledged loyalty to David. David then moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem. It was a more central location, and he forced out the Jebusites who lived there ([5:6-16](#)).

Jerusalem was more than just David's political capital. By bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, David also made it Israel's spiritual capital ([6:1-15](#)). Soon after, God made an eternal covenant (special agreement) with David and those descended from him ([7:1-29](#)). In these early years, David succeeded in many areas ([8:1-18](#); [10:1-19](#)). He kept his promise to be kind to Saul and Jonathan's families ([9:1-13](#)).

Then David made a terrible mistake. He brought Bathsheba, another man's wife, to his house for sexual relations ([11:1-5](#)). She became pregnant, and David arranged for her husband's murder ([11:6-27](#)). God was angry with David's actions and punished him ([12:1-12](#)). Although David admitted his sin and God forgave him, the child from the affair died ([12:13-23](#)). Yet, David remained the king God chose ([12:24-31](#)).

From this point on, David encountered increasing problems. Amnon, one of David's sons, raped his half-sister Tamar. Her brother Absalom took revenge for this act ([13:1-39](#)). Later, Absalom attempted to take David's kingdom, but he died in the rebellion ([14:1-19:43](#)). Sheba, a Benjamite, also led a revolution against David but David defeated and executed him ([20:1-26](#)).

As king, David acted twice to calm God's anger against the nation ([21:1-22](#); [24:1-25](#)). In the second instance, David built an altar in Jerusalem ([24:18-25](#)). This later became the temple site (see [1 Chronicles 21:18-22:1](#)). Between these events are passages celebrating God's power through David. They describe how loyal and brave David's special warriors were ([22:1-23:39](#)).

Author

The same anonymous author who wrote 1 Samuel likely also wrote 2 Samuel (see 1 Samuel Book Introduction, “Author”).

Historical Issues

Evidence for David

For a long time, no ancient documents outside the Bible mentioned David's name. This led some scholars to claim that David and his story were fiction. However, in 1993, archaeologists at Tell Dan in northern Israel found an Aramaic inscription (carved writing). It was about Hazael, King of Syria (around 842–800 BC), celebrating a military victory over Israel and Judah. The inscription reads, "I put Jeho ... , son of ... ruler of Israel, and ... iahu, son of ...g of the house of David to death" (ellipses show missing parts of the text). This inscription provides evidence of David's existence and shows he founded a family of kings in Judah.

Violence

Second Samuel describes murders and executions more than any other book. This is especially true for David's political rivals and their supporters:

- Saul and Jonathan ([1:1-15](#))
- Abner ([3:30](#))
- Ishbosheth ([4:6-8](#))
- Absalom ([18:14-15](#))
- Other males descended from Saul ([21:8-9](#))
- Amasa ([20:10](#))
- Sheba ([20:21-22](#))

The story shows that David was not responsible for these murders. Some people accused David of killing others to gain power (see [16:5-8](#)). But the story makes clear that this was not true. David was guilty of murder only in the case of Uriah. This was a terrible sin, but it was not done for political reasons.

David did not participate in the murders linked to his rise to power. He did not use violence to defeat the previous royal family. He truly showed grief at the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. He ordered the execution of those who killed Saul and Ishbosheth ([1:1-16](#); [4:12](#)). David deeply respected Saul as the king the Lord chose. Even though David knew God had anointed him to replace Saul, he chose not to act on it himself.

Meaning and Message

The book of 2 Samuel tells how God made David's private anointing (ceremony to appoint a leader using oil) as king known to everyone ([1 Samuel 16:1-13](#)). God also made a promise to David to support his family's rule.

God's covenant with David is similar to the covenant with Abraham. Both include promises of great fame and rest from enemies ([Genesis 12:2](#); [2 Samuel 7:9](#); [Genesis 15:18-21](#); [2 Samuel 7:10](#)). Both are eternal ([Genesis 13:15](#); [2 Samuel 7:16](#)). Much of the land God promised to Abraham and those descended from him came through David expanding the kingdom ([Genesis 15:18](#); [2 Samuel 5:17-25](#); [8:1-14](#); [10:1-9](#)).

God's commitment to David was key to David's success. This was despite civil war, revolutions, and the ambitions of some loyal subjects, as well as his personal failures. His mistakes, especially his adultery (lack of loyalty in marriage) with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah were major sins. These sins might make one wonder if David would end up like Saul, rejected by God and replaced. God did punish David when he sinned ([12:1-20:26](#); [24:1-25](#)). However, God remained committed to David and his family ([7:14-16](#)). God's commitment, rather than David's merit, explains his success.

Kingship played an important role in God's plan for his people and for the coming of Christ. God's promise to David extends beyond him and those immediately descended from him to a distant son, Jesus Christ. The New Testament begins and ends by emphasizing Jesus, the eternal king, from the family of David ([Matthew 1:1](#); [Revelation 22:16](#)).