

David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan

2 Samuel 1

2 Samuel 1 - *"Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David had returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had stayed two days in Ziklag, ² on the third day, behold, it happened that a man came from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. So it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself.*

³*And David said to him, "Where have you come from?" So he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." ⁴ Then David said to him, "How did the matter go? Please tell me." And he answered, "The people have fled from the battle, many of the people are fallen and dead, and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also."*

⁵*So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?" ⁶ Then the young man who told him said, "As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa, there was Saul, leaning on his spear; and indeed the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him. ⁷ Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' ⁸ And he said to me, 'Who are you?' So I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' ⁹ He said to me again, 'Please stand over me and kill me, for anguish has come upon me, but my life still remains in me.' ¹⁰ So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."*

¹¹*Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. ¹² And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

¹³*Then David said to the young man who told him, "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite." ¹⁴ So David said to him, "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" ¹⁵ Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go near, and execute him!" And he struck him so that he died. ¹⁶ So David said to him, "Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed.'"*

¹⁷*Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son, ¹⁸ and he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher:*

¹⁹*"The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!*

²⁰*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.

²¹ *“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.*

²² *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.*

²³ *“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.*

²⁴ *“O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.*

²⁵ *“How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places. ²⁶ 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.*

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

Background Notes

1 & 2 Samuel form a single book in the Hebrew Bible, and the same is true of 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Chronicles. That's why there are thirty-six books in the Hebrew Bible rather than thirty-nine books, as in our English Old Testament. It's the same content - just divided into First and Second. 1 Samuel closed with the death of King Saul and his sons.

2 Samuel covers the forty-year reign of King David: seven years over Judah, with Hebron as his capital, and then thirty-three years over all Israel, with Jerusalem as his capital. 2 Samuel covers David's great military victories as the second king of Israel, and it records God's great covenant with David about the enduring Davidic dynasty. But 2 Samuel also has the account of David's great sins of adultery and murder.

2 Samuel 1 gives a second account of King Saul's death; the first account was in the last chapter of 1 Samuel. When the two accounts are compared, there are some obvious differences that must be resolved and harmonized.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Bible is inerrant, but it contains some untrue human statements.

The 1 Samuel 31 account of King Saul's death says that King Saul committed suicide. 1 Samuel 31:4-5 - *“Then Saul said to his armorbearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.” But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. ⁵ And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him.”*

Here in 2 Samuel 1 we read that an Amalekite told David that he had killed King Saul. Is this a contradiction in the Bible? No, because the Bible is inerrant - the Bible doesn't lie! The Bible cannot lie because it is the Word of God, and God does not and cannot lie. Then how do we resolve this apparent contradiction between the two records of King Saul's death? There are two possible ways to harmonize this apparent contradiction:

1. King Saul tried to commit suicide, but was not completely successful in his attempt. While life still lingered in him, he asked the Amalekite to finish him off. That is one possible way to harmonize this apparent contradiction. If this was the case, it is significant and ironic, because Saul didn't remove all the Amalekites as God had commanded him to do in 1 Samuel 15 - and it was an Amalekite who killed him in the end!
2. The other way of harmonizing these two chapters is to recognize that the Amalekite lied in order to win favor with David.

"Wait a minute," you might say. "I thought we just said that the Bible doesn't lie because it's inerrant?" That's right, the Bible does not lie - but it does *contain* some lies. The Bible contains the inspired and by inspiration in the Bible. For example, Job's three friends lied about Job's suffering, but it is the true record of some people who told lies. The Pharisees lied about Jesus, and that is recorded by inspiration in the Bible. Abraham lied about Sarah, his wife, and those lies are recorded by inspiration in the Bible. Satan lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and those lies are also recorded by inspiration in the Bible.

So the Bible does not lie, but it does contain some lies. It contains the inspired record of some people who made false statements, and that may be what we have here in 2 Samuel 1. The Amalekite lied, thinking that he would win favor with David because Saul had been trying to kill David. The Bible is inerrant, but it contains some untrue human statements.

2. The Bible is inspired, but it mentions some non-inspired human sources.

Based on the Amalekites' own testimony (which may have been the truth), David had the Amalekite executed. How dare this Amalekite lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed? After Saul's death, David and his men mourned the loss of King Saul and Jonathan as well as the loss of all those who had been killed in the battle.

David composed a Song of Lament for Saul and Jonathan, called the "Song of the Bow." The well-known expression "How the mighty have fallen" comes from this song (v19 & 27).

A rhetorical curse was pronounced upon Mount Gilboa in David's Lament: "*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*" (v21). Tour guides in Israel today will point out a treeless, barren area on Mount Gilboa and they will tell you that it's still barren because of 2 Samuel 1:19.

The fact that Saul's shield was not anointed with oil means that King Saul would no longer need the shield, so it would no longer be preserved by rubbing it with oil. In verse 26, David said that Jonathan's love for him was "more wonderful than

the love of women.” There is **no** suggestion here of a homosexual relationship, as has been suggested by people who want to promote homosexuality as an “alternative lifestyle.” No! David and Jonathan were simply very close and committed friends.

Verse 18 says that this Lament of David is written in the “Book of Jasher.” This non-canonical book about the wars of Israel is also mentioned in Joshua 10:13. There are other non-inspired sources mentioned in the Bible as well, such as “The Book of the Wars of the Lord,” mentioned in Numbers 21, or “the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer” that are mentioned in 1 Chronicles 29. A number of other non-inspired sources are mentioned in the Bible. David’s Lament for Saul, written up in the non-inspired Book of Jasher, is also recorded here by the inspired writer of 2 Samuel.

Whenever an inspired biblical writer quotes or makes a statement about a non-inspired source, you can be sure that the statements are true and the quotations are correctly quoted - but that doesn’t mean that the source was inspired, and that doesn’t make the source inspired! And it doesn’t mean that every statement in the non-inspired book is correct, as well! The Bible is inspired, but it mentions some non-inspired human sources.

Practical Application

Be positive about people!

David had every reason not to honor King Saul with a Song of Lament. Think of all the negative things Saul had done, that David could have mentioned! But David emphasized the positive when he remembered Saul. He remembered Saul’s courage and his victories over the enemy (v22). He remembered Saul’s military abilities (v23). He remembered that Saul had made Israel prosperous (v24).

David emphasized the positive - and so should we! That’s what we’re exhorted to do in Philippians 4:8. The context of this well-known verse is really a “people context.” So, in view of the context of getting along with other people, let me paraphrase Philippians 4:8 – “Finally, brothers, whatever is true about your fellow believers, whatever is noble about your brothers and sisters in Christ, whatever is right about that brother that gives you a hard time, whatever is pure about that sister who seems so proud all the time, whatever is lovely or admirable about these people, if there’s **anything** that is praiseworthy (and there must be something!) - think about **those** things! And don’t dwell on the negative things!” Think positively! Be positive about people!