

Major Ideas in 2 Samuel

I. *Covenant*

The books of Samuel bring about the dawning of a new covenantal order when God makes a covenant with David (**2 Sam. 7**). The Mosaic covenant was not able to perfect the people (**Gal. 3:19-26; Heb. 10:1-18**), as evidenced by their continual idolatry and transgression. The historical books highlight this lack to cause the people to long for a consummation to the covenant that is able to bring about the true sanctification of God's people. The covenant with David is the next stage in God's unfolding covenant plan, but itself is also unable to bring about this consummation, but only sets the stage for the coming of Christ and the New Covenant that He will inaugurate.

II. *Bloodguilt and Defilement*

The defilement of sin and its effects on the land are a key though subtle theme in 2 Samuel. The two kinds of defilement highlighted are defilement from sexual immorality (**Lev. 18:24-25**) and defilement from bloodshed (**Num. 35:33-34**). Guilt for bloodshed cannot be atoned for by sacrifice; the life of the one guilty must be paid. 2 Samuel records various people who are guilty of bloodshed and various ways that they are dealt with and how God's judgment is carried out.

III. *Atonement and Redemption from Death*

2 Samuel wrestles with the problems of sin, death, and justice in very penetrating ways. On the one hand, those who are guilty of bloodshed face the problem of God's wrath. Is it possible for one who has committed this sin to be forgiven? Can the defilement that has resulted from their sin be cleansed by any other means but their death? On the other hand, those who have been wrongfully slain face the problem of justice. Even if the one who has murdered them has been put to death, what good does that do for the victim? 2 Samuel highlights the insufficiency of any answer that is restricted to this life. Thankfully, both sets of questions wonderfully find their answer in Christ. He is the one who freely gives His life to redeem even His people who are guilty of murder, so that even the death penalty cannot separate them from Him. But He is also the one who by the power of His resurrection freely gives everlasting life to His people who have been wrongfully killed.

Establishing the Reign of David (2 Samuel 1-9)

I. *David's Response to Enemies (2 Samuel 1-4)*

- A. **The character of a king.** With the death of Saul, David no longer must be on the run and should have an unchallenged claim to the throne of Israel. However, Saul's death is not welcome news to David. He laments the deaths of Saul and Jonathan and executes the man who claims to have killed Saul. He also thanks and blesses those who retrieved Saul's body and buried it. This heartfelt response becomes a hallmark of David's early reign. Even as he is forced to fight for seven years against other Israelites who make themselves his enemies and challenge his rule, he takes no delight in their defeat and deaths. He similarly mourns for Abner, the commander of Saul's army, when he is murdered and likewise executes the men who assassinate Ishbosheth rather than rewarding them. In this, David displays that he takes no delight in the death of his enemies and that, unlike Saul, he does not use his power to settle personal scores. Though David is a man of war, he does not desire to shed blood unnecessarily. David is a wonderful example of what it is to love your enemies.

- B. **Relating to the Psalms.** This perspective of David should inform the way that we read the Psalms, particularly the imprecatory Psalms. In them, we sometimes see David ask the Lord to bring great destruction upon his enemies. But we should understand from these chapters that these requests do not come from a personal vendetta. Rather, David sees himself as a just man who has been chosen to be God's king and who is being unjustly persecuted. Just as he understood that striking against Saul would be to strike against God, so he knows the same is true when others strike against him. His zeal is that the cause of God be defended. It is this perspective that makes the Psalms suitable to be songs for Israel, as they too are God's chosen who are often persecuted.

II. *David's House Established (2 Samuel 5-9)*

- A. **Seeking to establish a house for God.** With the kingdom united under his rule, David begins his campaigns to eliminate Israel's enemies. His crowning victory is in completely conquering Jerusalem, which had been semi-conquered before, and making it his capital. With this new capital of the nation and a measure of peace secured that Israel had never seen before, David sets his sights on honoring the God who has made this all possible. With great joy, he brings the ark and tabernacle to Jerusalem and plans to build a permanent dwelling for the Lord.
- B. **God establishes a house for David.** Though David's desire to make a permanent dwelling for the ark is a good one, the Lord has not chosen him for this task because he is a man of bloodshed (**1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3**). Rather, the Lord covenants to make an everlasting house for David, promising that he will have a son who will build the dwelling place for God, who will sit on his throne forever, and who will be regarded by God as a son. Through David, God promises to establish an everlasting kingdom in which God is worshiped in true holiness and a son of God reigns forever. Though Solomon in some sense fulfills the promise of this covenant, he does not sit on the throne of David forever, nor does he build an everlasting dwelling for God. Christ is the one who, being the true Son of God, creates a permanent dwelling place for God and forever sits on the throne of David at God's right hand.
- C. **War and peace.** The benevolent rule of David is pictured in the chapters after the covenant. David gains victory over the enemies of Israel that was unparalleled and brings great security to the land. He also seeks to show mercy to the house of Jonathan and gives his son Mephibosheth a permanent place at the king's table. Like David, Christ also wins unparalleled victory for His people over the powers of sin and darkness and welcomes those scarred and maimed by sin to eat with Him at His royal table forever.

David's Sin and Intra-Kingdom Strife (2 Samuel 10-20)

I. *The Circumstances of David's Sin (2 Samuel 10-12)*

- A. **The sin and the coverup.** During Israel's war with the Ammonites, we have the most infamous account of David's life, his sin concerning Bathsheba. At the sight of Bathsheba, the sin of lust flowers in David's heart leading to adultery. This adultery produced a pregnancy which led to David going to great lengths to hide his sin. He first seeks to hide it by recalling Uriah (who was one of his mighty men) and trying to get him to lay with his wife. When that fails, he successfully plans to have Uriah killed so that he can take Bathsheba as a wife and give the appearance of a pregnancy and birth that was not the result of adultery. David now had bloodguilt for murder.

B. **The repentance and punishment.** Though it seemed that David had gotten away with his sin, we learn from the Psalms that David was afflicted in his conscience over what he had done (**Ps. 32:3-4**). The Lord was also not content to allow David's sin to go unanswered and sent Nathan the prophet to uncover his sin. The truth of what David had done was laid bare and we find that David repents and is forgiven for his sin (**2 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 51**). Yet, though David is forgiven, this does not mean that there is no punishment for the sin. David's life will be spared and the promises made to him in the covenant will continue, but God will take the life of the child, cause members of his own house to rise against him, and cause bloodshed to come upon his house in all generations. David fasts and prays for the life of the child, that the Lord would relent of his curse and spare him. David's fasting and prayer was evidence of true repentance. Having been forgiven, David did not merely accept the judgment of the Lord, but sought His face, knowing that He is good and merciful, that He might relent concerning His judgment. True repentance runs to God, not away from Him.

C. **Irony and redemption**

1. **David and Uriah.** As with many accounts in the Bible, this narrative is full of significance that does not reflect well on God's people or make them comfortable but radiates the goodness and wisdom of God. The main way this is seen is in the contrast that exists between David and Uriah. David is a Hebrew, descended of the tribe of Judah, specially chosen to be God's king because of his heart for God and chosen to be the one through whom the Messiah would come. We know nothing of Uriah, other than that he was a Hittite, a Gentile who had come into Israel and was serving in David's army. Yet, it is not David, the most celebrated example of a Hebrew in history and inheritor of the promise who is held up in this story as faithful, it is this inconsequential Gentile. God raises the lowly and humbles the rich and exalted.
2. **David and Saul.** One of the questions that is often raised by this account of great sin in the life of David is why it is that Saul's sin causes him to lose the kingdom, but David's doesn't. There are two reasons we can observe for why this is. First, God has made a covenant with David in which He has explicitly promised to preserve him and his dynasty. God has promised to remain true to the line of David, even if He must chastise them for sin (**2 Sam. 7:14-16**). Second, we can observe a reason in the nature of their sins. Saul's sins are an explicit disregard for God and His worship. He continually shows disregard and even contempt for God's holiness and seeks to make the worship and ordinances of God serve him. David's sin on the other hand, though very great and also against the Lord, is not a sin directly against God's holiness. Third, David repents of his sin, but Saul merely wants to be delivered of sin's consequences. God forgives even the very worst of the sins of His children but there is no forgiveness for those who will not have the Lord to be their God.
3. **Redeeming great sin.** Just as there is an unexpected irony in Uriah being a greater example of faithfulness than David in this narrative, there is an even greater irony in the way the Lord uses this sin for His purposes. Though Uriah is vindicated in the telling of this account, his vindication is hollow if there is no life beyond the grave. Though he is a righteous man he is killed and there is no record of any children to carry on his name or inheritance. However, the hope for Uriah in death will come through David's marriage to Bathsheba. Though David's sin is that which robs Uriah of his life and family, God also uses it to be that which provides for Uriah's salvation and everlasting inheritance in Christ. Uriah's tragic death paves the way for salvation to come, not only to him, but to the whole world.

II. *The Consequences of David's Sin (2 Samuel 13-20)*

- A. **Rape and murder.** The punishment for David's sin is poetic justice. Just as David adulterously violated a woman and committed murder, so the same will happen among his own children. Amnon, one of David's sons, violates his half-sister Tamar and Tamar's full brother Absalom vengefully murders Amnon in response. Absalom shows no remorse for his sin but goes into exile fearing for his life.
- B. **Rebellion**
1. **Absalom's return and plot.** Joab contrives to have a woman come to David in a similar manner to Nathan, telling a story that is then applied to David to get him to acknowledge error. Where Nathan is sent by the Lord in truth, the woman is sent by Joab in deceit. Where Nathan's verdict requires the death of David's son, the decision from the woman's story requires the sparing of one who deserves to die. David lets Absalom return but refuses to see him. After being restored, Absalom successfully plots to gain the favor of the people to overthrow David.
 2. **David's exile**
 - a. **Strife in the house of David.** Absalom gathers many to rebel against David and his rule causing David to flee. Absalom claims the royal palace and seeks to establish his rule in place of his father's. We have already seen the Lord's curse that the sword would not depart from the house David to be true in Absalom's murder of Amnon, but it is further demonstrated in Absalom's war against David, as God indeed does raise one of David's own sons to seek his death (**2 Sam. 12:10-11**).
 - b. **Absalom and Ahithophel.** One of the men Absalom gains for his cause is Ahithophel. He is known as a wise man, but the Scriptures also subtly tell us of a connection that would lead him to rebel against David and side with Absalom. Ahithophel is the grandfather of Bathsheba (**2 Sam. 11:3; 23:34**). Ahithophel may have known of David's sin and held against him the violation of his granddaughter. So, it makes sense that he is the one to counsel Absalom to go in to David's concubines, so that just as David took to himself another man's wife, so Absalom now does the same with David's wives. This also was in accordance with God's curse upon David (**2 Sam. 12:11-12**). Ahithophel further counsels Absalom to immediately pursue and overtake David, but his counsel is thwarted by Hushai, a friend of David. In response to this, Ahithophel takes his own life and Absalom's chance to gain victory over David is lost. Once again, God demonstrates that those who seek the life of His anointed will come to a bloody end.
 - c. **David's humility in exile.** Though David is undergoing chastisement for his sin and is on the run for his life, we are again shown the difference between David and Saul and Absalom and why he is a man after God's heart. David does not seek to involve the people in a civil war as much as he can help it, but allows Jerusalem to be taken without a fight and counsels many to stay and prosper under Absalom rather than experience the difficulties of exile with him. He also does not seek to avenge himself on those who persecute him but leaves vengeance to the Lord.

- d. **God's vindication of David.** Though David is in the midst of this trial, there are indicators that we can observe that testify to the fact that God is still with Him and will vindicate him. As David flees, he comes to camp at Mahanaim. Mahanaim means “two camps” and is where Jacob met the camp of God and wrestled with God as he was being pursued by Esau. Just as God was with Jacob and taught him to trust in God to be delivered from the hand of his brother, so God is with David who trusts Him and will deliver David from the hand of his son. God demonstrates his favor in his provision of many supplies from men who are from outside the Promised Land. When they could expect no provision, God provides for the camp of David in the wilderness. Through the service of these men, God shows his abiding favor upon David and his purpose to preserve him (**2 Sam. 22:44-51; Ps. 18:43-50**).
3. **Absalom's death and David's restoration**
 - a. **David's victory.** The armies of Absalom and David do come to meet on the field of battle and God gives victory to the forces of David. 20,000 of those who rebelled against God's king perish at the hands of the army or in the forest (**2 Sam. 18:8-15**). That the forest is credited with the victory more than the army testifies that God turned even the earth itself against Absalom. Absalom himself is killed while hanging from a tree under God's curse (**Deut. 21:22-23**). This brings the immediate consequences of David's sin to a conclusion.
 - b. **David's humility in restoration.** Though David has undergone a difficult exile and the death of another one of his sons, God has restored him to his kingdom in an even more secure position, for those in Israel who would rebel against David have been exposed and killed. Though David has now returned to his place as king, he again does not seek to avenge himself. Rather, he shows himself to be merciful and generous, even against those who cursed him and abandoned him.
 - c. **Unresolved bloodguilt.** Though David is able to return in peace, the problem of bloodshed has not been completely dealt with. David's wars have led to much bloodshed among the people of Israel. Joab, who is David's nephew, has been the general of David's army, and has fought for David for years has shown himself to be an unrepentantly murderous man. Though he does seem genuinely to seek the welfare of David he is also ruthless in killing any who would threaten his own place in the kingdom. The issue of atonement for the blood that has been shed in the land is yet to be resolved.

The End of David's Reign (2 Samuel 21-24)

I. *Resolving the Bloodguilt of Saul*

- A. **A stunning account.** The conclusion of the books of Samuel begins with a stark account concerning God's judgment upon the land of Israel for the actions of the house of Saul. Saul and his house broke Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites by seeking to exterminate them. God declares that this is the reason for his curse, the Gibeonites ask for sons of Saul as recompense, and David hands them over to be killed. Although Saul was the instigator of the sin, his whole household was complicit in the crime. God's standard of justice in the law is very clear on this matter, the seriousness of murder must be paid for by the life of the perpetrators (**Gen. 9:6; Num. 35:33; Deut. 19:10-13; 21:8-9**). These men are executed at the beginning of barley harvest, right around the time of the Passover, and their deaths are accepted by God as atonement for the sin of the house of Saul and thus He removes the famine from the land of Israel.

B. Theological reflections

1. **Contrast.** David and Saul are again contrasted here. Saul is seen to be a covenant breaker worthy of judgment; David is seen to take care to preserve both Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites and his personal covenant with Jonathan.
2. **Bloodguilt.** Bloodguilt can and does come even upon God's anointed king. God has delayed the punishment for the sin of Saul but now has brought it about. David is also guilty of blood and will likewise pay the price in the person of Jesus.
3. **A type of Christ.** These men serve as a type of Christ, who also died during the Passover to atone for the sins of His people and secure God's forgiveness for a broken covenant. The horrific nature of their deaths should lead us to reflect upon the horrific nature of the cross. In addition to these men, there are also many others who have risked or given their lives in order to establish and perpetuate the kingdom of David but it is the Son of David who will give His life to secure everlasting life for all who serve God in truth.

II. David's Praise

David's concluding words in **2 Sam. 22-23** are the basis for **Psalms 18** and serve to illustrate many of the main points that we are intended to take from this book as a whole. David speaks of being graciously delivered from death by God, whom he describes as coming to his defense in cataclysmic ways. He speaks of God dealing with him according to his blamelessness. He speaks of the rule that God has given to him and his children through his covenant and how this favor of the Lord will be given to his house forever. All of these things are described in eschatological and exalted language and when we consider the themes of salvation from death that brings cataclysms on the earth, the king ruling in blamelessness, and the everlasting rule of the house of David we should see these things coming to a head in Christ.

III. Establishing Atonement

- A. **David's census.** The Lord was angry with the people and incited David sinfully to take a census of the people. This brings God's wrath upon the people and God sends a prophet to give David a choice about what punishment will come. There are two choices that bring punishment upon the people and one that brings punishment only upon David. David rejects the choice that would punish him only and casts himself on the mercy of God. God brings forth a pestilence for three days upon the whole land and kills 70,000.
- B. **Hints of the temple.** When David sees the angel of the Lord striking down the people, he cries out to the Lord to let the punishment be against him and not them. So, God commands David to go build an altar and offer sacrifices at a particular threshing floor in Jerusalem. David insists on buying the land lest he give an offering that is worthless, and the Lord relents from the plague in response to David's sacrifice. Chronicles gives us added perspective that this becomes the location on which the temple will be erected and was where Abraham offered Isaac (**2 Chr. 3; cf. Gen. 22:2**). At the place where the Lord provides (**Gen. 22:14**) God stays His wrath and will establish the work of atonement in the temple. Just as Abraham was willing to offer the child of promise according to the covenant, so David is willing to offer himself and his house promised him according to the covenant. For this reason, God will establish the temple at this point as a continual pointer to the culmination of these covenant promises who will offer Himself as true sacrifice to atone for sins.

C. **Tying Samuel together.** These final chapters, then, are not out of place but put a fine bow on the narrative of 1-2 Samuel. 1 Samuel opened with the tent of God defiled and seemingly no one with a heart for God among the people. The house of God and the worship of God is treated with disdain by many of the people and even by the first king. The people and their kings have also shown themselves to be guilty of blood by their false worship and murderous conduct. But the Lord will atone. He vindicates His holiness among the people concerning His ark. He also raises up a king who has a heart to build a permanent dwelling for God and His worship. So, God makes a covenant to perpetuate David's house that His own house would be established as well. But David is not the right man for this task, we must wait for another. So, Samuel ends by highlighting the fact that the people of Israel and even the house of David are guilty and in need of atonement. The reminder of that need will constantly be displayed in this location for centuries to come (**Heb. 10:1-4**). Both the king and the temple he is preparing are provisional but they also are a seal that God will surely stop His wrath through the atoning blood of His Messiah to bring in a kingdom and temple that will endure forever.

Applications from 2 Samuel

I. *Dealing with Corporate Guilt*

One of the issues that is often uncomfortable to talk about and overlooked in Christian discussions is corporate or national guilt. It is clear that Israel is chastised and judged for its sin but that's often viewed as something unique to them. However, it is not only Israel who is judged corporately for sin but also the nations at large (**Lev. 18:24-28; Jonah 3:1-4; Amos 1:1-2:3**). So, we need to recognize that the moral actions of our churches, communities, and nations will be judged by the Lord. The only means of avoiding this judgment is repentance from the people and leaders (**Jer. 18:7-10**). Therefore, our love for God and His holiness and our love for neighbor that they be spared from His wrath must compel us to pray for and promote public holiness and fidelity to God in every sphere of life and to call upon those in sin to repent and turn to the Lord.

II. *Looking to Christ*

2 Samuel shows us the foolishness of looking for ultimate answers in this world. Would you put your hope in the rulers of this world? Even the greatest with whom God has covenanted will make foolish and sinful decisions. Would you trust in the justice of courts of law? Even if their declarations are just and true they cannot redeem or restore what has been lost. Would you take refuge in the precepts of God's law? Even your best efforts will prove you to be a transgressor worthy of judgment. However, if we recognize that these things have their end and fulfillment in Jesus, then we view them rightly. 2 Samuel called the people in that day and calls us to look to Christ as the fulfillment of every expectation of life and the Scriptures (**Luke 24:27; John 5:39; 2 Cor. 1:20**). This means looking beyond the immediate circumstances of any biblical text to read them in light of the work and kingdom of Christ and the life that is to come and evaluating our circumstances not in light of their effects in this life but in the light of eternity. It also calls us to meditate much upon the cross. Our sins nailed Jesus to the cross. We are those who deserve to be strung up and hung for our sins. The only answer to the sins of the people in David's day and in ours is the bloody sacrifice of Christ. In the last day we will either be guilty of the blood of Jesus or have our guilt covered by His blood. If we would find atonement, it can only be found in the once for all atonement of Christ.