

2 Samuel 1:1-27

David Learns of Saul's Death

1 and 2 Samuel are one single, whole book in the Hebrew text. Samuel was said to be the author, but he could not have written any of the story after his death. Some think David wrote it, but more probably it was written by the prophets Nathan and Gad, and mostly relates the story of David's 40-year reign.

In **1 Chronicles 10** the story of Saul's death is repeated. It also gives the reason for his death:

- **1 Chronicles 10:13-14** - "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

1 Samuel 1:2 - "Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag; It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance."

David and his men were rejoicing in their victory over the Amalekite raiders, but knew that a great battle between Israel and the Philistines had occurred at the same time and were eagerly awaiting news.

The Amalekite's story

Like the Egyptian youth who was a slave of the Amalekites (**1 Samuel 30:13**) this Amalekite might have been a slave or servant of someone in the Israelite army. Or like Doeg the Edomite, he had converted and earned a place in Israel. He might have just been traveling and came upon the battle. It's not clear. Saul's reign began with Samuel's command to eradicate the Amalekites (**1 Samuel 11**). So it is ironic that news of the death of Saul - who had resisted killing the Amalekite king Agag - is brought by another Amalekite.

His explanation is contradictory. The first story of Saul's death has Saul asking his armor bearer to kill him, but he refuses. Then Saul falls on his sword, followed by the armor bearer. But we don't know how these events became known or brought back to be recorded. It's possible that the Amalekite's version shows him coming upon Saul, still alive after falling on his sword, but after the armor bearer has killed himself, and he finishes the job at Saul's request. But some of the details are wrong.

2 Samuel 1:3-10 - "And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the

battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?

"And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite. He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord."

But he says Saul was leaning on his spear, not impaled on his own sword. And that Saul was pressed by charioteers and cavalry rather than archers.

Josephus believed his story was true. And some of the rabbis did too. Some render the words, "anguish is come upon me" in **verse 9** as "my embroidered coat" or "breastplate" or "coat of mail", holds me, or hinders me from being pierced through with the sword or spear.

More likely, though, the Amalekite came upon the already dead Saul on the battlefield, took the crown and bracelet, and realized he could leverage himself into David's good graces by turning them over to him. Although he had rent his clothes and put dust on his head in mourning, he would have assumed that David would be secretly delighted to hear of the death of his enemy Saul, and reward him. Because that's how an Amalekite would think. But he was wrong.

Mourning for Saul

2 Samuel 1:11-12 - "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."

The Amalekite is Executed

2 Samuel 1:13-16 - "And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed? And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD'S anointed."

An execution would normally be accompanied by a trial with witnesses. And usually no one was convicted when he served as the only witness against himself. So even a

confession was not sufficient if there were no other witnesses to back that up:

- **Deuteronomy 19:15** - "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."

- **Numbers 35:30** - "If anyone kills a person, the murderer is to be put to death on the testimony of the witnesses. But no one is to be put to death based on the testimony of a lone witness."

- **John 7:51** - "Does our law convict a man without first hearing from him to determine what he has done?"

And in even any disagreement on a case to be judged:

- **Matthew 18:16** - "But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Some rabbis suggest that the crown and bracelet served as additional witnesses and circumstantial evidence against him.

David had several times refrained from delivering justice on Saul, refraining because he was God's anointed. Taking Saul's life was God's job. The Amalekite had taken that on himself (if his story was to be believed) so Saul's blood was on his head, and the responsibility for his death was one he alone carried, even though Saul had supposedly asked him to do it.

With Saul gone, and the kingship in dispute, David could not allow an assassination to stand without punishment.

So instead rewarding him, David had him executed.

The Amalekites Represent our Natural Flesh

This is probably a good time to review the spiritual meaning of the Amalekites.

God said "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." (**Romans 9:13**)

Paul is quoting **Malachi 1:1-3** - "This is the burden of the word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi: I have loved you," says the LORD. But you ask, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated, and I have made his mountains a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Even while still in the womb, the brothers struggled - Rebekah is told, "the elder shall serve the younger."

Jacob and Esau represented two ways of seeking salvation - through faith (Jacob) or works (Esau).

The Amalekites - an offshoot of the Edomites, descendants of Esau - represent our natural flesh, the old man, the "evil inclination" that influences us toward self and selfishness.

- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek focuses its attack on the tired and weak, those lagging in the rear (**Deuteronomy 25:17-18**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek does not fear God (**Deuteronomy 25:17-18**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek is the focus of a permanent state of war with Israel (**Exodus 17:16**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek is only defeated in the context of prayer and seeking God (**Exodus 17:11**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek will one day be completely blotted out of our remembrance (**Exodus 17:14**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek was defeated by Joshua (Jesus) (**Exodus 17:13**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek was once first but will one day be last (**Numbers 24:20**)
- Like our fleshly nature, Amalek allies itself with other enemies in battle against God's people (**Judges 3:13**)

(See https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/archives/guzik_david/StudyGuide_2Sa/2Sa_1.cfm)

We defeat Amalek when we "reckon ourselves as dead," and crucified with Christ.

Saul and David also display a similar contrast like Esau and Jacob. First comes the natural and then the spiritual (**1 Corinthians 15:46**). Saul was first, but he is succeeded by David.

Despite Saul's rebellion and many sins, because he had originally been anointed by God, his death is mourned.

David's Lament for Saul and Jonathan

David sings a poem or hymn praising Saul and Jonathan, and he never mentions Saul's pursuit of him or any of the things that brought on his rejection by God.

2 Samuel 1:17-18 - "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher)."

The proper translation would be, "He told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow"

The Book of Jasher (Uprightness) is also mentioned in **Joshua 10:13** and it evidently contained a collection of early Hebrew poetry.

The Song of the Bow (2 Samuel 1:19-27)

Since Israel's might warriors had fallen, the bow (*qešet*) would have to be taken up by everyone. But Abarbanel suggests the word refers to its root meaning of "bending," or difficulty, distress.

The recurring line "How the mighty have fallen!" could be better translated, "Alas, the mighty have fallen!"

"The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places!
(or, O Splendor of Israel, upon your heights [Mt. Gilboa] lie the slain)
 How the mighty have fallen!
 Tell it not in Gath,
 Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
 Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
 Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

O mountains of Gilboa,
 Let there be no dew nor rain upon you,
 Nor fields of offerings.
 For the shield of the mighty is cast away there!
 The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.
 From the blood of the slain,
 From the fat of the mighty,
 The bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
 And the sword of Saul did not return empty.

Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives,
 And in their death they were not divided;
 They were swifter than eagles,
 They were stronger than lions.

O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
 Who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury;
 Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle!
 Jonathan was slain in your high places.
 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
 You have been very pleasant to me;
 Your love to me was wonderful,
 Surpassing the love of women.

How the mighty have fallen,
And the weapons of war perished!"

From David's point of view "love will cover a multitude of sins." (**1 Peter 4:8**) This was despite all David had suffered at Saul's hand.

David says his love of Jonathan "was wonderful, surpassing the love of women." There is no indication that this was sexual. Their friendship and loyalty was so strong and deep that it surpassed the relationship David had with his wives.

Another interpretation is that the "women" David was referring to was the love between Rachel and Leah. Rachel loved Leah enough to not protest when Leah was substituted for Rachel to first marry Jacob (**Genesis 29**). In the same way Jonathan did not protest when it was apparent God wanted David to succeed Saul as king rather than Jonathan.

"Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul" - David knew they had sung David's praises - "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his ten thousands" - which had sparked Saul's jealousy. Now they should mourn for Saul.

Finally, by saying their "weapons of war perished," or have gone to waste, David means Saul and Jonathan are irreplaceable.

In fact, in the next chapter, when David is anointed king by the tribe of Judah, he makes no outward attempt to stop Saul's son Ish-Bosheth from being crowned as king of Israel and Saul's successor.

Like Jesus' Lament

David's lament over Saul and Jonathan prefigures Jesus's compassion and lament over Jerusalem, whose leaders were preparing to betray and crucify Him:

- **Matthew 23:37** - "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

As David called for rain to not fall on Mt. Gilboa because "the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil", so Jesus declares of Jerusalem, "your house is left unto you desolate" since it rejected Him as King Messiah, the Anointed One.