



2 Samuel



REFORMED
EXPOSITORY
COMMENTARY

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS

2 Samuel

REFORMED EXPOSITORY COMMENTARY

A Series

Series Editors

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2 Samuel

RICHARD D. PHILLIPS



P U B L I S H I N G

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To Melton Ledford Duncan Sr.
who so often has “strengthened my hand in God”
(1 Sam. 23:16)

and

to the Savior of the House of David
who “dawns . . . like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning”
(2 Sam. 23:3-4).

CONTENTS

Series Introduction ix

Preface xiii

Part 1: The Davidic Covenant

1. Under God's Judgment: 2 Samuel 1:1–16 5
2. A Royal Lament: 2 Samuel 1:17–27 16
3. Holy Ambition: 2 Samuel 2:1–32 28
4. The Price of Peace: 2 Samuel 3:1–21 40
5. The Prince of Peace: 2 Samuel 3:22–39 52
6. Bloody Justice, Severe Mercy: 2 Samuel 4:1–12 64
7. King and Covenant: 2 Samuel 5:1–16 74
8. Going Up to War: 2 Samuel 5:17–25 85
9. The Holiness of God: 2 Samuel 6:1–11 96
10. Rejoicing in the Lord: 2 Samuel 6:12–19 108
11. Merry before the Lord: 2 Samuel 6:16–23 121
12. A Place for My People: 2 Samuel 7:1–11 132
13. The Davidic Covenant: 2 Samuel 7:11–17 143
14. None like You: 2 Samuel 7:18–29 155
15. David's Reign of Victory: 2 Samuel 8:1–18 165
16. Table of Mercy: 2 Samuel 9:1–13 176
17. Strong in the Lord: 2 Samuel 10:1–19 187

Part 2: The Wages of Sin

18. David's Dreadful Sin: 2 Samuel 11:1–5 201
19. The Limits of Power: 2 Samuel 11:6–27 212

- 20. You Are the Man! 2 Samuel 12:1–15 224
- 21. Mourning for the Child: 2 Samuel 12:15–31 235
- 22. A Tale of False Love: 2 Samuel 13:1–22 246
- 23. Vengeance Is Mine: 2 Samuel 13:23–39 258
- 24. The Banished One Restored: 2 Samuel 14:1–33 269
- 25. Absalom’s Rebellion: 2 Samuel 15:1–37 280
- 26. Flight from Jerusalem: 2 Samuel 16:1–23 292
- 27. Ordained to Defeat: 2 Samuel 17:1–23 303
- 28. Absalom’s Monument: 2 Samuel 17:24–18:18 314
- 29. Absalom, O Absalom! 2 Samuel 18:19–19:8 326
- 30. Mercy Enthroned: 2 Samuel 19:8–40 337
- 31. The Trials of Kingship: 2 Samuel 19:41–20:26 348
- 32. Vengeance for the Gibeonites: 2 Samuel 21:1–14 360
- 33. Slaying the Giants: 2 Samuel 21:15–22 373

Part 3: Epilogue to the Life of David

- 34. David’s Song of Deliverance: 2 Samuel 22:1–24 387
- 35. Blessed Be the Rock: 2 Samuel 22:25–51 399
- 36. Like Morning Light: 2 Samuel 23:1–7 410
- 37. What the Gospel Can Do: 2 Samuel 23:8–39 422
- 38. David’s Census: 2 Samuel 24:1–14 434
- 39. The Gospel according to Samuel: 2 Samuel 24:15–25 446

Bibliography 457

Index of Scripture 461

Index of Subjects and Names 473

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In every generation there is a fresh need for the faithful exposition of God's Word in the church. At the same time, the church must constantly do the work of theology: reflecting on the teaching of Scripture, confessing its doctrines of the Christian faith, and applying them to contemporary culture. We believe that these two tasks—the expositional and the theological—are interdependent. Our doctrine must derive from the biblical text, and our understanding of any particular passage of Scripture must arise from the doctrine taught in Scripture as a whole.

We further believe that these interdependent tasks of biblical exposition and theological reflection are best undertaken in the church, and most specifically in the pulpits of the church. This is all the more true since the study of Scripture properly results in doxology and praxis—that is, in praise to God and practical application in the lives of believers. In pursuit of these ends, we are pleased to present the Reformed Expository Commentary as a fresh exposition of Scripture for our generation in the church. We hope and pray that pastors, teachers, Bible study leaders, and many others will find this series to be a faithful, inspiring, and useful resource for the study of God's infallible, inerrant Word.

The Reformed Expository Commentary has four fundamental commitments. First, these commentaries aim to be *biblical*, presenting a comprehensive exposition characterized by careful attention to the details of the text. They are not exegetical commentaries—commenting word by word or even verse by verse—but integrated expositions of whole passages of Scripture. Each commentary will thus present a sequential, systematic treatment of an entire book of the Bible, passage by passage. Second, these commentaries are unashamedly *doctrinal*. We are committed to the Westminster Confession

Series Introduction

of Faith and Catechisms as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Each volume will teach, promote, and defend the doctrines of the Reformed faith as they are found in the Bible. Third, these commentaries are *redemptive-historical* in their orientation. We believe in the unity of the Bible and its central message of salvation in Christ. We are thus committed to a Christ-centered view of the Old Testament, in which its characters, events, regulations, and institutions are properly understood as pointing us to Christ and his gospel as well as giving us examples to follow in living by faith. Fourth, these commentaries are *practical*, applying the text of Scripture to contemporary challenges of life—both public and private—with appropriate illustrations.

The contributors to the Reformed Expository Commentary are all pastor-scholars. As pastor, each author will first present his expositions in the pulpit ministry of his church. This means that these commentaries are rooted in the teaching of Scripture to real people in the church. While aiming to be scholarly, these expositions are not academic. Our intent is to be faithful, clear, and helpful to Christians who possess various levels of biblical and theological training—as should be true in any effective pulpit ministry. Inevitably this means that some issues of academic interest will not be covered. Nevertheless, we aim to achieve a responsible level of scholarship, seeking to promote and model this for pastors and other teachers in the church. Significant exegetical and theological difficulties, along with such historical and cultural background as is relevant to the text, will be treated with care.

We strive for a high standard of enduring excellence. This begins with the selection of the authors, all of whom have proved to be outstanding communicators of God's Word. But this pursuit of excellence is also reflected in a disciplined editorial process. Each volume is edited by both a series editor and a testament editor. The testament editors, Iain Duguid for the Old Testament and Daniel Doriani for the New Testament, are accomplished pastors and respected scholars who have taught at the seminary level. Their job is to ensure that each volume is sufficiently conversant with up-to-date scholarship and is faithful and accurate in its exposition of the text. As series editors, we oversee each volume to ensure its overall quality—including excellence of writing, soundness of teaching, and usefulness in application. Working together as an editorial team, along with the publisher, we are devoted to ensuring that these are the best commentaries that our gifted authors can

provide, so that the church will be served with trustworthy and exemplary expositions of God's Word.

It is our goal and prayer that the Reformed Expository Commentary will serve the church by renewing confidence in the clarity and power of Scripture and by upholding the great doctrinal heritage of the Reformed faith. We hope that pastors who read these commentaries will be encouraged in their own expository preaching ministry, which we believe to be the best and most biblical pattern for teaching God's Word in the church. We hope that lay teachers will find these commentaries among the most useful resources they rely on for understanding and presenting the text of the Bible. And we hope that the devotional quality of these studies of Scripture will instruct and inspire each Christian who reads them in joyful, obedient discipleship to Jesus Christ.

May the Lord bless all who read the Reformed Expository Commentary. We commit these volumes to the Lord Jesus Christ, praying that the Holy Spirit will use them for the instruction and edification of the church, with thanksgiving to God the Father for his unceasing faithfulness in building his church through the ministry of his Word.

Richard D. Phillips
Philip Graham Ryken
Series Editors

PREFACE

Second Samuel continues the biblical account of David, one of Scripture's greatest figures. The David of 2 Samuel, however, is less than great. In this second volume of Samuel, we see sin at work in the foundations of the Israelite kingship, starting in the heart of the king himself. For all the uplifting excitement of 1 Samuel, this second installment answers with a discouraging fall that is equally instructive for the life of faith. David the sinner, it turns out, has just as much to teach us as David the hero—his fall into sin validating Paul's warning, "Keep a close watch on yourself" (1 Tim. 4:16). David's subsequent repentance likewise illustrates the principle of 1 Peter 5:6: "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you."

Before David's fall are his heady days of triumph (chapters 1–9), displaying the fruit of a faith-filled life in the hands of a gracious God. The culmination of David's enthronement is the vitally important seventh chapter, in which God establishes his covenant with David for an eternal kingship in his line. It was faith that inspired David to build a house for the Lord, but grace that caused God to answer, "The LORD will make you a house" (2 Sam. 7:11). The careful, reverent study of 2 Samuel 7 will enrich any believer's life, helping us to understand God's redemptive plan that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

David's faith is further put on display in the painful chapters that follow his sins of adultery and murder. When he answers the prophet Nathan's charge, confessing, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:13), he sets an example of frank and sincere repentance. When the son from his union with Bathsheba dies, David's faith provides encouragement to countless Christian parents who have suffered a similar loss (12:23). Whereas 1 Samuel shows David struggling in the depths because of others' sins, 2 Samuel shows

Preface

that the same faith is needed when we suffer because of our own sins. The answering presence of God's grace for a faltering David shows the truth of Paul's claim in Romans 5:20: "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."

Scholars have pointed out that the disheartening scenes of the book of Judges have the purpose of making us look forward to the Davidic kingdom. If that is true, the foibles and follies of David's later reign create an even stronger passion for the coming of Jesus and his true kingdom of salvation. Second Samuel contains many pointers and full-blown types of Jesus, most notably in the Davidic covenant of chapter 7. But perhaps the way in which this book most strongly points to Christ is by seeing how far short even a great believer like David falls in meeting the needs of God's people. Looking forward to the first coming of Jesus from 2 Samuel reminds us of the precious gift that God has given in his Son, urging us to look fervently for his return: "Come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20).

These expositions on 2 Samuel were first preached in the evening worship services of Second Presbyterian Church in Greenville, South Carolina. I thank this dearly beloved congregation, with special thanks to the session for its kind provision of time for study and writing. I also express appreciation to Drs. Philip Ryken and Iain Duguid, whose editorial labors have measurably improved the quality of this book, as well as to my many friends and colleagues at P&R Publishing. I am again in debt to Mrs. Shirley Duncan for her copy edits. This commentary is dedicated to Melton L. Duncan Sr., who has been to me what Jonathan was to David. I remain grateful for the loving companionship and ministry of my wife, Sharon, and for the blessings of our five children. Finally, I give thanks to the God who fulfilled his ancient promise through the house of David, establishing the throne of Jesus Christ forever and making his kingdom sure for all generations.

Richard D. Phillips
Greenville, South Carolina,
August 2018

2 Samuel

THE KINGDOM OF THE
HOUSE OF DAVID

PART 1



The Davidic Covenant

1

UNDER GOD'S JUDGMENT

2 Samuel 1:1–16

David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. (2 Sam. 1:11–12)



Death will often exert a profound influence on those who come near it. Consider the experience of young Adoniram Judson, on a fateful night in 1808. Lodging at an inn, he learned that a man next door was struggling in the throes of death. Listening to the dreadful sounds coming through the wall, Judson wrestled with his thoughts. A brilliant student at Providence College, Judson had become enthralled with the company of students who had embraced the Enlightenment ideas coming from Europe, particularly a witty upperclassman, Jacob Eames, who had persuaded him to adopt deism and its idea of an absent God. On his twentieth birthday, Judson broke his parents' hearts with the news that he had abandoned the Christian faith of his youth and was moving to New York City to pursue a life of pleasure working in the theater.

It was during this time that Judson sojourned in the inn, with his dying neighbor. Hearing the terrible distress, he wondered whether the man was

Under God's Judgment

prepared to die. Moans passed through the walls, and he could hear the man's restless struggling. What would his "freethinking" friend Eames say to dismiss his anxiety and remove his concerns about eternity? Was the man next door a Christian? Or was he, like Judson, one who had despised the prayers of his godly mother and rejected the gospel for a sophisticated worldly creed? Before long, he began to wonder about his own fate in death, desperately trying to counter these "superstitious illusions" with the clever replies of the deist Eames.

Finally, the light of dawn entered Judson's chamber, and the distressing sounds from next door came to an end. Gathering his things, he was prepared to put the stressful ordeal behind him. On the way out, however, he passed the innkeeper and asked about the man next door. "He is gone, poor fellow!" was the reply. "The doctor said he would probably not survive the night." "Do you know who he was?" Judson asked. "Oh yes. Young man from the college in Providence," came the reply. "Name was Eames, Jacob Eames."¹ John Piper provides the postscript to this remarkable providence:

Judson could hardly move. He stayed there for hours pondering the death of his unbelieving friend. If Eames were right, then this was a meaningless event. But Judson could not believe it. "That hell should open in that country inn and snatch Jacob Eames, his dearest friend and guide, from the next bed—this could not, simply could not, be pure coincidence."²

Adoniram Judson, who later became one of the greatest of all Baptist missionaries, was not immediately converted. Months of spiritual struggle were to follow as he wrestled with that remarkable night and his own sinful heart. But one thing is sure: the presence of death had crossed the path of his life and changed him forever.

A REPORT FROM THE BATTLE

As we begin to study 2 Samuel, we encounter in David another man whose life was dramatically changed by news of a death. Second Samuel picks up the story directly where 1 Samuel left it off. This is to be expected, since originally,

1. Samuel Fisk, *More Fascinating Conversion Stories* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 65–67.

2. John Piper, *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 91.

until the time of its translation into Greek, Samuel was a single book in the Bible. First Samuel 29 tells of David's armed band of fugitives marching in the Philistine host as it advanced toward its invasion of Israel and of how David was providentially delivered from the battle that would take place in the north. Chapter 30 tells of his return to his southern base at Ziklag, only to find that Amalekite raiders had made off with their wives, children, and property. David and his men pursued and defeated these raiders and returned to Ziklag. The final chapter of 1 Samuel then relates the result of the battle between King Saul and the Israelites against the massed Philistine host. When 2 Samuel begins, the reader knows what David does not yet know: Saul was defeated and killed, and the Israelites were scattered in defeat.

Second Samuel 1:2 picks up the story on the third day since David's victory over the Amalekites who had raided his base. Back in Zicklag, David was met by an unexpected messenger: "On the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head." David must have been eagerly awaiting news from the great battle to the north. The approach of a travel-worn man in the traditional garb of lament and grieving—torn clothes and dirt on his head—would have braced David for bad news. After the man had fallen before him and paid homage, David asked the question to which he must already have guessed the answer: "Where do you come from?" The man answered, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." David eagerly demanded, "How did it go? Tell me" (vv. 3–4).

Given the man's attire, there could have been only one answer. The man replied directly, "The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead" (2 Sam. 1:4). Knowing the demoralized state of Saul's army and having seen the might of the Philistines firsthand, David would not have doubted the outcome of the battle. His urgent concern, however, was for Israel's king and his son. David thus replied, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" (v. 5).

The young man answered with a remarkable tale. He had happened to be on Mount Gilboa where the battle was raging. There was Saul, with the enemy horsemen and chariots bearing down. "He saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite'" (2 Sam. 1:7–8). Continuing his story, the visitor said that Saul had called him to "stand beside me and kill me," so that he

would not be captured alive. He concluded his report, saying, “So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen” (vv. 9–10). Before David could respond, the man drew forth two objects that at least proved his news that Saul was dead. He concluded, “And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord” (v. 10).

When the translators of Samuel made their division at this chapter, we can understand their logic, since the message of the Amalekite truly began a new phase in David’s life. The fact that David was far from the field when Saul died in battle proved David’s innocence in the matter. His reaction to this news further showed the sincerity of his motives toward the kingship and the nation. Moreover, 2 Samuel 1 shows David’s demeanor in a day that was dark with God’s judgment. His response presents us with valuable lessons about the judgment of God that we also must face.

GOD’S JUDGMENT CALLS FOR GRIEF AND REPENTANCE

This opening chapter of 2 Samuel tells us at least four things about God’s judgment. The first is that *God’s judgment is always a call for grief and repentance*. Undoubtedly, the Amalekite visitor expected David to respond to news of Saul’s death with a joy that would redound upon the messenger. Instead, David reacted by launching himself into public mourning: “Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son” (2 Sam. 1:11–12).

We can see why the messenger may have expected David to rejoice at Saul’s death. After all, David had spent the last several years as a fugitive from Saul’s unjust persecution. Moreover, everything that David’s heart might have desired, including a return to his home and people, and the fulfillment of God’s great promises to him, depended on the removal of King Saul. So we can imagine a chorus of “Hurray!” breaking forth at the news of Saul’s demise, with a special feast to celebrate the end of the wicked regime. Instead of putting on a festal coat, however, David tore his clothing, with all his men following suit. Instead of ordering a feast, David declared a fast that continued until that evening.

David acted in this strange but godly way for two reasons. The first is that

he knew that God is displeased by a heart that is vengeful, even against one's enemies. David knew the spiritual principle before his son Solomon wrote it as a proverb: "he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished" (Prov. 17:5). One reason why God's people are not to rejoice at judgment—even the judgment of so flagrant a rebel as King Saul—is that almost inevitably it involves us in offensive self-righteousness. Only God is competent to dispense judgment, because only God is perfectly holy. John Calvin warns that "he does not want us to be so presumptuous in our rejoicing that we fail to consider our own sins, and thus displease him. . . . We ought also to tremble before his majesty, knowing that we, too, are as deserving of punishment and grief as those whom he punishes."³ This is why Paul wrote: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom. 12:19).

A second reason for David's grief at news of Saul's death is that he had evidently been nurturing sanctified and merciful thoughts toward Saul in the quiet of his heart. Our reaction to sudden news will reliably show what has been cherished in our hearts, and so it seems on this occasion. If David had been thinking that here was an opportunity to be rid of his nemesis, secretly hoping for news of Saul's demise, it would have been inconceivable for him to have reacted as he did. David Payne comments: "A lesser man than David would have gloated over the death of Saul, so long his bitter enemy; and a more ambitious man than David would have been equally pleased about the death of Jonathan, since he would naturally have succeeded his father had he lived."⁴ David's reaction to the news of Saul's death validates the several occasions when David had been more concerned for the sanctity of Saul's person as Israel's king than for David's own safety. It is true that David had needed to take steps to protect himself and his followers from Saul's malice, but in his heart he fulfilled the New Testament teaching: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. . . . If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:14–18). If we wish to honor God and live peaceably with those around us, we like David must sanctify our private thoughts and make it our privilege to forgive others as Christ has forgiven us.

David grieved not only over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, but also

3. John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel 1–13*, trans. Douglas Kelly (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1992), 7.

4. David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1992), 157.

Under God's Judgment

for the lamentable plight of his people, Israel: “they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword” (2 Sam. 1:12). In this way, David shows us how our hearts should be grieved by the evil experienced by Christ’s church and people. Dale Ralph Davis writes: “The condition of the people of God disturbed [David]. And the same principle should control our life in the kingdom. Do we not have an obligation to mourn over the unbelief, apostasy and coldness in the visible church?” How dangerous it is for us, he warns, to take up a “conservative haughtiness” against liberalism and an “evangelical arrogance” that contradicts the spirit of the gospel. “Rather such unbelief or error in the church should drive us to mourning and grief and prayer and sorrow. It calls for intercession more than for pronouncements.”⁵ This is the example that David set with his grief and his fasting over Israel’s fall in battle.

This chapter presents the second time in the books of Samuel that news has arrived to Israel’s spiritual leader telling of disaster and divine judgment on God’s people. The first was the calamity of the battle of Ebenezer, at the news of which Eli the high priest fell off his seat, broke his neck, and died (1 Sam. 4:18). The fact that David was unscathed by the news of judgment is a reflection of his humility and his right standing with God. Moreover, his genuine loyalty toward his people overrode personal opportunism, and his compassion for those he desired to lead revealed his fitness to serve as their shepherd.

Like Adoniram Judson, whose spirit was troubled during the night that the sounds of death came into his room, we should all be heavy in heart for every instance of divine judgment, since our entire race is under the curse of death because of sin. Jesus guided our approach to calamity after a tower had fallen in Jerusalem, killing eighteen people. Should his listeners shrug this tragedy off, assuming that those who had died deserved their fate? Jesus told us to think differently: “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:4–5). Thoughts of divine judgment should prompt us to ensure that we are seeking mercy for everyone we know—even our enemies—and that we have repented of our own sins in order that we might cast ourselves on God’s mercy for salvation.

5. Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 1999), 17.

GOD’S JUDGMENT IS CERTAIN AND SEVERE

Not only do we learn from David’s reaction to Saul’s death, but we also gain insight into God’s judgment from the reported circumstances of Saul’s death. Saul’s demise shows that *God’s judgment is certain and severe*.

Surely it is not coincidental that news of Saul’s death was brought to David by an Amalekite. After all, it was for Saul’s failure to obey the command to eradicate this accursed people that God had sworn to tear the kingdom of Israel from his hands (1 Sam. 15:17–29). If this messenger’s story of giving Saul his killing blow was true, then Saul’s death had been caused by the hand of one whose very existence was the result of Saul’s disobedience. In the end, the man who would not give the order to kill the Amalekites was forced to give an Amalekite the order to kill him. Even if the messenger’s claim to have given Saul his *coup de grâce* was false, as seems likely, the fact that Saul’s royal insignia were scooped up by a member of one of the most divinely cursed races of the ancient world can be seen only as an expression of God’s ultimate justice against Saul’s disobedience. Calvin writes: “. . . was a just punishment which God sent Saul in accordance with his sin. . . . After Saul’s death, God sent a man of this very nation, who snatched the crown and royal ornaments from his body, so that he was left in even greater ignominy.”⁶

Saul’s death shows that the consequences of our sins are far-reaching and that, unless we are forgiven, God’s long-threatened judgment is certain to come. However Saul really died—whether he fell on his sword and died (as 1 Samuel 31:4 tells it) or having survived this attempt had to be put down with his own spear by a passing Amalekite—it is certain that he perished in a shameful manner, amid the utter ruin of his kingdom, and in circumstances of wretched disgrace before his enemies.

According to the New Testament, judgment is as certain for secret as for public sins. Jesus taught, “Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known” (Luke 12:2). Paul added that on the day of judgment, God will judge “the secrets of men” (Rom. 2:16). The wise course of action is therefore to seek a way of forgiveness and hope for our justification before God. It is just this hope that the Bible reveals in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Romans 3:24 tells us that we may be “justified by [God’s] grace as

6. Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel*, 11–12.

a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul adds, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of [God’s] grace” (Eph. 1:7).

This is the gospel in which Adoniram Judson finally found peace after he was forced to face both death and judgment through the demise of his friend Jacob Eames. Moved by the experience to reconsider his own need of salvation, Judson changed the direction of his life and entered a course of studies that resulted in the renewal of his faith in Jesus Christ. The urgent reality of divine judgment in death shook Judson out of his spiritual slumber. It is because of this same judgment that the Bible urges us to turn to Christ for our forgiveness. The Bible asks: “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). The question of Acts 16:30 is thus seen to be the greatest question of all: “what must I do to be saved?” The Bible answers: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (v. 31).

GOD’S JUDGMENT IS PUNISHMENT BY DEATH

If we lack a sense of urgency regarding our need for God’s mercy and forgiving grace, David’s treatment of the Amalekite messenger reminds us that *God’s judgment for sin is punishment by death*.

After grieving for Saul and commanding his people to fast, David turned back to the messenger. “Where do you come from?” he asked. The youth answered, “I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite.’ David said to him, ‘How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?’ Then David called one of the young men and said, ‘Go, execute him.’ And he struck him down so that he died” (2 Sam. 1:13–15).

To understand David’s response, we need to examine what truly seems to have happened. Numerous scholars point out that there is an apparent contradiction between the Bible’s account of Saul’s death in 1 Samuel 31:4–6 and this report brought to David in 2 Samuel 1. To resolve this difficulty, Dale Ralph Davis provides a simple interpretive rule: “If you ever have a choice between the narrator and an Amalekite, always believe the narrator.”⁷ Indeed, given the earlier description of Saul’s death by falling on his own sword, it seems most likely that this Amalekite came upon Saul after he had already died, and then seized the opportunity to ingratiate himself

7. Davis, *2 Samuel*, 14.

with Saul's rival by taking the royal emblems to David. If this is so, then he miscalculated badly. Even if he was innocent of slaying Saul, his sin of lying received the punishment of death. As David saw it, knowing only what the Amalekite had told him, the charge against the man was that of sacrilege: as God's anointed king, the person of Saul was sacred; therefore, anyone who struck him was liable to the punishment of death. David himself had so feared God that he would not strike out to harm one who had been anointed by the Lord, even at the risk of danger to himself. The great example was at Engedi, where David had spared King Saul at the very time when Saul was hunting his life (1 Sam. 24). "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" he asked, sealing the Amalekite messenger's doom (2 Sam. 1:14).

This reminds us to treat as holy all those things set apart by God for his service. We should honor the Word of God and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is also appropriate to set apart sacred space for our gathered worship, so long as we do not wrongly limit worship to a mere location or setting. The New Testament tells us to honor those set apart for spiritual leadership and those who labor in teaching the Word of God (1 Tim. 5:17). Children should honor their fathers and mothers as holy persons set apart by God for their governance (Eph. 6:1-3). Indeed, a proper understanding of the fifth commandment obliges us to honor all those whom God has placed in proper authority over us. This includes civil leaders, even those who are incompetent and ungodly. Paul emphasized this principle, writing: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1).

If we think David's death sentence on the Amalekite was excessive or harsh, we fail to realize how holy is the anointed king of God's people. Moreover, we forget that in God's judgment "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). This does not mean that civil governments should punish all transgressions with death or other severe punishments. But as the one truly anointed to rule over God's kingdom, David acted as judge on God's behalf, and he reminds us that in the day of judgment to come, Jesus, the King of kings and final Judge of all people, will consign his enemies "away into eternal punishment" in hell and then will receive his faithful people into the righteous blessing of eternal life (Matt. 25:46).

GOD'S JUDGMENT DEMANDS A ROYAL PROTECTOR

Finally, we can see why this scene of divine judgment was brought to the feet of King David. David was the only one who seems to have known how to respond to God's judgment, and temporally speaking, only he could now save his people in their distress. The Amalekite messenger, therefore, came to the right person, though with the wrong motives. Seeing David in this passage, we are reminded that *God's judgment demands a royal protector*.

David shows his fitness to rule Israel through his compassion for the scattered people of God. He grieved "for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword" (2 Sam. 1:12). This merciful attitude is a mark of true spiritual leadership and illustrates the kind of royal savior that God's people need. In this, David points us forward to the true saving King for God's people, Jesus Christ. Mark notes how Jesus looked on the great crowds and "had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mark 6:34). Jesus therefore spent the years of his earthly ministry in healing, guiding, teaching, and saving, all because of his great compassion for the plight of God's people under the yoke of sin.

It is wonderful for a savior to have compassion, but he must also have strength with which actually to save those in need. In the chapters that follow the calamity of Israel's defeat, David is revealed as a mighty redeemer, pointing us forward to the true and great Redeemer, David's descendant Jesus. As the news of Saul's death and the emblems of Saul's kingdom were laid at David's feet, God was providing a king to stand against Israel's foes. This power to redeem is fulfilled in Jesus, who showed his power over sin, evil, sickness, and death in the years of his ministry. Jesus secured forgiveness through the victory of his cross and grants eternal life through the conquest of his resurrection from death. It is no wonder, then, that God arranged that even in his death, Jesus should be hailed "the King of the Jews," as was pronounced on the placard over his cross (John 19:19). He is the saving King before whom we may kneel with our fears of judgment and death, acclaiming him with all lordship and honor because he alone can save us from God's judgment on our sins.

Soon after these events, David would go up to be hailed as king before God's people (see 2 Sam. 2:1-4). Today, Jesus is proclaimed as Savior and King through the witness of those he has delivered from God's judgment on

sin. God's judgment requires a royal Savior, and the calling of Christ's people is to herald his saving reign to all the world. Paul explains: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. . . . Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 5:19–6:2).