

# 1 SAMUEL 25 - 2 SAMUEL 5

25

The death of Samuel marks a new chapter in the saga. David travels far enough away from Saul so that he can build his own “business” (so to speak). What kind of business is it? It is as protector of the region. He and his men are supported by the inhabitants paying them tribute money for their protection in return.

The story that follows reveals what happens when an inhabitant refuses to co-operate. In this case, Nabal, a disreputable fellow with an insolent character, refuses to be part of this arrangement. David is prepared to enforce his offer. Fortunately, Abigail (Nabal’s wife) intervenes and saves the slaughter of Nabal and his men that would have followed. When Nabal finds out, he is so ashamed that his spirit dies within him. Physical death follows soon after. Abigail, who is now a widow, has so pleased David (she is both beautiful and intelligent) that David takes her as his wife. We are also told that David takes a second wife (more will be on the way as the story progresses).

26

There is another incident where David has a chance to kill Saul but spares his life. Is this sparing a strategy or is it David’s respect for God in terms of Saul being “the Lord’s anointed” king? Unlike a character like MacBeth in Shakespeare’s play, David will not make himself King even though he has been anointed to succeed Saul and the prophet Samuel (and many others whom he has met) have acknowledged that he will be King one day. David is content to allow things to unfold without his intervention. He will respect Saul’s rule while Saul is alive.

A source of tension for David is introduced here, and it will continue throughout the story, namely, the activity of Joab and his brothers. They are David’s generals and they are very effective soldiers and killers. But they are merciless and impetuous, and David is unable to control them. They will cause David considerable grief. In this chapter, however, David persuades Abishai that it’s a good idea to spare Saul, and Abishai consents to this counsel. In the long run, David’s graciousness to the house of Saul will serve to gather more support for his kingship when he becomes king. Killing one’s enemies is not always the best way to get respect, honour and loyalty. It also encourages treachery and deception, as well as tyranny (rule based on brutality and fear). David is willing to take risks in protecting the life of some of those who intend harm to him (like Saul and his household).

27, 29, 30

David’s relationship with the Philistine Achish is an interesting one. Achish develops a trust for David even though David is not truthful with him. Achish believes David is fighting other Israelites (and therefore serving the Philistine cause). Instead, however, David is fighting the enemies of Israel, and in order to safeguard his deception, he doesn’t allow any survivors of the towns and cities he attacks. This seems fairly bloody and treacherous of David, but his aim is to survive this extreme situation he has been forced into by Saul’s animosity toward him.

Later, when the Philistines are preparing to fight the Israelites, Achish is willing to allow David to fight by his side. He fully trusts him. Achish's fellow Philistine commanders, however, refuse to trust David and he is not allowed to fight alongside Achish in the upcoming battle with the Israelites. The question for us, however, is: what was David possibly thinking in offering to fight alongside the Philistines? Would he actually attack the Israelites, or would he betray the Philistines on the field of battle? We are not told.

Upon his return to Ziklag, David witnesses how the Amalekites had taken advantage of the absence of David and his men to raid their town and take away all their possessions and women. David takes it upon himself to make things right and goes after them in pursuit. All is taken back again, and several things are done by David that gives us further clues into his character. First, he establishes that the men who stay back to keep guard, should get the same share of the spoils as those who actually get their hands dirty fighting. Second, David makes it a practice to give shares of his spoils to elders and leaders who are friends in other towns, villages and cities. This is an excellent way of building alliances.

28, 31

The drama on the Israelite side in preparation for the upcoming battle has Saul searching for a word of support from God. Given that Samuel is dead and the priests that have survived Saul's slaughter have fled under David's protection, Saul has no way of receiving a word from God (the 3 ways listed are: 1) dreams, 2) Urim (priestly representatives who would consult God in prayer), or 3) prophets. And since he has expelled wizards, mediums and sorcerers (they are competitors with the priestly and prophetic groups), he is desperate to find someone who can communicate God's will (and hopefully, encouragement) to him. He tracks down a medium who is cautious, lest she be found out and executed. Saul is looking for Samuel, whose guidance had been his mainstay when Samuel was alive. Samuel is brought up from the dead (the conception at the time was of an underworld where the dead lived as lifeless spirits. There was not yet a developed concept of heaven/hell).

Samuel's word to Saul is terrible. Within a day, he and his sons will be dead. Saul is so overwhelmed by this bad news that he falls to the ground in terror. Eventually he pulls himself together, eats and departs to prepare for battle.

When the battle begins, the Israelites are quickly overcome by the Philistines, and the loss is total. Jonathan and 2 other sons of Saul are killed, and Saul is so badly wounded that he finishes himself off. He dies in despair, but he dies a man. One can't but have respect for this tragic hero. Even though the kingdom has passed from his hands, Saul has engendered loyalty and respect. In an act of courage and grace, the men of Jabesh Gilead (a city near the Philistine borders) rescue Saul's body and that of his slain sons and give them a proper burial. Respecting dead bodies is respecting the people who are dead.

2 Samuel 1-4

David mourns deeply the death of Saul and his sons, Jonathan in particular. 'The Song of the Bow' is beautiful poetry of lament. It is especially beautiful in the KJV.

Abner, Saul's general, survives this defeat and he supports a surviving son of Saul as king. His name is Ish-bosheth or Ishbaal. He does not have the confidence or strength of character of his father or brother Jonathan, and he depends on Abner's support to make his kingship. Abner (house of Saul) and Joab (house of David) lead their men into fighting each other. Joab has the support of the southern part of Israel (Judah) while Abner has the support of the northern part, and especially, Saul's tribe - Benjamin. With the fighting back and forth, Abner's side is declining in strength while David's side is becoming stronger. Eventually, Abner is disgusted by the unworthiness of Ishbaal as king and the ingratitude which he feels he has received. So, he defects to David's side and works to transfer the leadership of all Israel to David.

As is his character, David wants to treat Abner with the same respect as he has treated the house of Saul. Does Joab find in this a threat to his own power in David's army? Or is Joab now committed to finishing off the blood feud that has begun with Abner's killing of Joab's brother Asahel? Certainly, Abner's wish was not to kill Asahel. He pleaded with Asahel to stay away and when he hit Asahel with the butt of his spear, he probably intended to knock him down, not kill him. But the force of Asahel's lightning speed (2:18) and the fact that the back of the spear probably hit him in the abdomen rather than his rib cage, made Asahel's death inevitable. Thus, in an act of trickery, Joab stabs Abner, causing David fresh grief and fresh outrage at Joab's brutality.

With Abner no longer alive to protect Ishbaal, his assassination is predictable. Again, by publicly denouncing this act of treachery, David distinguishes himself as a man of honour and loyalty to the house of Saul. But also, David is a man of grace in his own way. He refuses to do to Saul or his house what Saul wanted to do to him. He forgives and forgets and wants to build bridges rather than eliminate threats. The fact that he cannot control Joab, however, will cause David further grief down the line.

5

David becomes king of all Israel. Jerusalem is taken and established as his capital. The Philistines hear about this and fear this unification of all Israel under one king as a threat to them. They wage war and lose bitterly. David's kingdom is beginning to grow. His success is interpreted as God's blessing.