



David's Lament: How the Mighty Have Fallen! (2 Sam 1-2)

Notes: Week One

2 Samuel 1-2 (HCSB)

Responses to Saul's Death

1 After the death of Saul, David returned from defeating the Amalekites and stayed at Ziklag two days. **2** On the third day a man with torn clothes and dust on his head came from Saul's camp. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. **3** David asked him, "Where have you come from?"

He replied to him, "I've escaped from the Israelite camp."

4 "What was the outcome? Tell me," David asked him.

"The troops fled from the battle," he answered. "Many of the troops have fallen and are dead. Also, Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

5 David asked the young man who had brought him the report, "How do you know Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

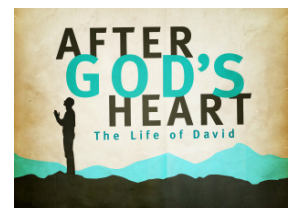
6 "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," he replied, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear. At that very moment the chariots and the cavalry were closing in on him. **7** When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, so I answered: I'm at your service. **8** He asked me, 'Who are you?' I told him: I'm an Amalekite. **9** Then he begged me, 'Stand over me and kill me, for I'm mortally wounded,^[a] but my life still lingers.' **10** So I stood over him and killed him because I knew that after he had fallen he couldn't survive. I took the crown that was on his head and the armband that was on his arm, and I've brought them here to my lord."

11 Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and all the men with him did the same. **12** They mourned, wept, and fasted until the evening for those who died by the sword—for Saul, his son Jonathan, the LORD's people, and the house of Israel.

13 David inquired of the young man who had brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I'm the son of a foreigner," he said. "I'm an Amalekite."

14 David questioned him, "How is it that you were not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" **15** Then David summoned one of his servants and said, "Come here and kill him!" The servant struck him, and he died. **16** For David had said to the Amalekite, "Your blood is on your own head because your own mouth testified against you by saying, 'I killed the LORD's anointed.'"



¹⁷ David sang the following lament for Saul and his son Jonathan, ¹⁸ and he ordered that the Judahites be taught The Song of the Bow. It is written in the Book of Jashar:^[b]

¹⁹ The splendor of Israel lies slain on your heights.

How the mighty have fallen!

²⁰ Do not tell it in Gath,

don't announce it in the marketplaces of Ashkelon,

or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,

and the daughters of the uncircumcised will gloat.

²¹ Mountains of Gilboa,

let no dew or rain be on you,

or fields of offerings,^[c]

for there the shield of the mighty was defiled—

the shield of Saul, no longer anointed with oil.

²² Jonathan's bow never retreated,

Saul's sword never returned unstained,^[d]

from the blood of the slain,

from the bodies of the mighty.

²³ Saul and Jonathan,

loved and delightful,

they were not parted in life or in death.

They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.

²⁴ Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,

who clothed you in scarlet, with luxurious things,

who decked your garments with gold ornaments.

²⁵ How the mighty have fallen in the thick of battle!

Jonathan lies slain on your heights.

²⁶ I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother.

You were such a friend to me.

Your love for me was more wonderful

than the love of women.

²⁷ How the mighty have fallen

and the weapons of war have perished!

David, King of Judah

2 Some time later, David inquired of the LORD: “Should I go to one of the towns of Judah?”

The LORD answered him, “Go.”

Then David asked, “Where should I go?”

“To Hebron,” the LORD replied.

2 So David went there with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. 3 In addition, David brought the men who were with him, each one with his household, and they settled in the towns near Hebron. 4 Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. They told David: “It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul.”

5 David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, “The LORD bless you, because you have shown this kindness to Saul your lord when you buried him. 6 Now, may the LORD show kindness and faithfulness to you, and I will also show the same goodness to you because you have done this deed. 7 Therefore, be strong and courageous, for though Saul your lord is dead, the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.”

8 Abner son of Ner, commander of Saul’s army, took Saul’s son Ish-bosheth^{[e][l]} and moved him to Mahanaim. 9 He made him king over Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin—over all Israel. 10 Saul’s son Ish-bosheth was 40 years old when he began his reign over Israel; he ruled for two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. 11 The length of time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

12 Abner son of Ner and soldiers of Ish-bosheth son of Saul marched out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. 13 So Joab son of Zeruiah and David’s soldiers marched out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. The two groups took up positions on opposite sides of the pool.

14 Then Abner said to Joab, “Let’s have the young men get up and compete in front of us.”

“Let them get up,” Joab replied.

15 So they got up and were counted off—12 for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth son of Saul, and 12 from David’s soldiers. 16 Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his sword into his opponent’s side so that they all died together. So this place, which is in Gibeon, is named Field of Blades.^[g]

17 The battle that day was extremely fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David’s soldiers. 18 The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel was a fast runner, like one of the wild gazelles. 19 He chased Abner and did not turn to the right or the left in his pursuit of him. 20 Abner glanced back and said, “Is that you, Asahel?”

“Yes it is,” Asahel replied.

²¹ Abner said to him, “Turn to your right or left, seize one of the young soldiers, and take whatever you can get from him.” But Asahel would not stop chasing him. ²² Once again, Abner warned Asahel, “Stop chasing me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How could I ever look your brother Joab in the face?”

²³ But Asahel refused to turn away, so Abner hit him in the stomach with the end of his spear. The spear went through his body, and he fell and died right there. When all who came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, they stopped, ²⁴ but Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. By sunset, they had gone as far as the hill of Ammah, which is opposite Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon.

²⁵ The Benjaminites rallied to Abner; they formed a single unit and took their stand on top of a hill. ²⁶ Then Abner called out to Joab: “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize this will only end in bitterness? How long before you tell the troops to stop pursuing their brothers?”

²⁷ “As God lives,” Joab replied, “if you had not spoken up, the troops wouldn’t have stopped pursuing their brothers until morning.” ²⁸ Then Joab blew the ram’s horn, and all the troops stopped; they no longer pursued Israel or continued to fight. ²⁹ So Abner and his men marched through the Arabah all that night. They crossed the Jordan, marched all morning,^[h] and arrived at Mahanaim.

³⁰ When Joab had turned back from pursuing Abner, he gathered all the troops. In addition to Asahel, 19 of David’s soldiers were missing, ³¹ but they had killed 360 of the Benjaminites and Abner’s men. ³² Afterward, they carried Asahel to his father’s tomb in Bethlehem and buried him. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at dawn.

Footnotes:

- a. [2 Samuel 1:9](#) LXX reads *for terrible darkness has taken hold of me*
- b. [2 Samuel 1:18](#) Or *of the Upright*
- c. [2 Samuel 1:21](#) LXX reads *firstfruits*
- d. [2 Samuel 1:22](#) Lit *empty*
- e. [2 Samuel 2:8](#) Some LXX mss read *Ishbaal*; 1Ch 8:33; 9:39
- f. [2 Samuel 2:8](#) = Man of Shame
- g. [2 Samuel 2:16](#) Or *Helkath-hazzurim*
- h. [2 Samuel 2:29](#) Or *marched through the Bithron*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

2 Samuel 1-2

1:1 The historical account of the first kings of Israel continues following the description of the death of Saul in [1Sam 31](#). No doubt David and his men needed some rest, so they stayed at Ziklag. In addition, Ziklag needed to be rebuilt ([1Sam 30:1](#)).

1:2 By the third day, Saul had been dead a few days, but David had been occupied elsewhere. Torn clothes and dust on his head were signs of mourning, so David immediately knew bad news was forthcoming.

1:4 The words the troops fled indicate that Israel had lost the battle ([1Sam 4:17](#); [17:24](#); [31:1](#)). Saul and...Jonathan are dead was terrible news, but also news that required further verification.

1:6 Mount Gilboa was the site of the battle, so the messenger's word placed him at the scene. Saul, leaning on his spear gives the sense that an eyewitness was speaking. The mention of chariots and...cavalry was consistent with Philistine warfare, especially in a valley where the chariots had plenty of room to maneuver.

1:8 Ironically, the man was an Amalekite, part of the group Saul had been commanded to destroy ([1Sam 15:1-3](#)).

1:9 Saul's alleged words could square with the circumstances of [1Sam 31:3-4](#); see the next note.

1:10 With his words I stood over him and killed him, the Amalekite claimed responsibility for killing King Saul. Further, the man's possession of Saul's crown and armband provided proof of the Amalekite's presence at Gilboa and that Saul was dead. Two possibilities exist on harmonizing this verse with [1Sam 31:4](#). The first is to assume Saul fell on his sword, did not die immediately, and so asked the Amalekite to help bring about a quicker death. The second and more likely is that the Amalekite arrived on the scene after Saul had died but before the Philistines arrived. He saw an opportunity to receive a reward from David, so he took the crown and armband to David and lied about the way Saul died. Perhaps David detected the Amalekite's deceit, which in part would explain his command in [verse 15](#).

1:11-12 Throughout his life, David had remained as loyal as possible to Saul's house. The king of Israel lay dead, so David and all with him mourned, wept, and fasted.

1:14 David's reference to Saul as the LORD's anointed ([1Sam 24:6](#)) highlights the respect he had for God's hand on his former king, despite the struggles he had experienced with Saul.

meshiyach

Hebrew Pronunciation [meh SHEE akh]

HCSB Translation anointed

Uses in 2 Samuel 5

Uses in the OT 38

Focus Passage [2 Samuel 1:14,16](#)

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "2 Samuel 1-2".

Meshiyach, from *mashach* (anoint; 70x) describes somebody *anointed* to serve God, usually kings ([1Sam 10:1](#)), prophets ([1Ki 19:16](#)), or priests ([Ex 28:41](#)). *Meshiyach* figuratively designates patriarchs as specially chosen ([Ps 105:15](#)). Cyrus was *God's anointed* because of his role in delivering Israel from Babylonian captivity ([Isa 45:1](#)). All priests were *anointed* ([Ex 29:21](#)), but the specially anointed high priest was called the *anointed* priest ([Lv 4:3](#)). The king of Israel is often called the Lord's *anointed* ([2Sam 1:14](#)). After David, *meshiyach* indicates Davidic kings ([Ps 18:50](#)). *Meshiyach* identifies God's *Anointed One*, Christ, in [Ps 2:2](#), according to [Ac 4:26](#). *Meshiyach* is transliterated *Messiah* in [Dan 9:25-26](#).

[1:15-16](#) By ordering the Amalekite's death, David further distanced himself from participation in or endorsement of Saul's death.

[1:17](#) The lengthiest example of a lament in the Bible is the book of Lamentations, though many psalms also are so classified ([Pss 3; 22; 137](#)).

[1:18](#) David commanded that Judahites everywhere should learn this lament. Such an order provided further indication of the depth of his sorrow and the respect he had for Saul and Jonathan. The Book of Jashar (or "Book of the Upright") is also mentioned in [Jos 10:13](#). It has never been discovered, but it appears to have been a collection of some of God's great works among His people.

[1:19](#) Splendor also may be translated as "gazelle," describing Saul as a majestic animal. Gazelles often inhabited the heights, so the image fits well.

[1:20](#) David did not want Israel's enemies to rejoice, but they were already doing so ([1Sam 31:9](#)). Gath and Ashkelon were two leading Philistine cities (see note at [1Sam 5:1](#)).

[1:21](#) David called to the mountains of Gilboa, the site of Saul's death, to participate in the mourning by lacking dew and rain, two kinds of moisture much more common in the north where Gilboa was located rather than in the south where David was. The Hebrew seems to reflect the depth of David's extreme emotion. The phrase the shield of Saul, no longer anointed with oil perhaps indicates the cleaning and polishing of Saul's weapons. The concept of anointing was fitting for Saul, God's anointed one.

[1:22](#) David praised the king and prince for their bravery and lack of retreat in the face of serious danger.

[1:23](#) David also praised the relationship that Saul and Jonathan had. First Samuel reveals Jonathan's strained relationship with his father, as Jonathan tried to be both a loyal son to Saul and a loyal friend to David. David affirmed the mutual commitment of Saul and Jonathan in that they died fighting beside each other.

[1:24](#) The phrase clothed you in scarlet shows that Saul's military victories had provided stability and perhaps even prosperous times for many Israelites.

[1:26](#) David called Jonathan his brother and friend. His relationship with Jonathan included a covenant bond of deep mutual respect and loyalty ([1Sam 18:1-3; 20:13-17; 23:16-18](#)). As leading men of society, they had much in common and developed a deep relationship that David considered more wonderful than the love of women. The text does not suggest that David had a homosexual relationship with Jonathan or that David had a poor relationship with his wives. Rather, it speaks to an unbreakable friendship bond between men that has been witnessed countless times and in countless cultures throughout history.

2:1 David inquired of the Lord as he often did to determine God's will for his life ([1Sam 23:2,9-12](#); [30:7-8](#)). Hebron was Judah's natural capital, located about 19 miles south of Jerusalem high in the hill country.

2:2 Ahinoam and Abigail remained with David, though Saul had given Michal, David's first wife, to another man ([1Sam 25:44](#)).

2:3 The men who were with David had come from many places ([1Sam 22:2](#)), but most were probably from Judah. Settling them in the towns near Hebron meant David would have many loyal citizens nearby.

2:4 The men of Judah recognized God's hand on David and anointed him king over the house of Judah—over his own tribe only. At this time, David heard how the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul.

2:5-6 David informed the citizens of Jabesh-gilead that they had done well with their special kindness to Saul. David wanted them to know he did not count their loyalty to Saul as disloyalty to him.

2:7 David probably wanted to be sure people outside Judah heard he was now king over his own tribe. Perhaps they would then conclude the next logical step was to anoint him king over all Israel.

2:8 Abner, Saul's relative and general, had survived the battle at Gilboa. Saul's son Ish-bosheth was probably the oldest surviving son ([1Sam 31:2](#)). The exact location of Mahanaim is uncertain, but [Jos 21:38](#) designates it as a Levitical city east of the Jordan River ([Gen 32:2](#)).

2:9 Gilead designated the north-central region of Transjordan. The territory of Asher lay along Israel's northwestern Mediterranean coastline. Jezreel probably denotes the valley rather than the city. Ephraim and Benjamin were centrally located with Ephraim above Benjamin; Benjamin was Saul's tribe ([1Sam 9:1](#)). All Israel means everything but Judah in light of [verse 4](#).

2:10 Ish-bosheth's reign of two years provides a hint about the length of the period of transition between Saul's death and David's assumption of the kingship over all Israel.

2:11 After seven years and six months, David would move his capital to Jerusalem, where he would reign for 33 years ([5:5](#)).

2:12 Gibeon lay in the territory of Benjamin about 23 miles north of Hebron.

2:13 David's general Joab wanted to keep Ish-bosheth's army out of Judah. The pool of Gibeon probably denotes a large reservoir near the spring outside the city.

2:14 The purpose of the deadly competition between the 24 representatives of the two armies is uncertain. Some have suggested a kind of representative combat as in the David and Goliath account ([1Sam 17:8-10](#)); others believe it was to give the Lord a way to show which army He favored.

2:16 The seemingly synchronized death of all 24 soldiers at once heightened tensions between the armies and foreshadowed the toll the civil war would take on the Israelite population.

2:17 The battle referred to in this verse apparently began immediately after the stalemate of the contest in [verses 14-16](#).

2:18 Zeruah was David's sister ([1Ch 2:16](#)), so Joab, Abishai, and Asahel were David's nephews who served in his army.

2:19 Asahel chased Abner because he saw an opportunity to strike down the leader of the opposition forces. Both men appear to have been on foot.

2:21 Abner hoped to deter Asahel with the possibility of obtaining easy spoil from one of the young soldiers of lesser skill whom he might kill more easily.

2:22 Abner's words, Stop chasing me, suggest that Asahel was gaining on him. Abner probably was better armed and more experienced in fighting than Asahel.

2:23 The end of his spear may designate the butt end, since it may have been sharpened to stick in the ground ([1Sam 26:7](#)). Or Abner may have turned the spear around and thrust it back at Asahel.

2:24 The hill of Ammah is an unknown site east of Gibeon.

2:25 The top of a hill was more easily defended.

2:26 Abner's questions to Joab challenged him to consider the high price of a civil war in Israel. During the days of the judges, another civil war almost resulted in Benjamin's extermination ([Jdg 20:46-21:3](#)).

2:28 The blowing of a ram's horn was a signal to gather the troops—in this case, to stop fighting ([18:16; 20:22](#)).

2:29 Abner and his men then retreated across the Jordan River and northward about 30 miles to Mahanaim ([v. 8](#)).

2:30-31 The differences in the number of casualties (19 of David's soldiers...360 of the Benjaminites and Abner's men) reveal the overwhelming victory David's forces achieved and suggest God's favor on David.

2:32 Bethlehem lay approximately 10 miles south of the battle site. From there to Hebron was another 14 miles along the highway.

English Standard Version - *Study Bible*²

2 Samuel 1-2

1:1-20:26 *Story of King David.* Most of 2 Samuel recounts the rise of David's kingship, first over Judah and then over all Israel, and the major challenge to David's rule resulting from David's own sins.

The Setting of 2 Samuel

c. 1000 B.C.

The book of 2 Samuel recounts David's reign over Israel and his battles to establish Israel as the dominant power in Syria and Palestine. David expanded Israel's borders from Saul's fledgling territory until, by the end of his reign, he controlled all of Israel, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Syria, and Zobah. Other kingdoms, such as Tyre and Hamath, established treaties with him.



1:1-27 *David and the Death of Saul.* The earliest history of the Israelite monarchy now moves into its second stage, the era of King David. The narrator first looks back to the end of Saul's life (the death of Saul and his sons at Mount Gilboa; [1 Samuel 31](#)). David, who is in Ziklag, hears of the death of Saul. But instead of rejoicing, he mourns Saul's death and executes the man who claims to have killed Saul. His elegy shows his deep personal grief over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in battle. David was not a vengeful rebel against Saul, and thus can receive the kingship in good conscience.

1:1-2 [Verse 1](#) follows the events of [1 Samuel 30](#); in [2 Sam. 1:2](#) an Amalekite man (cf. [v. 8](#)) arrives to report the events of [1 Samuel 31](#). Saul probably died at about the same time that David returned to **Ziklag**, since the Amalekite arrived on the **third day** after David's return. The torn **clothes** and **dirt** are signs of mourning (see note on [1 Sam. 4:12](#)).

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "2 Samuel 1-2".

1:6-10 So I stood beside him and killed him (v. 10). The narrator (whom readers should believe) in [1 Samuel 31](#) says that Saul killed himself. Having already read that, readers know that this man is lying to gain favor with the person who was most likely to replace Saul as king. Saul had destroyed most of the Amalekites ([1 Samuel 15](#)), but since this man was the son of a sojourner ([2 Sam. 1:13](#)), his presence in Israel is no surprise. The **crown** and the **armlet** are the royal insignia; the crown was given to the king at the time of his investiture ([2 Kings 11:12](#)); “armlet” appears elsewhere only in [Num. 31:50](#), where it is an ornament worn by Midianites.

1:12 David and his men **fasted** as a sign of mourning (as in [1 Sam. 31:13](#); [2 Sam. 3:35](#)). After this summary statement, the story resumes the actual dialogue between David and the young man who brought this news of Saul’s death.

1:14 How is it you were not afraid... to destroy the LORD’s anointed? See note on [1 Sam. 24:6](#). As a sojourner who was subject to the laws of Israel ([Lev. 24:22](#)), the Amalekite should have recognized the sanctity of Saul as his king (contrast Saul’s armor-bearer; [1 Sam. 31:4-5](#)). David himself had refrained from killing Saul ([1 Samuel 24](#); [26](#)). Clearly, David did not ascend to the throne through violence or disloyalty (cf. note on [2 Sam. 1:1-27](#)).

1:15 Go, execute him. David believed the Amalekite’s story (but see note on [vv. 6-10](#)), and on that basis had him put to death. David’s action provides clear evidence that he had no complicity in Saul’s death. Though the Amalekite intended to win David’s favor, David made it clear that his action constituted the murder of “the LORD’s anointed” (v. 14), for which the just punishment would be execution.

1:16 Your blood be on your head means that the Amalekite (not David) is responsible for his own death (see [Josh. 2:19](#); [1 Kings 2:32, 37](#); [Ezek. 33:4](#)).

1:17-27 And David lamented. David’s lament is a profound expression of public and personal grief. As part of the historical records of David’s reign, the lament provides lasting evidence of David’s innocent ascent to the throne (cf. notes on [vv. 1-27](#) and [14](#)). Though grievously wronged by Saul, David nonetheless chose to remember Saul in a generous way, setting an example of graciously emphasizing the good that someone has done after that person dies. The recurring theme of **how the mighty have fallen** ([vv. 19, 25, 27](#)) provides the structure of David’s lament, which exhorts Israel first to mourn **Saul** (v. 23) and then to mourn **my brother Jonathan** (v. 26), then closes with the repetition of the haunting refrain, “How the mighty have fallen” (v. 27).

1:18 The ESV text, saying **it should be taught**, refers to the lament that follows. The Hebrew text (see ESV footnote) is “the Bow should be taught to the people of Judah.” This may be a heading, meaning, “In order to give the men of Judah military training (with the bow and other weapons).” Compare the heading of [Psalm 60](#), “A Miktam of David; for instruction.” Or, “the Bow” may be the name of the melody for this lament. The **Book of Jashar** is a non-biblical written source which also included [Josh. 10:12-13](#) and, according to the Septuagint text, Solomon’s poem in [1 Kings 8:12-13](#).

1:19 How the mighty have fallen! This is the theme line of David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan, repeated in v. 25 and at the end in v. 27. [Verses 19](#) and [25](#) form a literary “envelope” (or *inclusio*) that constitutes an inverted distant parallelism. That is, v. 19a (**Your glory... is slain on your high places**) is parallel to v. 25b (“Jonathan lies slain on your high places”), while v. 19b (“How the mighty have fallen”) is repeated in v. 25a.

1:20 Gath and **Ashkelon** are Philistine cities. David cannot bear to think about the Philistine victory celebrations (cf. the Israelite women rejoicing in [1 Sam. 18:6-7](#)).

1:21 **let there be no dew or rain... nor fields of offerings!** David wishes for lack of blessing on the place where Saul and Jonathan died. The line **the shield of the mighty was defiled** is paralleled by the next line, **the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil** (i.e., “not in proper condition,” since leather shields were treated with oil).

1:22 **Blood** and **fat** are often used as a word pair to refer to the whole of a sacrifice. For **bow of Jonathan**, see [1 Sam. 20:20](#).

1:23 The term **lovely** could be applied to outstanding “heroes” in Ugaritic. **In life and in death** means “all the time.” One might wonder whether Saul and Jonathan were really “in life... **not divided**.” In [1 Samuel 14](#) Jonathan acted without his father’s knowledge and readily criticized him, and they disagreed over David (see esp. [1 Sam. 22:8](#)). Yet from the fact that the Amalekite specified that “his [Saul’s] son Jonathan” was dead ([2 Sam. 1:4](#)), it appears that Saul continued to treat him as his heir. Apparently they were able to maintain a relationship, working together and eventually fighting and dying together for Israel. This song, whose purpose is to celebrate and idealize, would not delve into these details.

1:24 **Scarlet** cloth, colored with a dye made from the dried bodies of an insect, was a sign of prosperity ([Prov. 31:21](#)).

1:26 **Very pleasant** refers to the way in which the relationship between David and Jonathan was uniquely “good,” i.e., in a “pleasant” or “lovely” way ([v. 23](#); cf. [23:1](#), where the same word is translated “sweet” in the phrase “sweet psalmist of Israel”). Jonathan deeply loved and supported David (as seen in [1 Sam. 18:1-20:42](#); [23:16-18](#)), in accordance with their covenant with the Lord. **surpassing the love of women**. David’s remark does not carry any sexual overtones. Rather, he is calling attention to Jonathan’s radical self-denial in giving up any right to the throne of Israel ([1 Sam. 23:17](#)); instead, he gave his absolute support to David as the Lord’s choice to succeed Jonathan’s father Saul, even to the point of risking his life for David ([1 Sam. 20:30-33](#)).

2 Samuel 2

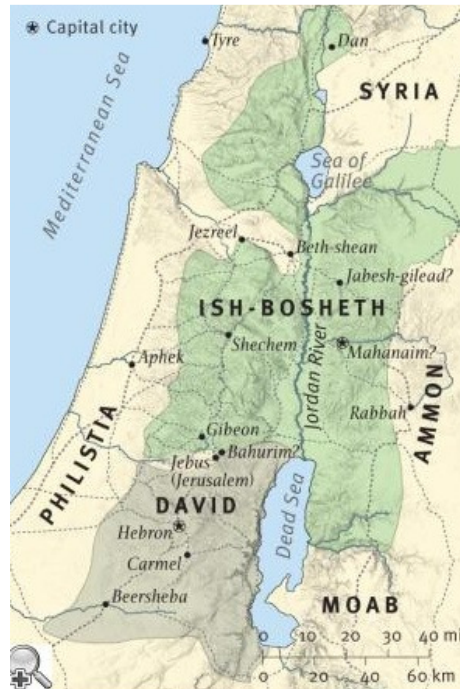
2:1-5:5 **David Becomes King**. Judah makes David its king. Saul’s general Abner, however, seeks to restore Saul’s kingdom with Saul’s son Ish-bosheth as king. During the struggle between the two kingdoms, Abner, who has decided to go with David, is killed by David’s commander Joab. Later, Ish-bosheth is killed by two of his own men, but David executes them for murder. With no candidate for king in the house of Saul, all of Israel unites to anoint the hero David as king. There are many cases of Israelites’ shedding the blood of fellow Israelites, and this is tragic; but the narrator holds David innocent in each case, and thus he is qualified to be king over all Israel.

2:1-3 With Saul no longer pursuing him and Ziklag burned, David, after inquiring of the Lord (as in [1 Sam. 23:2](#)), moves to the **Hebron** area with his family and men. His **wives** were from the region, and he had sent parts of the spoil from his battle with the Amalekites to the elders of the area ([1 Sam. 30:26-31](#)). Hebron was the most important city of southern Judah and not far from Bethlehem. It was associated with Abraham ([Gen. 13:18](#); [23:2](#); [25:10](#)) and was a Levitical city ([Josh. 21:13](#)).

David's Struggle for Power

c. 1010 B.C.

Immediately after Saul's death, a struggle for power ensued between David and Ish-bosheth (or Eshbaal), Saul's youngest and only surviving son. David ruled over his native tribe of Judah from Hebron, while Ish-bosheth ruled over the rest of Israel from Mahanaim across the Jordan River, and they fought against each other for seven years. David's power continued to grow, and eventually Ish-bosheth and his commander Abner were assassinated, leaving David as the sole ruler of all Israel.



2:4 **Judah** has apparently decided that having a king is a good thing; but rather than seeking out a relative of Saul (who was from the tribe of Benjamin, [1 Sam. 9:1](#)), the people choose one of their own as king, the hero David, who was chosen by the Lord ([1 Sam. 16:1-23](#); [25:30](#)). Even in Saul's time, Judah formed a separate part of the army ([1 Sam. 11:8](#); [15:4](#)), and now it was prepared to act independently from the rest of Israel.

2:4b-7 See [1 Sam. 31:11-13](#). David seems to be presenting himself as Saul's successor and suggesting that **Jabesh-gilead** should enter into a treaty relationship with Judah; Gilead, however, soon becomes part of Ish-bosheth's kingdom ([2 Sam. 2:8-9](#)). David is not motivated by mere politics when he sends **messengers** to Jabesh-gilead. He is moved by their faithfulness toward their mutual sovereign and wants to reward them with blessings from the Lord and with his own work on their behalf.

2:8-9 **Abner** tries to continue Saul's kingdom, even on a reduced scale. (For Abner, see note on [1 Sam. 14:50-51](#).) Saul's son **Ish-bosheth** appears as Eshbaal in the genealogies in [1 Chron. 8:33](#); [9:39](#). It is uncertain whether he is the Ishvi of [1 Sam. 14:49](#). (For his name, see note on [2 Sam. 4:4](#).) From these verses and [3:9](#), it appears that Ish-bosheth was little more than a puppet for Abner. **Mahanaim**, a city on the Jabbok River, was apparently the capital of Gilead. The fact that the capital had to be in Transjordan suggests the precariousness of Ish-bosheth's reign. **Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel** refers to the northern and Transjordanian part of the country, **Ephraim and Benjamin** to the central and main part. Ish-bosheth did not necessarily have real control over all this area, especially since the Philistines apparently were in the Jezreel Valley ([1 Sam. 31:7](#)). **All Israel** is a summary description of the area just mentioned.

2:10-11 For a time, there are two kings in the land of Israel. David has apparently decided that his allegiance to Saul as God's anointed king does not extend to Saul's descendants, as succeeding events will show. For example, in [4:11](#) he refers to Ish-bosheth just as a "righteous man," not as a king or an anointed one. Ish-bosheth **reigned two years**, but David's reign as king at Hebron in Judah lasted seven and a half years. It probably took some time after Ish-bosheth's death for Israel to recognize David ([5:1](#)); the period when David was king in Hebron over all Israel before capturing Jerusalem ([5:5](#)) may also be included in the **seven years and six months**.

2:12 **Gibeon** is about 6 miles (9.7 km) north-northwest of Jerusalem. The "pool" ([v. 13](#)) is probably the huge round cistern cut into the rock on the north side of the site of Gibeon. Excavations at Gibeon have uncovered an elaborate water system. One part of the system is a large, circular shaft (37 feet [11 m] in diameter), which was cut into bedrock to a depth of 82 feet (25 m). At the bottom was the water table that formed a pool. The pool was reached by a staircase also cut into the limestone. This is probably the pool mentioned in the present text (cf. [Jer. 41:12](#)).

2:13 This marks the first appearance of **Joab the son of Zeruiah**, though Abishai was referred to as his brother in [1 Sam. 26:6](#). Joab was commander over the army ([2 Sam. 8:16](#)) and appears frequently in 2 Samuel, often as a mover of events. Since Abner knows him and his brothers well ([2:20-22](#)), Joab probably came to Saul's court soon after David's rise to prominence. He was one of the three sons (Joab, Abishai, and Asahel) of David's sister Zeruiah, and thus was David's nephew ([v. 18](#)). Joab's father probably died young, since he had a grave in Bethlehem ([v. 32](#)) and it was unusual for a man to be known by his mother's name. Zeruiah is not identified in Samuel, but according to [1 Chron. 2:16](#), she and Abigail, the mother of Amasa ([2 Sam. 17:25](#)), were sisters of David and his brothers. Abigail is identified in [2 Sam. 17:25](#) as "the daughter of Nahash, sister of Zeruiah." Therefore, it appears that Abigail and probably Zeruiah were maternal half-sisters of David by an earlier marriage of their mother. (David's sister Abigail is a different Abigail from Nabal's wife, who later became David's wife; see note on [1 Sam. 25:3](#).)

2:17 This transitional verse connects the first episode, dealing with the fight at Gibeon, and the second episode, where the death of Asahel is recounted. After this episode, the enmity between the surviving sons of Zeruiah and Abner, the killer of Asahel, will be a major factor.

2:19 **Asahel** was one of David's mighty warriors, "one of the thirty" ([23:24](#); see also [1 Chron. 11:26; 27:7](#)).

2:23 Abner, an experienced warrior, apparently stopped suddenly, thrusting **his spear** backward so forcefully that it went right through Asahel's body as he ran into it.

2:28 Here, as in [18:16](#) and [20:22](#), Joab uses a **trumpet** to summon an army to mark the end of fighting after a victory.

2:29 The **Arabah** is part of the Jordan Valley rift that is south of the Dead Sea.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

2 Samuel 1-2

1:1 David had great faith in God. He waited for God to fulfill his promises. The book of 1 Samuel tells of David's struggles as he waited to become king of Israel (Samuel had anointed David as king of Israel many years earlier). King Saul became jealous of David because the people were praising him for his accomplishments. Eventually, Saul's jealousy became so intense that he tried to kill David. As a result, David had to run and hide. For many years David hid from Saul in enemy territory and in the barren wilderness south and east of Jerusalem. David may have wondered when God's promise that he would be king would come true, but his struggles prepared him for the great responsibilities he would later face. The book of 2 Samuel tells how David was finally rewarded for his patience and consistent faith in God.

1:1 When Saul died, David and his men were still living in Ziklag, a Philistine city. Because Saul had driven him out of Israel, David had pretended to be loyal to Achish, a Philistine ruler ([1 Samuel 27](#)). There he was safe from Saul.

1:11, 12 "They mourned and wept and fasted all day." David and his men were visibly shaken over Saul's death. Their actions showed their genuine sorrow over the loss of their king, their friend Jonathan, and the other soldiers of Israel who died that day. They were not ashamed to grieve. Today, some people consider expressing emotions to be a sign of weakness. Those who wish to appear strong try to hide their feelings. But expressing our grief can help us deal with our intense sorrow when a loved one dies.

1:13 The man identified himself as an Amalekite from Saul's camp ([1:2](#)). He may have been an Amalekite under Israelite jurisdiction, but more likely he was a battlefield scavenger. Obviously the man was lying both about his identity and about what happened on the battlefield. (Compare his story with the account in [1 Samuel 31:3, 4](#).) Because he had Saul's crown with him, something the Philistines wouldn't have left behind, we can infer that he found Saul dead on the battlefield before the Philistines arrived ([1 Samuel 31:8](#)).

A life of deceit leads to disaster. The man lied to gain some personal reward for killing David's rival, but he misread David's character. If David had rewarded him for murdering the king, David would have shared his guilt. Instead, David had the messenger killed. Lying can bring disaster upon the liar, even for something he or she has not done.

1:13 The Amalekites were a fierce nomadic tribe that frequently conducted surprise raids on Canaanite villages. They had been Israel's enemies since Moses' time. David had just destroyed an Amalekite band of raiders who had burned his city and kidnapped its women and children ([1 Samuel 30:1-20](#)). This man was probably unaware of David's recent confrontations with the Amalekites, or he may not have come. Instead, he incurred David's wrath by posing as an enemy of Israel and claiming to have killed God's chosen king.

1:15,16 Why did David consider it a crime to kill the king, even though Saul was his enemy? David believed that God anointed Saul, and only God could remove him from office. If it became casual or commonplace to assassinate the king, the whole society would become chaotic. It was God's job, not David's, to judge Saul's sins ([Leviticus 19:18](#)). We must realize that God has placed rulers in authority over us, and we should respect their positions ([Romans 13:1-7](#)).

Characters in the Drama of 2 Samuel

It can be confusing to keep track of all the characters introduced in the first few chapters of 2 Samuel. Here is some help.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Relation</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Whose Side?</i>
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 Ishbosheth's, but made overtures to David
Abishai	Joab's brother	High officer in David's army—Commander of "the Thirty"	Joab and David's
Asahel	Joab and Abishai's brother	High officer—one of David's 30 select warriors ("mighty men")	Joab and David's
Ishbosheth	Saul's son	Saul and Abner's selection as king	Saul's

1:17,18 David was a talented musician. He played the harp ([1 Samuel 16:23](#)), he brought music into the worship services of the Temple ([1 Chronicles 25](#)), and he wrote many of the psalms. Here we are told that he wrote a funeral song in memory of Saul and his son Jonathan, David's closest friend. Music played an important role in Israel's history. (For other famous songs in the Bible, see the chart in [Exodus 15, p. 119](#).)

1:17-27 Saul had caused much trouble for David, but when he died, David composed a song in memory of the king and his son. David had every reason to hate Saul, but he chose not to. Instead, he chose to look at the good Saul had done and to ignore the times when Saul had attacked him. It takes courage to lay aside hatred and hurt and to respect the positive side of another person, especially an enemy.

1:26 By saying that Jonathan's love was "deeper than the love of women," David was not implying that he had a sexual relationship with Jonathan. Homosexual acts were absolutely forbidden in Israel. [Leviticus 18:22](#) calls homosexuality "detestable," and [Leviticus 20:13](#) decrees the death penalty for those who practice homosexuality. David was simply restating the deep brotherhood and faithful friendship he had with Jonathan. (For more on their friendship, see the note on [1 Samuel 18:1-4](#).)



Joab Versus Abner

David was crowned king of Judah in Hebron; Ishbosheth was crowned king of Israel in Mahanaim. The opposing armies of Judah and Israel met at Gibeon for battle—Judah under Joab, Israel under Abner.

Chapter 2

2:1 Although David knew he would become king ([1 Samuel 16:13](#); [23:17](#); [24:20](#)), and although the time seemed right now that Saul was dead, David still asked God if he should move back to Judah, the home territory of his tribe. Before moving ahead with what seems obvious, first bring the matter to God, who alone knows the best timing.

2:1 God told David to return to Hebron, where he would soon be crowned king of Judah. David made Hebron his capital because (1) it was the largest city in Judah at that time; (2) it was secure against attack; (3) it was located near the center of Judah's territory, an ideal location for a capital city; (4) many key trade routes converged at Hebron, making it difficult for supply lines to be cut off in wartime.

2:4 The men of Judah publicly anointed David as their king. David had been anointed king by Samuel years earlier ([1 Samuel 16:13](#)), but that ceremony had taken place in private. This one was like inaugurating a public official who has already been elected to office. The rest of Israel, however, didn't accept David's kingship for seven and a half years ([2:10, 11](#)).

2:4-7 David sent a message thanking the men of Jabesh-gilead who had risked their lives to bury Saul's body ([1 Samuel 31:11-13](#)). Saul had rescued Jabesh-gilead from certain defeat when Nahash the Ammonite had surrounded the city ([1 Samuel 11](#)), so these citizens showed their gratitude and kindness. In his message, he also suggested that they follow Judah's lead and acknowledge him as their king. Jabesh-gilead was to the north in the land of Gilead, and David was seeking to gain support among the 10 remaining tribes who had not yet recognized him as king.

2:10, 11 David ruled over Judah for seven and a half years, while Ishbosheth reigned in Israel for only two years. The five-year gap may be due to Ishbosheth's not assuming the throne immediately after Saul's death. Because of constant danger from the Philistines in the northern part of Israel, five years may have passed before Ishbosheth 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 Ishbosheth began to rule, his control was weak and limited. The Philistines still dominated the area, and Ishbosheth was intimidated by Abner ([3:11](#)).

[2:12ff](#) With Israel divided, there was constant tension between north and south. David's true rival in the north, however, was not Ishbosheth but Abner. In this incident, Abner suggested hand-to-hand combat between the champions of his army and the champions of David's army, led by Joab. The fact that this confrontation occurred at the pool of Gibeon (located in Saul's home territory of Benjamin) suggests that Joab's men were pushing northward, gaining more territory. Abner may have suggested this confrontation in hopes of stopping Joab's advance.

Twelve men from each side were supposed to fight each other, and the side with the most survivors would be declared the winner. The confrontation between David and Goliath ([1 Samuel 17](#)) was a similar battle strategy—away to avoid terrible bloodshed from an all-out war. In this case, however, all 24 champions were killed before either side could claim victory. Nothing was accomplished, and the civil war continued.

[2:21-23](#) Abner repeatedly warned Asahel to turn back or risk losing his life, but Asahel refused to turn from his self-imposed duty. Persistence is a good trait if it is for a worthy cause. But if the goal is only personal honor or gain, persistence may be no more than stubbornness. Asahel's stubbornness not only cost him his life, but it also spurred unfortunate disunity in David's army for years to come ([3:26, 27](#); [1 Kings 2:28-35](#)). Before you decide to pursue a goal, make sure it is worthy of your devotion.

[2:28](#) This battle ended with a victory for Joab's troops ([2:17](#)), but war in the divided nation continued until David was finally crowned king over all Israel ([5:1-5](#)).

Abner

The honest compliments of an opponent are often the best measure of someone's greatness. Although Abner and David frequently saw each other across battle lines, the Bible gives a glimpse of the respect they had for each other. As a young man, David had served under Abner. But later, Saul's campaign to kill David was carried out by Abner. After Saul's death, Abner temporarily upheld the power of the king's family. But the struggle between Abner and Saul's heir, Ishbosheth, brought about Abner's decision to support David's claim to the throne. It was during his efforts to unite the kingdom that Abner was murdered by Joab.

Several years earlier, in a battle between Ishbosheth's army under Abner and David's forces under Joab, Abner fled and was pursued by Joab's brother, Asahel. Abner told Asahel twice to stop following him. But the eager young soldier refused, so Abner killed him. Joab was determined to avenge his brother.

Abner realized Saul's family was doomed to defeat and that David would be the next king, so he decided to change sides. He hoped that in exchange for his delivering Saul's kingdom, David would make him commander in chief of his army. David's willingness to accept this proposal was probably another reason for Joab's action.

Abner lived by his wits and his will. To him, God was someone with whom he would cooperate if it suited his plans. Otherwise he did what seemed best for him at the time. We can identify with Abner's tendency to give God conditional cooperation. Obedience is easy when the instructions in God's Word fit in with our plans. But our allegiance to God is tested when his plans are contrary to ours. What action should you take today in obedience to God's Word?

Strengths and accomplishments

- Commander in chief of Saul's army and a capable military leader
- Held Israel together for several years under the weak king Ishbosheth
- Recognized and accepted God's plan to make David king over both Israel and Judah

Weaknesses and mistakes

- He had selfish motives in his effort to reunite Judah and Israel rather than godly conviction
- He slept with one of the royal concubines after Saul's death

Lesson from his life

- God requires more than conditional, halfhearted cooperation

Vital statistics

- Where: Territory of Benjamin
- Occupation: Commander of the armies under Saul and Ishbosheth
- Relatives: Father: Ner. Cousin: Saul. Son: Jaasiel.
- Contemporaries: David, Asahel, Joab, Abishai

Key verse

"Then King David said to his officials, 'Don't you realize that a great commander has fallen today in Israel?'" ([2 Samuel 3:38](#)).

Abner's story is told in [1 Samuel 14:50-2 Samuel 4:12](#). He is also mentioned in [1 Kings 2:5, 32; 1 Chronicles 26:28; 27:16-22](#).

