
THE BOOK OF 2 SAMUEL

AFTERMATH AND THE AMALEKITE

(2 SAMUEL 1:1-16)

In 2008, shortly after the financial crisis that triggered the Great Recession, Rahm Emanuel, the chief of the staff of the President elect, attended a *Wall Street Journal* conference of top corporate chief executives and was quoted as saying, “You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.”¹ Those words launched a firestorm of political controversy. At best, Emanuel meant that the fiscal crisis that the country faced provided both the opportunity and the impetus for bipartisan solutions to the problems imbedded in the different sectors he referenced (health, tax, energy, education, and regulation); at worst, it was a quietly telling statement that, although lightly sprinkled with some bipartisan language, suggested the newly elected administration would use that crisis (and others) to make political gains. Looking through the lens of history the reader can make his or her own assessment about where the evidence points concerning the former chief-of-staff’s true intention, but as it pertains to the young Amalekite man that we are introduced to in this chapter, you might say that he had a kind of thinking that reflected the latter option. He saw Israel’s current crisis as an opportunity to ingratiate himself to the king-to-be. Before we are introduced to him let us remind ourselves of the historical context of the opening chapter of 2 Samuel.

Creating Context

2 Samuel begins with the dust of Israel’s recent national disaster beginning to settle. In one decisive battle many Israelites had died and much had changed. The Philistine forces made significant gains and inroads into Israelite territory (1 Sam 31:7); Israel was on the run, those on the other side of the valley and those who were on the other side of the Jordan forsook their cities and fled; and the king they hoped would fight their battles for them was dead. Before his body was taken and pinned to the wall at Beth Shan (v.10) and before it was retrieved and buried by the men of Jabesh Gilead (vs.11-13) it laid on a sword on Mount Gilboa. It was a tragic end for the king who stood in God’s place.

It is important to remember that 1 Samuel 31 did not come immediately after 1 Samuel 10. There were twenty chapters and many years between the Saul’s anointing and Saul’s death. And during that time there was an extensive downward spiral filled with red flags and loud

¹ Seib, Gerald F. (Nov 21, 2008), “In Crisis, Opportunity for Obama,” *Wall Street Journal*, accessed December 4, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122721278056345271>

alarms but it was as though Saul looked the other way and pressed the spiritual snooze button each time he was presented with a call to self-examination and genuine repentance. You might say that Saul's life is a lesson in trajectory. Much happened between the renewal of the kingdom at Gilgal and the death of the king at Gilboa. And whether it was the rebukes of Samuel or the impassioned reasoning of David, Saul had multiple opportunities to hit the eject button of his kamikaze spiritual life but instead he maintained his course, nose to the ground, firm in his rebellion.

The prudent reader is forced to ask: What is my trajectory? Am I growing in the grace and knowledge of my Lord and Savior or am I caught in the undertow of apathy? Do I see myself falling more in love with my God or am I surprised by how far away from Him I am? People that run diagnostic tests typically care about the thing they are examining. Likewise, should you take the time to give honest answers to your own self-examination you probably care about the relationship you have with God. If the trajectory needs to be altered, embrace grace, fix your eyes upon Jesus, lay aside the weights that encumber and the sin that easily entangles and run the race that is set before you with diligence (Heb 12:1). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, snuff out the sparks of rebellion at Gilgal before they catch fire at Gilboa.

Into the Text

As we begin our study of 2 Samuel it's important to remember that both 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel comprise the same book. So while we are beginning a new study in one sense, in another sense we are not. We walk into the door of 2 Samuel having just walked down the street of 1 Samuel and most immediately 1 Samuel 31. So as the inspired narrator takes us into the camp of David we remember that we know something that David did not. The political landscape of Israel had dramatically changed and the wave of mourning was about to catch up with the recently victorious David.

Verse 1 and 2

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.

David and his men had been successful in retrieving all that the Amalekites had taken from them but there was still much rebuilding to be done in **Ziklag** (v.1b). The aftermath of victory for David, at least immediately, was, most likely, trying to restore and replace what had been recently burned to the ground.

It's worth noticing, if even briefly, that the inspired narrator sets the **death of Saul** and David's **slaughter of the Amalekites** side by side. The irony being – David had returned from doing what Saul should have done earlier in his reign, a point that Samuel reinforced

in his posthumous appearance at Endor (1 Sam 28:18).² Additionally, the mention of David's slaughter of the Amalekites prepares us for further irony later in the chapter.

While in Ziklag David was unaware of the events that had taken place on Mount Gilboa, at least for the first two days; on **the third day** that changed.³ Suddenly a man arrived before the presence of David bearing the signs of mourning (cf. 1 Sam 4:12). His clothes were torn, there was dust upon his head, and he fell to the ground and prostrated himself before the man who he likely knew was the successor to Saul's throne. Don't forget, David's call to kingship was well known (cf. 1 Sam 21:11; 23:17; 24:20). We could understand why David would be curious to find out who this man was, where he was from, and what he was doing in Ziklag.

Verse 3

³ And David said to him, "Where have you come from?" So he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel."

It is possible that this man was a noncombatant who kept company with or around the army of Israel. But as we will see shortly, this man may better be described as an *opportunist*. He was likely around the battle, watching from a distance to see which way the battle would go, hoping for an opportunity to plunder the battlefield. But none of that came up at this point. David's attention was drawn to his people (v.4). Don't forget, David knew a big confrontation had been on the horizon. After all, he almost ended up in it! He simply wanted to know how it went.

Verse 4

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."

We would imagine that David felt a "pit in his stomach" upon hearing that dreadful news. The messenger, in a succinct fashion, communicated the news of the disaster in, what appears to be, ascending importance. He first referenced the people who fled; then he referenced the people that had fallen and died; and finally he referenced the death of Saul and Jonathan.

Verse 5

⁵ So David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?"

² Gordon Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel* (Evangelical Press, : Darlington, CO, 1990), 19.

³ Though some would argue that "**the third day**" refers to the third day after Saul's death as opposed to the third day of David's return, I think the immediate reference to David's two days of ignorance in Ziklag is the precursor to the news that arrives to him on his third day back in Ziklag. With that being said, I think it is safe to say that both battles happened around the same time, though the exact nature of their correspondence is not able to be determined based upon the text.

Understandably David was curious. This news was of both national and personal significance. Therefore it's not surprising that David wanted to ascertain the messenger's level of credibility by finding the source of his information. In response we see that the man recalls a story that is different than the one that was presented in the previous chapter. That is a problem, but not for the reader, for him. We will see why shortly but first let's hear his story.

Verses 6 through 10

⁶Then 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. ⁷Now 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."

Have you ever told a story to make yourself look better than you are? Have you changed certain details while recounting a personal story in the hopes of winning favor, or approval, or applause with your hearer(s)? That appears to be exactly what this young man was doing.

First, we see that he postured himself as serendipitously coming across Saul on Mount Gilboa (v.6). He said, "**As I happened by chance to be on Mount Gilboa.**" It was as though he was saying, 'It was the strangest thing. I was taking this walk over by Mount Gilboa, and wouldn't you know it, over to my left, who's there? You guessed it – Saul!' And immediately the reader is thinking – really? It would be hard to imagine that Saul, the king, was still alive and unattended by either his own men, or Philistines, or nearby fighting!

Second, the young man did not mention Saul's armor-bearer, a detail that is repeated in 1 Samuel 31:4-6. Contrary to that, the young man's account suggested that no one was near Saul.

Third, before we consider the difference between this man's account and the one presented in 1 Samuel 31, let's take notice of the young man's self-identification. Up until this point we hadn't known much more than the fact that this was a young man who looked like a mourner and could run a modern marathon with ease. But here we see his identity in his response to Saul – "**I am an Amalekite**" (v.8b). Let that sink in. The man who is telling a different story than the inspired narrator in 1 Samuel 31 is an Amalekite! The same people that God said He would have war with from generation to generation (Ex.17:16). The same people that God commanded Saul to destroy (1 Sam. 15:3). And the same people that ransacked David's home at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:1-2). The inspired narrator spoke of Saul as being wounded by archers and then falling on his own sword and dying in the presence of his armor-bearer. The Amalekite said Saul was leaning on his spear with no one else

around him and asked him to kill him. Who are you going to believe – the inspired narrator or the Amalekite? A bit of advice – never trust an Amalekite.⁴

The Amalekite likely plundered the deceased body of Saul, grabbed his crown and bracelet (v.10), though interestingly he left Saul's body there to be desecrated by the Philistine forces, and created a story that he hoped would ingratiate himself to David. From his vantage point, he had the opportunity to look like a compassionate hero who fulfilled the king's dying wish while also generously bringing the ornaments of kingship to the king-in-waiting. His motto might have very well been, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." As the evidence suggests, he was likely hoping to profit from the story he made up. Let us be careful to not do the same. Let us not make up stories or embellish details so as to put ourselves in what we perceive to be 'a better light.' Honesty and self-abasement should be a much more common description of Christians than affirmation-seeking embellishers.

Think of how callous this was. The Amalekite did not care about the situation or the people grieving. He was only concerned with trying to gain advantage. He must have thought for sure that David would be thankful to him and excited about Saul's death. Perhaps to him the idea of being callous did not even enter his mind because he saw himself as bearing both bad news and good news. The reaction of David and his men, however, must have taken the young Amalekite by surprise.

Verses 11 and 12

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.

Proverbs 17:15 says, "He who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished" (ESV). Such was not the case with David. Upon hearing the account set forth by the Amalekite, he and his men were overcome with grief. He showed no sign of joy in the fact that the man who hunted his life was dead. Instead he and his men "**mourned and wept and fasted until evening**" (vs.12a) for all of the people of Israel who fell by the sword, *including Saul*. David showed the heart of a shepherd-king in that he wept for the people of the Lord and the nation. He showed the heart of a true covenant friend in that he wept for Jonathan. And he showed the heart of Christ in that He wept over the death of his pursuer even as Jesus wept over the rejection that was directed towards Him from Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37).

It may be a small application but it is a point worth making: sometimes grief must take priority. Think about what was happening. The Amalekite told this report to David and the next thing he knew David and his men were mourning, weeping, and fasting till evening. We don't know exactly what the Amalekite was doing, but you could imagine him awkwardly standing there as this outburst of extended mourning took place, and David and his men were okay with said awkwardness. In Ecclesiastes 3:4 we read that there is "a time

⁴ Additionally, seeing as 1 and 2 Samuel originally comprised one volume, are we to think that the inspired narrator didn't realize that there were two conflicting accounts right next to one another?

to weep.” And there is. Here was one such instance. And though we must be careful to not over indulge our mourning, remember even the LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?” (1 Sam 16:1a). We must sometimes let mourning have its sanctifying work.

Apparently, either sometime after the mourning or perhaps in the midst of the mourning, David returned to his interrogation of the messenger who identified himself as Saul’s executioner. Notice the providential emphasis that is again placed on this young man’s identity in light of the question David posed and the response he was given.

Verse 13

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.”

This is the third time in the opening thirteen verses of the chapter that the identification of Amalekite has been used. It’s as though the implication is – *remember* Saul’s pivotal act of rebellion. Just as this Amalekite had stripped Saul’s royal ornaments from his body in death, so Saul’s failure to slay all of the Amalekites stripped him of God’s endorsement of him in life (cf. 1 Sam. 15:26).

But the young man also revealed another important fact concerning his identity. He said, “**I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite**” (vs.13b). “Alien” was a designation for a foreigner who, in this case, resided in the land of Israel. This information was incredibly pertinent to David. It suggested that the man himself lived in the land of Israel. And because he did he would have undoubtedly had some knowledge of how the king, the Lord’s anointed was to be viewed and regarded. Look at how David responded to that self-identification.

Verse 14

14 So David said to him, “How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?”

David communicated a sense of shock. This man identified himself as the son of a sojourner in the land of Israel, indicating that he himself was also a foreign resident in Israel, and David’s response was a poignant one – why were you not afraid to do what you did? We remember that David was; he would not dare put his hand to Saul; and even when he cut a piece of Saul’s robe he became immediately convicted. Yet this Amalekite, according to his story, showed no such fear. And because of his self-identification as the executioner of the one whom the LORD had anointed to be king over Israel, David ordered that he would receive the wages of his sin – death (Rom. 6:23).⁵

⁵ What was going through David’s mind when he did this? He likely saw that the penalty for striking the Lord’s anointed was death. Perhaps David also thought in his mind - “this man is an Amalekite”, meaning, this is a man whom God (in that Old Testament context) had already appointed to judgment. Furthermore, let us understand that David was acting as the civil authority here. He was the anointed king, and the prior king had fallen.

Verses 15 & 16

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.’”

This, again, is another bit of sad irony in the chapter, but it is quite instructive. This Amalekite was caught in the tangled web of deception he weaved and he was judged guilty by the king-to-be. And why was he judged? Because David held in highest esteem the sanctity of the office of the Israelite king, seeing that the king was chosen and anointed by Yahweh.⁶ David’s understanding of such a crime, even if Saul was on the verge of death, was that it warranted capital punishment. It was act of rebellion against God’s order that could not be tolerated.⁷ In a single act, David further affirmed the sanctity of the Lord’s anointed as well as the fact that he was not an enemy to Saul. He had nothing to do with Saul’s demise; rather, he inflicted justice on Saul’s executioner. This would be of ‘big picture’ significance seeing as it added to the evidence that David did not seek to take the throne of Saul via a coup. Ironically he showed himself to be Saul’s true defender even in death. What a lesson in contrasts, and we would do well to learn from both sides.

The Amalekite: Untrustworthy but Helpful

The Amalekite reminds us of the danger of deception before the God who is truth. Think of the irony – his lie wasn’t exposed but he was judged for the lie he told. It’s as though he ‘got away with it’, all the people were seemingly fooled, but he didn’t get away with it because he was judged for the very lie he successfully covered. The Amalekite may not have been trustworthy but he can be helpful, particularly if you and I learn from his example and avoid the evil of deception. Paul assumed even Christians still needed to hear this when he wrote, “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9).

Now I don’t think the typical Christian reader is going about telling bold-faced lies to congregants of their local church, but perhaps there is a temptation to engage in ‘round-about lying.’ Let me illustrate it like this. At the church where I serve as pastor there was once a member who loved organ concerts - truly a niche interest. On occasion he would ask different people about attending one with him. Now to the best of my knowledge the following example did not happen, but let’s imagine it nonetheless. Say he invited someone to an organ concert and in a mental mad-dash to find some sort of legitimate reason to say “no” without saying “no, thank you” they begin to say, “Well, I would love to [lie #1], but my uncle may be visiting my parents later [emphasis on “may” – ‘I mean he probably isn’t because he said he wasn’t sure if he was coming by but there’s still the possibility...’] and I was thinking I may stop by to see him [‘I mean, even if he comes I probably won’t go because I’m kind of tired but there is the possibility’]. So thank you so much for the invite, maybe next time.” See the problem? Though shrouded in good intentions, see how

⁶ Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Samuel* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003), 411.

⁷ Providentially, it was probably beneficial for David, the anointed king-to-be, to publicly establish the high regard that the people ought to have for the one whom God anointed to be king.

Amalekite-like propensities towards falsehood can creep in? So for a moment let this Amalekite be your instructor as he reminds you “the righteous man hates lying” (Prov. 13:5a) and nothing stays covered before the eyes of God, who will one day judge the secrets of men by His Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 2:16).

Handle With Care

Then there’s the behavior of David. Is there any application for us when we see David execute justice upon the opportunistic Amalekite? I think so. David’s behavior and words help remind us as New Testament Christians of how we ought to esteem those whom God has identified as His anointed (i.e. all genuine Christians). Remember the apostle John wrote to Christians (in general) when he said, “But you have an anointing from the Holy One” (1 Jn. 2:20a) and “the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you” (v.27). Yes, the contextual difference between Saul’s anointing and the New Testament Christian’s anointing is vast. Saul was not saved, though he was empowered, while New Testament saints are *both* saved and empowered. But the application is relevant nonetheless. If David could see a “handle with care” sign posted on Israel’s king how much more should we see that sign posted on Yahweh’s children and the bride that Jesus purchased with His own blood?

For Further Study

Recalling the Text

Describe the context of the opening verses of 2 Samuel. How is the word "aftermath" appropriate in more ways than one?

What were some of the notable differences between the Amalekite's story in this in chapter and the inspired narrator's story in 1 Samuel 31? Why should the reader assume the Amalekite was lying?

What were some of the reactions of David and/or his men that would have taken the Amalekite by surprise?

Applying the Text

Do you see any Amalekite-like tendencies in yourself, particularly as it relates to trying to make yourself look better than you are? How does a narrative like this help expose the sinfulness of such a proclivity?

How is Colossians 3:9 a fitting application in light of this passage?

What application can you see in this passage for people who are tempted to come to King Jesus with the wrong motivation?