



2 Samuel

2 Samuel tells the story of King David – how he consolidated his power after the death of Saul, and made his capital first at Hebron and then at the ancient Jebusite, city of Salem, which he renamed Jerusalem. It tells the story of his spectacular success as a King, as well as his more mixed personal life. Throughout the story runs the theme of his deep relationship with God which shaped who he was, even when he needed to repent.



How long will it take?

Reading time: 1 ¾ hours
Short of time? Just read 1.1-3.5; 5.1-25; 9.1-13; 20.1-22



Genre

Theological History



Anything tricky?

The telling of the building of David's kingdom, like the entry into the Promised Land, is told with no concern for the inhabitants who already lived there. This can be difficult for modern readers.



Inspiring quotes

²⁶ I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

²⁷ How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!

(2 Samuel 1.26-27)

¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. ¹⁵ But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.

(2 Samuel 7.14-15)



About the Author

Jewish tradition attributes the authorship of 2 Samuel to Nathan and Gad, but there is no evidence for this or, indeed, for any other author within the book itself. In style and theology it is very similar to Joshua, Judges, 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, and so it is often thought to form a collection of writings which scholars call the 'Deuteronomistic histories'.

What do we know about him?

Next to nothing.

This name implies (and intends to imply)

a theological connection with the book of Deuteronomy, since the outlook of all these books seems very similar. It is suggested that the author or, more likely, authors of these histories were influenced by Deuteronomy and told Israel's history from that perspective. The key feature here is that Deuteronomy stresses that God's people will only stay in the land if they remain faithful. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of how God's people failed to be faithful and so, eventually, went into exile from the land right at the end of 2 Kings.



About the times

No one really knows when these books were written. It is thought that they reached their final form in the 6th century bc, in other words shortly after the Judeans went into exile and were finalised then in order to explain why the exile had happened at all. It is clear, however, that these final documents were drawn together from already existing source, many of which would have been written at or shortly after the event described.

What were people feeling?

The books, therefore, have more than one audience – those who read the first annals of the history and those who read the final text once it was pulled together. Since it is hard to know anything about the first audience we will concentrate on the second.

If it is right that these histories are written to explain why the exile happened then it is clear that the people would have been feeling hurt, despairing and lost. For a sense of what people were feeling then have a look at the book of Lamentations which provides an accurate insight into their emotions.

Other books set around this time

2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings



What kind of Book is it?

This is a history book but it falls into the category of what you might call theological history – history with a purpose. It is not telling the events solely so that you can know what happened but so that you can understand why they happened. Many of the historical books of the Bible are like this.



How is it structured?

- 1.1-3.5 David is made King of Judah (just the Southern two tribes) and rules at Hebron
- 3.6-5.16 David is made King of the whole of Israel and moves the capital to Jerusalem
- 5.17-8.18 David attempts to consolidate the Kingdom, defeats the Philistines and brings the ark to Jerusalem
- 9.1-20.26 The personal life and struggles of David
- 21.1-24.25 Epilogue – some extra stories that were too good to miss out but didn't fit with the flow of the story.



Look out for...

2 Samuel tells the story of David both as a king and as a human being – look out for the way in which it weaves together these two strands.

This story tells the story of David's great success as a King but keep an eye open for the way in which it also points to the seeds of Israel and Judah's ultimate downfall (hint - the rebellions tell you something about the deep down stability of Israel).

As in 1 Samuel, there are a number of stories that are told twice in slightly different ways, look out for them in the book and ask yourself why they might have been included twice.



What could this mean for me?

The story of David is the story of someone who was deeply flawed and yet had a close relationship with God. Reflect on this and its importance as you read.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- Talk about David – what was it, do you think, that has made him such an iconic leader in the minds of so many?
- What do you make of David's relationships (with Bathsheba, with his children and with God)? Can we learn anything about who David really was from the way he relates to others (including God)?
- 2 Samuel tells two versions of David – the great leader and the flawed husband and father. This is surprising for someone who was regarded by them as their greatest King. Why do you think they were so content to do this? Would we be prepared to tell similar stories of our leaders today? Do tales of personal flaws undermine our view of our leaders?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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