

Grieving Your Enemies

2 Samuel 1 & 2

Key Bible Texts

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Key Bible Verse(s)

“Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him: and they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.” (2 Samuel 1:11-12)

Background to the Study

The Book of 2 Samuel is really a continuation of the Book of 1 Samuel. Originally, the two were written together as a history for the people of Israel and Judah. Together, the two books chronicle the transition in Israel from the time of the judges to the rule of the kings. They specifically tell the accounts of Samuel, Israel’s last ruling judge; Saul, Israel’s first king; and David, Israel’s second and greatest king.

Samuel anointed David as Saul’s successor around 1063 B.C. Initially, David played the harp to soothe Saul, but their relationship soured after David’s victory over Goliath. Saul, jealous of David’s popularity, tried to kill him, forcing David to flee for 7–10 years. Despite this, David respected Saul as God’s anointed and spared his life twice. The Book of 2 Samuel records the culmination of God’s plans for David. Finally, after David had spent many years running and hiding from Saul and his armies, the deaths of Saul and Jonathan had opened the throne to David.

When Saul died, a messenger falsely claimed responsibility, likely seeking a reward. David, known for his tender nature, mourned Saul, Jonathan, and the fallen soldiers sincerely, in keeping with mourning customs like tearing clothes and wearing sackcloth.

David was sincere in his mourning. It affected all that were with him, causing them to also rend their garments and grieve. He did not rejoice over the death of the man who had tried to kill him (showing a desire for public justice over private grievance), and grieved sincerely and publicly over the loss of his king and his friend. David’s grief over Saul’s death reflected his godly character. Instead of assuming the throne, David sought God’s guidance, was directed to Hebron, and was anointed king. He honoured the people of Jabesh-gilead for burying Saul and Jonathan, showing no desire for vengeance.

A challenge arose when Abner, Saul's general, made Ishbosheth king. Though most followed Ishbosheth, David's forces grew stronger. Abner, not Ishbosheth, was the true leader of the opposition, while David's rise aligned with God's plan.

A TESTIMONY FROM OUR DAY

An anecdote about Abraham Lincoln illustrates the principle shown by David's example. Edwin M. Stanton, a bitter political opponent who despised Lincoln, was appointed by Lincoln as Secretary of War despite their differences. This decision seemed unwise during the Civil War, but Stanton later changed his view of Lincoln and served with "incorruptible efficiency." At Lincoln's death, it was Stanton who famously said, "Now he belongs to the ages."

Another incident highlights Lincoln's character. When Lincoln praised the South during the war, a shocked woman questioned him, to which he replied, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?" This reflects Lincoln's belief that we are like David, who refused to let hatred control him, we must call on God to overcome opposition. We are not really fighting human enemies, but enmity itself.

By the power of God's love we can defeat the hostility that the devil tries to put between us and others. Saul let enmity come between himself and David, but David would give the devil no such victory. If circumstances or people oppose us, especially in our relationship with God, we need to recognize our enemy's real identity. Like David, we need to call on our truest Ally.

A Closer Look

Question 1

What was David's immediate reaction when he learned of Saul's death?
What does this reveal about David's character? 2 Samuel 1:11-12

Question 2

In 2 Samuel 1:17-27, the author included David's lament for Saul and Jonathan. Why do you suppose he did this?

Question 3

Using David in II Samuel 1 as a case study, since others may not always act in a way that we consider to be perfect, what should our reaction be to any missteps?

Question 4

Why did David commend the city of Jabesh-Gilead? 2 Samuel 2: 5 & 6

Question 5

Why do you think Abner opposed David's reign as king over Israel? 2 Samuel 2: 8-17

Question 6

With reference to II Samuel 2, how should we respond to people who treat us wrongly?

Take Home

Maybe today your heart is aching with grief. Look to God and find comfort in Him. Let us learn from David's example and keep the lines of communication with God open continually. Through His guidance we can react appropriately, be comforted in sorrow, and be able to help comfort others. We should also allow God to fight our battles. If we trust and follow Him as David did, He will give victory every time.