

CHAPTER 4: REIGN

THE BIG PICTURE

The book of 1 Samuel closes with the tragic death of Saul: he takes his own life after a devastating military defeat by the Philistines. Saul's ultimate surrender happened at the point of a sword, even though David refused to be the one wielding it. Yet even after the death of Saul, the ascent of David to the throne of Israel was not smooth or easy. The aftermath of Saul's death leaves David on a journey wrought with trial and resistance - realities that David endured and allowed to shape his character. Only the southern tribes initially recognize David's rule, causing civil war to break out against the tribes in the north. The specific circumstances of the way David finally gains the throne are such an important part of the story, as are the immediate actions of David once he has power. When all Israel recognizes David as their king, the people remember the promise given to David so many years before: ***"You will shepherd my people Israel and you will become their ruler."*** David embodies the image of the "shepherd king" as he follows the lead of the Lord, the shepherd of all. David's first actions as king serve to secure safe pasture for his people and ensure their connection to God. For this chapter, read and be familiar with **2 Samuel 1-6**.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. **2 Samuel 1:1-27** highlights the strength of David's character. David receives the news of Saul's death with tears instead of triumph. Shockingly, there is no hint of offense, anger, or bitterness in David's heart despite the abuse that David has received from Saul. David does not gloat over the death of his rival, instead, he mourns. Pay close attention to the honor that David shows Saul and Jonathan in the song he composes to commemorate their lives. There is something special about a person that could write such a song after enduring such hatred and persecution. David sets the tone for his reign by honoring the legacy of his predecessor. David's display of honor invites others to show him the same level of honor.
 - Do you think you could have such affection for someone that mistreated you? Write a few thoughts about how David embodies the teaching of Jesus to love our enemy.
 - Do you agree that people that show respect deserve respect? Why? In our trash-talking and fist-pumping culture, how can we reclaim this level of respect even for those who have wronged us?
 - What do you think about David's choice to execute the man who claimed to kill Saul? What does it say about David's character and how David understands authority?

- II. In **2 Samuel 2-4**, notice how the emphasis is on David's *non-role* in the civil war and the other chaotic events that happen in the wake of Saul's death. The narrator tells the stories in such a way as to exonerate David of taking the throne by force or of any wrong doing in the deaths of Abner and Ish-Bosheth. The story might be different if David had tried to rush God's plan: a more forceful or self-seeking course of action would leave a stain on David's character and undermine his reputation for surrendering to the will of God.
- In our dog-eat-dog culture, what is surprising about David's attitude?
 - How do you discern when it is time to act and when it is time to wait?
- III. **2 Samuel 3:1** records this summary statement: *"The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker."* It is clear David's men have the edge in the civil war because of the superior training they received from David. David invested himself in these men. They came to him misfits, and he helped them become mighty. They are fierce, they are loyal, and they are disciplined. They have a strong commitment to David and would give their lives for their leader. This sacred bond is the result of watching him do the right thing when it was easy to do the wrong thing. It is the result of being chased over mountains, into caves, and across the wilderness of Judah with this man. ***Contrast the unity in David's camp with the fear, division, and paranoia that characterize the camp of Ish-Bosheth.*** Abner and his king disagree, and Abner decides to defect to David's side. Soon after Abner's betrayal, Ish-Bosheth is assassinated by his own men as they attempt to win David's favor. Ish-Bosheth might have wished for a decade in the desert in which to build some true loyalty!
- Read the legendary exploits of "David's Mighty Men" recorded in **2 Samuel 23:8-23**. With the strength of these men in mind, who has your back and watches out for you? Do you need to recruit some mighty men or women to stand beside you?
 - How can adversity prepare you for success?
 - David's men display a profound level of loyalty. Why do you think David's men followed him so loyally? What do you think makes David a better leader than Saul?
 - Do you have any relationships that have grown through adversity or trial?
- IV. The narrative of 1-2 Samuel is remarkable for a number of reasons - one of which is how well the characters are developed. This section further develops several of the men around David that will continue to be significant characters going forward. Pay attention to the three brothers: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. The sons of Zeruiah, as they are known, emerge as David's mightiest champions and most skilled commanders. Their reputations, their choices, and their personalities are significant elements of the plot.

They are talented and loyal to David, but their wild and impulsive nature can be a liability. Joab, for instance, seems to be the kind of person that does what he thinks needs to be done regardless of David would wish him to do. Despite his sometimes “maverick” actions, David continues to trust him and rely on him. Negatively, Joab does impulsive things like the murder of Abner. Positively, he wins many battles for David and is instrumental in the capture of Jerusalem. Joab’s role in the kingdom and his relationship to the king will become very important later.

- Sometimes the bold can also be brash. Is there a difference between bravery and foolishness?
- Do you have any friends like Joab who are somewhat unpredictable? How does it impact your relationship?
- Joab and his brothers likely came as outlaws to David during his years in the Cave of Adullam. Why do you think David continues to trust Joab?

V. The story of David’s pursuit of the Ark of the Covenant illustrates David’s perspective: He knew The Lord had established him as king over Israel. David understands the throne was given to him by God, the victories over his enemies were because of God, and that his future success depends on God. David seeks the Ark of the Covenant for God’s glory, not his own. The Ark of the Covenant is a physical representation of the glory of God - a symbol of God’s desire to dwell among his people. It was a holy object that housed the manifest presence of God, and so it demanded reverence and respect. David is zealous to bring the presence of God into his new capital Jerusalem, and he makes some mistakes in his eager haste. Read the dramatic story in **2 Samuel 6**.

- This story reveals that David is concerned about God’s glory and not his own. In a culture that highly values fame, how can we keep our hearts in check?
- David is a rare example of someone who is successful and famous yet still surrendered to God and concerned with God’s glory. *Are fame and worship mutually exclusive? How can someone embody both?*
- Michal’s story is a hard one. She loved David, but she was used as a political pawn in her father’s game of thrones. She was first married to David, then given to one of Saul’s men when David fled from Saul, only to be taken from him and returned to David by Abner. She has endured upheaval and heartbreak. Can you identify with Michal’s feelings at all? Why might she be upset about David’s behavior? How could she potentially misunderstand David’s dramatic worship?
- Write a few thoughts about how David’s willingness to be “undignified” before others qualifies him to be a true worshipper. Do you ever value your dignity over God’s glory?