

2 Samuel Chapter 1

Verses 1:1 – 3:5: David ascends to the kingship of Judah.

2 Samuel 1:1 "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;"

“The death of Saul” (2 Samuel 1:1-14 begins where 1 Sam. 31:1-13 ends), with the death of Saul (1 Chron. 10:1-12).

“Amalekites”: The mention of these people serves as a reminder of David’s obedience to the Lord (1 Sam. 30:1-31), and Saul’s disobedience (1 Sam. 15:1-33; see notes on Exodus 17:8-16).

“Ziklag” (see notes on 1 Sam. 27:6; 30:1). This town was not so completely sacked and destroyed that David and his 600 men with their families could not stay there.

This book is a continuation of 1 Samuel. We will read primarily of the history of the reign of David in this book. Saul, and his three sons, were killed in the battle with the Philistines.

David would have been in this battle, except the LORD found a way for the Philistines to refuse his help. While he was gone for three days, the evil Amalekites came and destroyed his city, and took his family. They burned Ziklag. David and his men went after them, and killed them. After they returned to Ziklag, and had been there 2 days (this is when verse 1 is set). Saul is dead, but David is not yet aware of it.

2 Samuel 1:2 "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."

The refugee from the “camp” of the defeated “Saul” came with torn “clothes” and with “earth” [dust] “upon his head,” both signs of mourning or grief (Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 15:32). This Amalekite (verse 8), thus bore all the marks of lamenting the death of Saul and his sons.

This was a common cultural sign of anguish and mourning over a death (15:32; 1 Sam. 4:12).

Adversity is the test of faith; prosperity is the test of integrity. David had proven that he could handle adversity, but as the king of Israel, he would know unparalleled prosperity, and what he would do with it would set the tone for the rest of his life.

This man is aware who David is, because he bows to him. He is in mourning, when he comes, because he had his clothes rent and dust upon his head. This takes place the very next day (after verse 1 above). He had been with Saul, but David is not immediately aware of that.

2 Samuel 1:3 "And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped."

It is very likely by his appearance and circumstances he suspected from whence he came: and he said unto him, out of the camp of Israel am I escaped; which plainly suggested that that was in danger, confusion, and distress.

This man was in the camp area after the battle was over, to pick up anything of value that might be left. He does not tell David that. He tells David, that he just happened by. When David asks him where he came from, he tells him from the camp of Israel.

Verses 1:4-12 (see 1 Samuel 31:1-13; 1 Chron. 10:1-12).

2 Samuel 1:4 "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."

That is, how went the battle? On which side the victory?

"And he answered, that the people are fled from the battle": Meaning the people of Israel, they had given way, and turned their backs upon their enemies, and were fled.

"And many of the people also are fallen and dead": Fell by the sword in the pursuit of them, and were not only wounded, but were slain, and these great numbers of them.

"And Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also": Which are mentioned last, because they fell some of the last. And this part of the account is reserved by the messenger to the last, because it was the article of the greatest importance; the death of these two persons. The one the enemy, and the other the friend of David, and the death of both made way for his accession to the throne.

This is terrible. This is not what David wanted to hear. Jonathan was his best friend. The Israelites have lost the battle, and Saul and his sons are dead.

Verses 5-10: There is no discrepancy in Scripture: (1 Sam. 31:4-5), gives God's record of Saul's death. These verses are the fabricated story of an Amalekite who found "Saul" already "dead" and was trying to exploit his death to ingratiate himself to the new king. In trying to gain David's favor, the "Amalekite" signed his own death warrant (1:16).

2 Samuel 1:5 "And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?"

The things that had happened.

"How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?" This he particularly inquired after, as what most affected him, and was most material for him to know. And his meaning is, whether he had this of his own sight and knowledge, or by report.

David does not want to hear that Saul and Jonathan are dead. He wants the young man to give him proof.

Verses 1:6-10: The details of Saul's death here are at variance with those of (1 Samuel 31:3-5). But the difference originates with the "Amalekite" who has made up a false account so as to win David's favor. However, his "reward" was vastly different from what he expected (verse 15), for he had dared to touch the Lord's anointed (verse 16), a thing David had twice refrained from doing (1 Sam. 24:6); 26:11).

2 Samuel 1:6 "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."

Chariots and horsemen: Chariots and horsemen were a symbol of power and strength (Exodus 14:9; 1 Sam. 8:11; 13:5; 2 Sam. 8:4; 1 Kings 4:26; 9:19; 10:26; 1 Chron. 19:6; 2 Chron. 1:14; 9:25; 12:3; 16:8; Dan. 11:40). The Philistines were in pursuit of Saul with an abundant number of warriors, making Saul's escape hopeless.

2 Samuel 1:7 "And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here [am] I."

To see how near the enemy was, and who were pursuing him.

"He saw me, and called unto me": By which it should rather seem that he belonged to the Philistines than to the Israelites, and as his being an Amalekite shows. For such a one would hardly be admitted among the latter, though it is most likely he was with neither, but happened to come that way just at that time.

"And I answered, here am I": Ready to hear what thou hast to say, and do thy pleasure.

In the (last chapter of 1 Samuel), the account was a little vaguer than here. Saul was wounded by the Philistines, and then, he fell upon his sword. We did read in the other account, where he died. It does not say that the act of him falling upon his sword did not kill him. This man is saying that after Saul fell upon the sword, he called to him. This meant that his falling on the sword did not kill Saul.

2 Samuel 1:8 "And he said unto me, Who [art] thou? And I answered him, I [am] an Amalekite."

"Amalekite": the man claiming to have killed Saul was from among the people whom David recently slaughtered (verse 1), whom God wanted eliminated (Exodus 17:14; 1 Sam. 15:3), and who would plague Israel for generations (Exodus 17:16), due to Saul's disobedience (1 Sam. 15:9-11).

Saul did not want a Philistine to kill him. This man is an Amalekite. He tells Saul who he is.

2 Samuel 1:9 "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."

Which it can hardly be thought Saul would say; since he might as well have died by the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, which he endeavored to avoid, as by the hands of an Amalekite.

"For anguish is come upon me": Or trembling, as the Targum, not through fear of death, but through fear of falling into the hands of the Philistines, and of being ill used by them. Some render the words, "my embroidered coat", or "breastplate", or "coat of mail" holds me, or hinders me from being pierced through with the sword or spear; so Ben Gersom.

"Because my life is yet whole in me": For though he had been wounded by the archers, yet he did not apprehend he had received any mortal wound, but his life was whole in him. And therefore feared he should fall into their hands alive, and be ill-treated by them.

Saul asked the Amalekite to stand upon him, and drive the sword deeper into his body. It appears that, Saul was in great pain, and this would quicken his death.

2 Samuel 1:10 "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."

"Slew him": The Amalekite claimed responsibility for Saul's death, saying that Saul was still alive when he found him. However (1 Sam. 31:3-6), makes it clear that Saul died by falling on his own sword, not by the hand of the Amalekite. Thus, this man, who may have witnessed Saul's suicide, claimed to have killed Saul when in reality he had only reached his body before the Philistines and had fabricated the story to ingratiate himself with the new king by killing his enemy and by bringing Saul's crown and bracelet to David. The crown and bracelet in the hands of the Amalekite show that he was the first to pass by the body of Saul.

He did just as Saul had asked him to do. He, in a sense, killed Saul, but he really just shortened his life. He would have died anyway. He just shortened the time it took for him to die. He took his crown and bracelet to prove who he was.

Verses 11-17: David's extreme grief at the death of the man who tried to kill him for 30 years is astonishing (Prov. 24:17), but it is consistent with David's belief that Saul was God's anointed (1 Sam. 24:6). Whenever there is report on one of God's choice servants falling by the wayside in moral or physical defeat, the response should follow David's response. Not gladness, not smug complacency or a superficial piety, but sorrow for the person, sorrow for the people and sorrow for the work of God that person had committed his or her life to do.

2 Samuel 1:11 "Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that [were] with him:"

Not on the young man's but his own.

"And rent them": On bearing of the death of Saul and Jonathan (see Genesis 37:34); from whence the Jews gather, that a man is bound to rend his clothes for a prince, and for the father of the Sanhedrim, since Saul they say was the prince and Jonathan the father of that court.

"And likewise all the men that were with him": Rent their clothes also, in imitation of him; the same custom obtained among the Gentiles on mournful occasions.

The tearing of the clothes was a sign of deep mourning. David, and all the men, tore their clothes in grief.

2 Samuel 1:12 "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."

"Mourned, and wept, and fasted": David demonstrates genuine, heartfelt grief for the death of Saul and Jonathan by mourning and weeping, as well as fasting, which were common ways to demonstrate grief (Easter 4:3; Joel 2:12).

David had never stopped loving Saul, Jonathan, or his countrymen. He was so overwhelmed with grief, that he cried and did not eat food. This was grief of a personal nature, but it was, also, a grief for their fallen nation. Israel, in its greatness, had been the people of God. Saul, and some of his men, had turned from the pure keeping of God's commandments. This terrible loss of life was punishment for their sins.

This is so much like the church. Many of us start out with God, keeping His commandments. The world, sometimes, calls so strongly, that we wander away from the absolute truth. This was Saul's problem. At first, he seemed to have every intention of following God, but more and more started doing things that were advantageous to him.

2 Samuel 1:13 "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."

This expression signifies one who resided among the Israelites, and had embraced their religion, though not admitted into their communion.

2 Samuel 1:14 "And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?"

David said: "How wast thou not afraid ... to destroy the Lord's anointed? Who possibly might have recovered, and been carried off by some of his own men; the Philistines, by some extraordinary providence of God, being diverted from the pursuit. It was the greater presumption in this young man to do it, since none of Saul's own servant's would venture upon such an act.

"The LORD's anointed": Despite Saul's many attempts on David's life, David would not allow himself to see Saul as just a mere man or human monarch; he remained "the Lord's anointed," who occupied a sacred role before God (1 Sam. 24:1-15; 26:1-20).

This Amalekite had come to David, believing that David would rejoice in the death of Saul. He really thought that David wanted him dead. It really does not matter, whether his story of killing Saul is true, or not. It seems that he was out to be rewarded for the death of Saul. This Amalekite was not a Hebrew. He did not understand about not raising his hand against the anointed of God. David is explaining to him the error in destroying the anointed.

2 Samuel 1:15 "And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, [and] fall upon him. And he smote him that he died."

“Fall upon him”: This most certainly came as a great surprise to the Amalekite, for he intended to win the favor of David by saying he had killed Saul. This story is very similar to that of the men who later killed Ish-bosheth, thinking they would be able to endear themselves to David (4:5-12).

This young man was an Amalekite, but had, probably, settled in Israel. David had not immediately killed him, so it was not done from a fit of rage. He fasted and wept, even before he sentenced the man. If his story is true, he assisted Saul in the act of suicide. If it is not true, he was a looter and had taken the things he brought off the body of Saul. He was looking for advantage from Saul's death, at the least. I would believe that David consulted with the LORD, during his fast, to find what to do with the man. I, also, would believe this judgment is from God. He is executed.

2 Samuel 1:16 "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."

“Thy blood be upon they head”: David executed the Amalekite on the basis of his own testimony, not on the basis of the truthfulness of his story.

The Lord's instruction to the people of Israel concerning the Amalekites was very specific (Deut. 25:17). As the king, David was responsible for carrying out God's commands, and the first order of business was to do what God told him to do.

We have seen, on two previous occasions, the respect that David had for the position Saul held as being the anointed of God. Even though Saul had fallen in his own character, David still respected the office. We remember the remorse he felt from just cutting off the skirt of the anointed. Somehow, this was an affront to the LORD himself, to kill His anointed.

2 Samuel 1:17 "And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son:"

“Lamented”: David chose to have both Saul and his noble son Jonathan remembered through this lament, which would be taught to all Israel as a national war song.

"Lamented", in this, means chanted, or wailed, at a funeral. The sorrow that David felt was not just a surface grief. This was a hurt deep in his heart. We remember that, Jonathan was David's best friend.

Verses 18-27: This passage has been referred to as the “Song of the Bow.” It is a classic funeral dirge from which many dirges or eulogies have been adapted. The lament “How the mighty have fallen!” is the key refrain in the song and brackets the entire poem for emphasis (1:19, 25, 27).

2 Samuel 1:18 "(Also he bade them teach the children of Judah [the use of] the bow: behold, [it is] written in the book of Jasher.)"

“The use of the bow”: This was the title of the poem in which the word “bow” may have been chosen with reference to Jonathan, whose bow is mentioned (in verse 22).

The book of Jasher was a poetic collection of Israel’s wars in which Israel’s events and great men were commemorated (Joshua 10:13).

For the “book of Jasher” (see the note on Joshua 10:12-15).

Since Saul was initially injured by an arrow from a bow, David trains his men in the bow. This is training for their future wars. This book of Jasher is not in the Bible, but is an important book. This book of Jasher is sometimes called The Book of Canticles. The Song of Solomon is also called Canticles.

Verses 19-27: David’s lamentation over “Saul” and “Jonathan” is one of the most eloquent eulogies in all of the Bible. The pronouncement of a curse against “dew” and “rain” (verse 21), on the occasion of the death of a heroic figure is known also in the literature of ancient Syro-Palestine.

2 Samuel 1:19 "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!"

“The beauty of Israel”: Literally the gazelle or antelope of Israel, the chosen symbol of youthful elegance and symmetry, most likely referring to Jonathan. Thus, the song began and ended with Saul’s noble son (verses 25-26).

“High places”: These were open-air worship sites generally established at high elevations. In this case, the high place was Mt. Gilboa, where Saul had died.

“How are the mighty fallen”: They were not only Israel’s slain “beauty,” but Saul and Jonathan were mighty men who had fallen in battle. This phrase is repeated as a refrain (in verses 25 and 27).

David felt so strongly about the personality of Jonathan, that this may indirectly be speaking of him. Their friendship was beautiful. The relationship of the LORD with His people Israel was very beautiful, as well.

2 Samuel 1:20 "Tell [it] not in Gath, publish [it] not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph."

“Gath ... Ashkelon”: Two chief cities which together could represent all of the Philistine territory. Gath was situated in the eastern part of the Philistine territory, while Ashkelon was in the west by the sea. David did not want the Philistines to rejoice at the calamities of Israel as Israel had rejoiced at the defeat of the Philistines (1 Sam. 18:7).

Hearing that Philistine cities such as “Gath” and “Ashkelon” rejoiced over Saul’s death, as the women of Israel did (in 1 Samuel 18:6-7), distressed David. Despite Saul’s poor leadership and repeated efforts to kill him, David eulogized Saul in glowing terms and did not mention any of his faults. These words model the way to honor someone who has died.

David could not stand thinking of the uncircumcised Philistines gloating about the victory over Israel. Gath was near him, and he would be repulsed, hearing them speak of their victory over Saul and Israel. It was, generally, the custom for the women to rejoice in song and dance when there was a decisive victory. He is saying, he prays this will not happen close enough, that he will hear it with his own ears.

2 Samuel 1:21 "Ye mountains of Gilboa, [let there be] no dew, neither [let there be] rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, [as though he had] not [been] anointed with oil."

“Let there be no dew”: David spoke a curse, seeking the absence of dew or rain upon the mountain where Saul and Jonathan died.

“Not been anointed with oil”: It was necessary in those times to anoint a shield with oil (Isa. 21:5), to prevent the leather from being hard and cracked. But there on Mt. Gilboa lay the shield of Saul dried out, a symbol of defeat and death.

This is speaking of the shield of Saul, which had been taken and set up as a symbol of their victory. David is praying to the LORD, to withhold rain from the place where it is set up. He wants them to be aware of the LORD's displeasure in their defamation of the character of God's anointed. David is praying to God, to withhold the crops from the Philistines.

2 Samuel 1:22 "From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty."

“Bow ... sword”: These two weapons were used by Saul and Jonathan with much power, accuracy, and effectiveness. It was also with the bow that Jonathan helped David escape Saul’s wrath (1 Sam. 20:35-42).

Jonathan, as well as Saul, had been a mighty warrior. They had come back from many battles with the blood of the enemy upon their swords. Now, their swords and their shields were in the possession of the Philistines.

2 Samuel 1:23 "Saul and Jonathan [were] lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions."

“Were lovely”: This generous commendation, including Saul who was seeking to kill David, showed David’s gracious, forgiving attitude, a model of gracious love (Matt. 5:43-48).

David is like many of us looking back over the lives of someone we loved very much. He was unable to see the faults of Saul. He remembers only the good things. True, Saul and Jonathan were powerful men of war, winning many battles. Even though Saul knew he would lose his life in this battle, he did not run and hide. He fought as a brave soldier. He was a very strong man, physically.

2 Samuel 1:24 "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with [other] delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel."

This refers to Saul's division among the people of the spoil of his conquered foes, and to the prosperity resulting from his many successful campaigns. Notwithstanding that his light at last went out under the cloud of a crushing defeat, he had been on the whole a successful warrior. The Philistines, the Ammonites, the Amalekites, and others, had felt the power of his arm, and the relations of Israel to the surrounding nations had been wonderfully changed for the better during his reign.

This weeping that David is calling for over Saul, is for the material things he had furnished them with from his battles.

Verses 25-26: David sorrowed over Jonathan as he would a brother. There is no hint of an inappropriate or sexual relationship, as some modern translators allege. Besides grieving the closest of friends, David also honored Jonathan for his extreme sacrifice in willingly giving up the throne. For more on their relationship (see I Sam. 1:1-4; 23:16-18).

2 Samuel 1:25 "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, [thou wast] slain in thine high places."

The mighty and valiant men of war, the common soldiers as well as their general officers, whose loss David mourns, and the repetition of, shows how much it affected him.

"O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places": In the high places of the land of Israel, the mountains of Gilboa, which though high, and in his own country, could not protect him from his enemies, and from falling by their hands. He who had been so valiant and victorious a prince, and yet he fell, not in an enemy's country, but his own.

2 Samuel 1:26 "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women."

"Was wonderful, passing the love of women": The bond between David and Jonathan was strong. However, this does not mean that their friendship was necessarily superior to the bond of love between a man and a woman. The commitment shared between the two of them was a noble, loyal and selfless devotion (1 Sam. 18:3), which neither of them had ever felt for a woman. Unlike love between a man and a woman in which a sexual element is part of the strong attraction, this love between these two men had no such sexual feature, yet was compellingly strong.

The friendship of David and Jonathan still remains today, an example of two friends who stick to each other, even greater than two natural brothers do. This is not speaking of sexual attachment

they had for each other. This is speaking of two men who had a communion of thoughts and ideas. This is speaking of them having great mutual admiration for each other. They believed so much alike, they made covenants with each other. David loved and trusted Jonathan more than anyone else. This friendship grew from Jonathan's great admiration of David, for standing up against Goliath. He admired David greatly. This became a mutual admiration for each other. On occasion, Jonathan had warned David, and saved his life.

2 Samuel 1:27 "How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

“Weapons of war”: A figurative expression referring to Saul and Jonathan.

This is very much like a eulogy given at a funeral. David reflects on the greatness of Saul and Jonathan. He laments their death.

2 Samuel Chapter 1 Questions

1. How long had David been back at Ziklag in verse 1?
2. Who had he slain in the battle, he had just returned from?
3. 2 Samuel is a continuation of _____.
4. Why did David go after these Amalekites?
5. When did David hear of Saul's death?
6. What condition was the man in, who brought the sad news of Saul's death?
7. Where had the man come from?
8. What question did David ask the man?
9. What was the condition of the battle?
10. What terrible news did he give David?
11. How did he prove their death to David?
12. What does he tell about Saul's death?
13. This man was an _____.
14. What does he say, that Saul asked him to do?
15. When David believed, that Saul and Jonathan were dead, what did he do?
16. What two types of grief was David feeling?

17. Why had this terrible thing happened?
18. Why did this man not understand about raising his hand against God's anointed?
19. Why does it not matter, whether his story is true, or not?
20. What had testified against this Amalekite?
21. What punishment did David pronounce on the man?
22. What does "lamented", in verse 17, mean?
23. What did David have them teach the Israelites?
24. Who is David speaking of in verse 19?
25. Where did David not want to hear celebrations of this victory from?
26. How did the women, generally, rejoice over a victory?
27. What is verse 22 speaking of?
28. Who had the swords and shields of Jonathan and Saul?
29. How is David like many of us, in verse 23?
30. Why did David say, the daughters of Jerusalem should mourn over Saul?
31. Describe the friendly relationship between David and Jonathan?