

2 Samuel - Introduction & Background

Introductory Matters

Because the Hebrew Bible considers 1–2 Samuel to be a single composition, issues related to title, authorship, date, audience, position in the canon, and historical background were dealt with in my 1 Samuel argument.

Scope

The scope of 2 Samuel covers the duration of the Davidic monarchy. David's monarchy lasted from 1011 to 971 BC. David's 40 year reign (2 Sam 2:11; 5:4-5) can be further subdivided. The book's first five chapters cover David's 7½ year rule in Hebron (5:5), which lasted from 1011 to 1004 BC. The book's remaining chapters cover David's 33-year reign in Jerusalem, which lasted from 1004 to 971 BC.

Structure

The book of 2 Samuel follows a fourfold division. The first section exemplifies David's triumphs (1–10). This section can be further subdivided into David's political (1–5), spiritual (6–7), and military (8–10) victories. The second section emphasizes David's transgression (11–12). The third section highlights David's troubles (13–20). This third section can be further divided into troubles within David's immediate family (13–18) and national family (19–20). The troubles within David's immediate family include incest, murder, treachery, and revolt against David's kingship. Other ways to categorize these first three sections include David's faith (1–10), fault (11–12), and foes (13–20) or David's success (1–10), sin (11–12), and sorrow (13–20).

The fourth section represents six non-chronological appendices dealing with the greatness of the Davidic Covenant and kingdom (21–24). This fourth section can be chiasmically structured. This first and sixth parts deal with famine and its consequences (21:1-14) and plague and its consequences (24). The second (21:15-22) and fifth (23:8-39) parts deal with heroes. The third (22) and fourth (23:1-7) parts each consist of a psalm.

Genre

The overriding genre of the book is historical narrative. Other sub genres found in the book include lament (1:19-27), poetry (3:33-34; 20:11; 22:2-51; 23:1-7), and parable (12:1-6; 14:6-9). Other potential sub genres may encompass praise psalm (22), last words (23:1-7), and hero lists (23:8-39).³

Christ in 2 Samuel

Christ is most clearly seen in 2 Samuel through the giving of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7). "The same three promises of an eternal kingdom, throne, and seed are later given to Christ (Luke 1:32-33)...The promise of a permanent dynasty is fulfilled in Christ, the 'son of

David' (Matt 21:9; 22:45), who will sit upon the throne of David (see Is 9:7; Luke 1:32).” Unlike the other Davidic kings, only Christ will perfectly fulfill the covenant’s righteous requirements. Thus, unlike the preceding Davidic kings, His righteous reign will exempt Him from covenant discipline (7:14).

Message

As David, the elect king, rises to power within Israel, he consolidates the entire kingdom under his authority (1–10). The height of this consolidation process is his reception of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7) guaranteeing his lineage a perpetual kingdom, dynasty, and seed. The messianic lineage originally promised to Eve (Gen 3:15), Shem (Gen 9:26), Abraham (Gen 12:3), Isaac (Gen 17:18–19), Jacob (Num 24:17), Judah (Gen 49:10), and Jesse (Is 11:1) is now narrowed to David’s lineage through the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:16). However, the unconditional Davidic covenant also contains a conditional blessing (2 Sam 7:14) allowing God to discipline the Davidic heir without compromising what God originally promised to David.

The rest of the Book of 2 Samuel describes the outworking of this principle. Because of his covenant violations (11–12), David experiences covenant discipline (13–20). The recounting of such discipline is necessary to deter future Davidic kings from following David’s pattern of covenant rebellion. However, because such covenant discipline does not nullify the covenant itself, the book ends with David’s return to the throne (20:23–26) as well as a future anticipation of covenant fulfillment (21–24). Thus, “the story of 2 Samuel properly ends not with its last chapter but with 1 Kings 2, where Solomon is said to be firmly established on David’s throne as the first member of his dynastic succession.” The continuity of the Davidic lineage in spite of covenant discipline imposed upon David is not only necessary in order to vindicate the unconditional nature of the Davidic covenant, but it is also necessary in order to pave the way for the future Messiah who must come from his lineage (Matt 1:6–16). This future Messiah will govern in perfect covenant obedience thereby making the provision for covenant discipline unnecessary. In sum, the message of 2 Samuel is the establishment of the unconditional Davidic covenant while at the same time explaining the outworking of its provision of discipline against the Davidic heir for covenant violations, which do not nullify the covenant’s unconditional nature.

Purposes

The writer had several purposes in mind when he composed what the protestant canon calls the Book of 2 Samuel. First, the writer wanted to bridge the historical gap between the end of Saul’s reign and the beginning of Solomon’s reign. Second, the writer wanted to record the events surrounding David’s reign. Third, the writer wanted to describe the transition of the monarchy from the rise of its first elect king to that king’s reception of the Davidic Covenant.

Fourth, the writer wanted to trace the outworking of the Davidic Covenant. Specifically, he wanted to explain that the covenant allows for discipline to be imposed upon the Davidic heir (7:14) without compromising what God initially promised to the heir. Fifth, the writer wanted to explain how covenant discipline would not jeopardize the covenant itself since the Messiah would come from the Davidic lineage. Sixth, the writer wanted to explain that covenant obedience yields fertility and blessing and covenant disobedience yields infertility and curses in order to deter the nation's future kings from covenant disobedience. Thus, the writer traces obedience (1–7) bringing forth blessings (8–10) and disobedience (11) bringing forth covenant discipline (12–24).

Theological Themes

Numerous theological themes recur throughout the book of 2 Samuel. First, as explained previously, the book describes the outworking of the Davidic Covenant. Second, as previously explained, the book describes the narrowing of the messianic seed purposes to the lineage of David. Third, as explained above, the theme of blessing for covenant obedience and cursing for covenant disobedience is found throughout the book.

Outline

I. David's faith (2 Sam 1:1—10:19)

(1) Political victory (1:1—5:25)

(A) David's reaction to Saul's death (1:1-27)

(a) David receives the report of Saul's death (1:1-10)

(b) David mourns and kills the man taking credit for Saul's death (1:11-16)

(c) David's lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (1:17-27)

(B) Beginning of David's rule over Judah in Hebron (2:1-7)

(a) Judah coronates David (2:1-4a)

(b) David praises Jabesh-gilead for giving Saul a proper burial (2:4b-7)

(C) David's house, which is located in the South, gains an upper hand in the civil war with Saul's house which is located in Israel (2:8—3:1)

(a) Kingdom divided as Abner installs puppet Ishbosheth (2:8-11)

(b) Civil War between Abner and Joab (2:12-32)

(c) David's house begins to prevail (3:1)

(D) David's many children (3:2-5)

(E) David's acceptance of Abner's desire for rapprochement begins to unify the nation (3:6-21)

(F) David mourns Joab's murder of Abner (3:22-39)

(G) David executes Ishbosheth's murders (4:1-12)

(H) David becomes enthroned in the entire nation (5:1-6)

(I) David captures Jerusalem (5:7-10)

(J) David's alliance with Hiram king of Tyre (5:11-12)

- (K) David's many children (5:13-16)
- (L) David defeats the Philistines (5:17-25)
- (2) Spiritual victory (6:1—7:29)
 - (A) David returns the Ark to Jerusalem (6:1-23)
 - (B) Davidic covenant (7:1-29)
- (3) Military victory (8:1—10:19)
 - (A) David conquers Philistia, Moab, Zobah, Aram and Edom (8:1-18)
 - (B) David's concern for Saul's family (9:1-13)
 - (C) David defeats Ammon (10:1-19)
- II. David's fault (11:1—12:31)
 - (1) David's sins (11:1-27)
 - (A) Adultery (11:1-13)
 - (B) Murder (11:14-27)
 - (2) David's consequences (12:1-25)
 - (3) David completes the battle with Ammon (12:26-31)
- III. David's foes (13:1—20:26)
 - (1) Turmoil in David's immediate family (13:1—18:33)
 - (A) Absalom kills Amnon, who raped Tamar, and Absalom flees (13:1-39)
 - (B) Absalom's rebellion (14:1—18:33)
 - (a) Absalom returns from exile (14:1-33)
 - (b) Absalom gains control of the nation and David flees into exile (15:1—16:14)
 - (c) Absalom's reign (16:15—17:29)
 - (d) Absalom's murder (18:1-33)
 - (2) Turmoil surrounding David's return to power (19:1—20:26)
 - (A) David listens to Joab's advice (19:1-8)
 - (B) Resistance to David's return in the North (19:9-10)
 - (C) David promises Amasa that he could lead David's army in the place of Joab (19:11-15)
 - (D) David accepts the Benjamites and forgives Shimei (19:16-20)
 - (E) David prevents Abishai from killing Shimei (19:21-23)
 - (F) David accepts Mephibosheth's explanation about remaining in Jerusalem and allows Ziba to keep half of the estate in an attempt to win over Benjamin (19:24-30)
 - (G) David invites Barzillai for his earlier hospitality although he turned the offer down (19:31-39)
 - (H) Judah pressed greater claim to David and Israel at Gilgal (19:40-43)
 - (I) Israel follows Sheba (20:1-2)

(J) David reclaims kingship in Judah and orders Amasa to put down the rebellion (20:3-6)

(K) Joab kills Amasa (20:7-10a)

(L) Joab pursues the fleeing Israelites (20:10b-14)

(M) Joab agrees to relent in exchange for Sheba's head (20:15-22)

(N) David rules with his mighty men (20:23-26)

IV. Six appendices testifying to the greatness of the Davidic covenant (21:1—24:25)

(1) David averts a famine by avenging the Gibeonites as he killed the seven sons of Saul (21:1-14)

(2) David was more powerful than the Philistine giants (21:15-23)

(3) David praises God for his deliverance (22:1-51)

(4) David's last words as a reminder of the Davidic covenant (23:1-7)

(5) David's mighty men (23:8-39)

(6) David's census and the resulting plague and purchase of the Temple site from Araunah (24:1-25)

Introduction and Overview

1 Samuel records David's preparation; 2 Samuel records his service, namely, his reign. 1 Sam noted three aspects of David's preparation: as shepherd, as courtier, and as "outlaw." In 2 Sam we see those aspects of his preparation put to work. He became the shepherd of his people, the center of his court, and the strong ruler of his nation. He fulfilled the office of king successfully under God's leadership.

Application

The message of 2 Sam is that man's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God, and God's attitude toward man creates an opportunity for man.

First, man's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God. We find this principle stated in 2 Sam 22:26-28. Compare Hannah's prayer of praise in 1 Sam 2:1-10. God is to each person what that person is to God (Cf. James 2:13).

We find the principle illustrated in David's attitudes toward God. David had four convictions about God (Cf. 2 Sam 22; Ps 18):

(1) David believed that God was Israel's supreme Ruler. He never doubted this or presumed to elevate himself to God's place as Head of the nation (2 Sam 22:2-16).

(2) David believed that God was consistently and completely righteous (right) in His dealings. David confessed his sin when he was charged with it, rather than trying to deny it. In 22:17-27, this comes through clearly. Contrast Saul, who made excuses.

(3) David believed that God was always merciful. He was willing to let God determine his punishment, because he believed God would be merciful (Cf. 22:28-46). Contrast Saul, who sought control.

(4) David believed that God's will was always best. His greatest desire was for God's will in his own life and in Israel (Cf. 22:47-51). Contrast Saul, who believed that his will was best.

David's convictions created opportunities for God:

(1) Because David really believed in God's *sovereignty*, God could and did set David over the throne of Israel, and could direct him to govern God's people (Cf. 22:2-3). Even today, loyal employees are the ones that employers promote to positions of greater responsibility.

(2) Because David acknowledged God's *righteousness*, God was able to bless David for his righteousness (Cf. 22:21-28). There was no conflict over who was right.

(3) Because David appreciated God's *mercy*, God was able to be merciful with him (Cf. 22:35-36). God defended David.

(4) Because David viewed God's will as superior, God was able to bring His will for David and Israel to pass (Cf. 22:51). God returned loyalty for loyalty.

Because he had these attitudes, David became God's instrument through whom God accomplished His larger plans and purposes. Even though David sinned greatly, his deepest convictions lay in these truths. God based His dealings with David on David's deepest convictions. He was the man after God's own heart. God did not base His dealings with David primarily on David's momentary failures.

This is a great encouragement. The Christian's deep underlying attitudes toward God provide a foundation on which God can build and use him or her in some way. The direction one is heading is more important than how far he or she has advanced in Christian growth. The other side of this coin is that God's attitude toward a person creates an opportunity for that person. John wrote, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We find this principle stated in 2 Sam 23:1-5, and illustrated in God's attitudes toward David:

(1) God purposed for David to be king (Cf. 23:1). This knowledge affected David's attitude toward God. He just needed to consent to God's purpose for him. God has purposed to bless every believer. This is the revelation of the whole Bible. God has chosen every Christian (Eph 1:4).

(2) God's power would be adequate for David's needs (Cf. 23:2). The power for all of David's life, including the inspiration for his words, came from God. David could simply cooperate with it. We, too, have the Spirit. We, too, only need to cooperate with God (Gal 5:25).

(3) God's pattern for David's kingship was God's own rule (Cf. 23:3-4). David could conform to God's example as Sovereign to fulfill his destiny. We have Jesus Christ's

example as well as God's pattern (Heb 12:1-2).

(4) God's persistence would result in the fulfillment of all His promises to David (Cf. 23:5). This gave David confidence in God in the present. God has promised never to leave us (Matt 28:20), and He has proved Himself faithful (Phil 1:6).

In 1 Samuel, we saw that God's ultimate victory does not depend on people's attitudes toward Him. His people can be loyal or rebellious, and this will not affect His ultimate victory.

In 2 Samuel, we learn that *our* ultimate victory in life depends on our attitude toward God. *Conformity to the will of God creates fitness for service.* Conformity to the will of God depends fundamentally on our attitude toward God. It does not depend primarily on our ability, or on our ability to persuade God to do something. It depends on our abandonment to Him, and on our willingness to let God persuade us to do something. It depends on our commitment to Him and our faithfulness to Him.

God does not measure us as other people do. We measure each other by external actions. God measures us by internal attitudes. 1 Sam 16:7 says, "The Lord looks at the heart." What is your attitude toward God? Do you really want to please God, or do you obey God simply because of your background and environment? Would you live a filthy life if you could get away with it? What is your real attitude toward God? Do you really want to do right? David was a man after God's own heart, because he really wanted what God wanted.

What do you *really* want? Be careful, because God will give you what you really want. Do you want to run your own life? God will let you do it, but He may let you run your life into a brick wall.