

---

# The Tears of David

## 2 Samuel 1<sup>1</sup>

*Russ Kennedy*

First, I want to think together about the Bible as history. J. G. Keddie is very helpful when he says:

The Bible's history is no different from other historical accounts. Scripture is obviously no mere record of what happened. It is a carefully crafted account of the history of God's mighty acts and of the people he has called to be his own. The salient events of God's dealings with them are presented in such a way as to provide an interpretive framework for the proper understanding of both the origin and destiny of the human race. The difference between the biblical interpretation of history and all other histories is that it alone is truth revealed by the living God. Factual accuracy is selectively and interpretively, but infallibly, observed in order to bring out in the sharpest focus the purposes of God for the human race. Precisely because the Scriptures are the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, they represent God's absolutely authoritative 'interpretation' of history. [2 Samuel, Keddie, p. 9]

He is also helpful in discussing how and why the Davidic history is idealized.

The covenant and reign of David are key elements in the messianic hope developing in the Old Testament. Both the man and his office are idealized here without the qualifications of the historic blemishes. As such they form an important link in the chain of Christological reference in the Bible.' The apostle Peter declared in his great Pentecost sermon that David 'was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne'. And who was that descendant? Peter was clear that he is none other than the risen Christ: 'Seeing what was ahead, he [David] spoke of the resurrection of Christ ...' (Acts 2:30-31). This is the most vital insight that can be brought to the understanding of 2 Samuel. [Keddie, p.12]

This period of Jewish history was a seven year civil war.

1 Samuel closed with the death of Saul. This sets us up for the ascension of the anointed king David to the throne. This was not an easy transition. 2 Samuel opens with the seven year civil war that raged and devastated Israel. It took seven long years for David to achieve victory over Saul's son and presumed heir to the throne, Ish-Bosheth. Through this bloody period, David emerges as the rightful king and is finally installed on his throne.

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise designated, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

## The Report of Saul's Death (1:1-16)

No matter how much Saul viewed David as his enemy, David never viewed Saul as his enemy. His thoughts of Saul were filled with grief over Saul's thoughts about him. David's own beliefs and wants were so shaped by God's Word and grace that he never raised his hand against Saul. Even more, his heart was never filled with enmity against Saul. He never imagined evil against Saul.

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. <sup>2</sup> And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage.

### The Ironic Situation

(v. 1-2)

David has returned from defeating the Amalekites and setting his family and fortune free. He has arrived at his town of Ziklag in Philistia.

Not to miss the irony, but here is David home from a tribal raiding skirmish. But to the northeast, Saul has led Israel into a titanic battle against the Philistines. He has been defeated. He and his sons are dead.

He is approached by a man who is dressed in mourning clothes. He has torn clothes. He has dirt on his head. This man falls down before David. The homage paid is in recognition of David as king.

### The Unlikely Story

(v. 3-10)

And he has a story...

<sup>2</sup> And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. <sup>3</sup> David said to him, "Where do you come from?" And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." <sup>4</sup> And David said to him, "How did it go? Tell me." And he answered, "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." <sup>5</sup> Then David said to the young man who told him, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?" <sup>6</sup> And the young man who told him said, "By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. <sup>7</sup> And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' <sup>8</sup> And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' <sup>9</sup> And he said to me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' <sup>10</sup> So I stood beside 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 armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord."

So he appears to be a grief stricken messenger from Saul's camp. He has terrible news. He has managed to get away from the camp of Israel. He has come to make a report.

Israel has been terribly defeated. They have fled the battle field. Many are dead. King Saul and his son, Jonathan are dead.

Well, David wants to be sure. How does this man know they are dead? Has he seen them with his own eyes? Is this a report from a reliable general? Or is this the “fog of battle” – a rumor that might turn out to not be true.

What he says is interesting. He happens to be where a titanic battle is taking place. He happens to come upon a mortally wounded Saul. Saul asks who he is. We find out he is an Amalekite. Saul asks to be killed lest he suffer more. The Amalekite says that he killed Saul and brought his crown and armlet as proof.

We have the divine account of how Saul died in **1 Samuel 31:1–7**

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. <sup>2</sup> And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. <sup>3</sup> The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. <sup>4</sup> Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.” But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. <sup>5</sup> And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. <sup>6</sup> Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. <sup>7</sup> And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them.

Some commentators struggle with the two accounts. They see them as needing to be harmonized as though the clear telling of the Biblical historian of I Samuel 31 is to be set aside somehow in favor of the lying opportunist of 2 Samuel 1. Since we were told what actually happened at the end of the previous chapter (book, in our case) we are prepared to listen to this messenger with deep suspicion. There is a difference between the infallible, inerrant, inspired interpretation of history and the infallible, inerrant, inspired record if someone’s lies, false teaching or fabricated story. In both, the record itself is true. But the second is the accurate record of a clear falsehood. Reconciliation is not needed. Skepticism of the messenger is required.

Three commentators together basically say the following:

The explanation is so obviously a cock-and-bull story concocted by the Amalekite to ingratiate himself with David, who he surely believed was likely to be the next king of Israel. Apart from his claim that the king was dead and that he had removed his crown and armlet, all other details in 1:6–10 are self-serving fiction. They are completely contradicted by the earlier matter-of-fact historical account of Saul’s death in 1 Samuel 31, which is surely, as A. W. Pink observes, ‘God’s description of Saul’s death,’ while ‘2 Samuel 1 gives man’s fabrication.’ David, of course, was hearing the news for the first time – and not the final version of the

divinely inspired chronicler. In the account David heard, the Amalekite 'happened to be' on Mount Gilboa and happened to be the last able-bodied man around Saul, as the Philistine chariots happened to be closing in on him! After allegedly killing Saul, at the king's request, he then happened to be able to remove the crown and armband from his body, in full view of the advancing Philistines, and escape in one piece to tell the tale! There was something wrong here. Things did not quite fit, even if the crown proved Saul's death and Israel's defeat.

## **The Greathearted Sorrow**

**(v. 11-12)**

<sup>11</sup> Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. <sup>12</sup> 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.

Because of the crown and the arm band David and his entourage believe that Saul and Jonathan are dead. In the typical way of their day and culture, they tear their clothes, wept and did not eat for the rest of the day. They mourned the death of the royal family and the people of Israel who had fallen by the sword.

## **The Royal Sentence**

**(v. 13-17)**

David's suspicion of the messenger leads to a penetrating and exposing interrogation.

<sup>13</sup> And David said to the young man who told him, "Where do you come from?" And he answered, "I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite." <sup>14</sup> David said to him, "How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" <sup>15</sup> Then David called one of the young men and said, "Go, execute him." And he struck him down so that he died. <sup>16</sup> And David said to him, "Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed.' "

David begins to question his story. His inquiry into where he comes from is meant to probe who he is. He is the son of a sojourner. This does not merely mean he is a traveler or a nomad. This means that his family had lived in Israel among the Jews. This is why David's next question assumes this Amalekite would know Jewish terms for the king. He should have known that it was a great evil to assassinate the king God had anointed. We once again see the heart of David. Most would have at least in their heart, congratulated the Amalekite But not David...

David condemns the murderer to death. Now we have to understand this. Saul may have been on a battlefield. But the Amalekite was not a combatant. In fact he had been recognized by Israel as a "sojourner" meaning he had been given refuge. His claim here to have killed the king deserves the sentence of death. David's words assume the Amalekite should have known the Law. As a sojourner, he was protected by the Law and he was expected to abide by the Law. His regicide was a capital offense.

David is acting as king. His first act of succession is to execute the murderer of his predecessor.

Some have suggested that this was unjust. If David suspected that the Amalekite's story was bogus, then David at least should have taken the time to ascertain whether he had actually killed Saul. Since the evidence is against his actually having committed the killing, then David's rash justice is an execution of an innocent, yet foolish confession, without the benefit of two witnesses.

Some have suggested that this was simply politics. If he allowed the killing of king Saul to go unpunished, then he would embolden his own enemies to kill him. David at this point had to know that one of Saul's remaining sons would try to assume the throne as the legitimate heir. The fact that David executed the man who claimed to kill Saul sent a public message to anyone plotting or attempting to kill David. This also would publicly distance David from the murder of Saul, if this man's story got out.

Sometimes it is tiresome to have to deal with all the opinions on a text that actually have nothing to do with the text. The text is very clear about the justice and motivations of David's act. The Amalekite had confessed to killing Saul. His claim was ungodly, lawless and foolish. He confessed to committing treason, murder, and regicide. He tried to justify it with calling it euthanasia. In the formula of the Mosaic Law, "his blood was on his own head." The text is clear that David had him executed because he had raised his hand against the Lord's anointed. This would have been doubly odious to David as he had ample cause and opportunity to kill Saul. Furthermore, the man was an Amalekite whom God had commanded Joshua and Saul to utterly destroy.

## **The Response to Saul's Death**

**(v. 17-27):**

David composes a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan. Its major theme is in the repeated phrase, "How the mighty are fallen."

### **The Gravity of their Fall**

**(v. 17-21)**

David expresses his deep sorrow over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan.

<sup>17</sup> And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, <sup>18</sup> and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:

<sup>19</sup> "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!  
How the mighty have fallen!

<sup>20</sup> Tell it not in Gath,  
publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon,  
lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,  
lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

<sup>21</sup> "You mountains of Gilboa,  
let there be no dew or rain upon you,  
nor fields of offerings!

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,  
the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

Though Saul was far from a perfect king, his fall is dreadful and dangerous for Israel. He had accomplished much. We focus on the record of his murderous hatred for David, but he also did much to form Israel into a functioning monarchy.

The gravity of the fall of the house of Saul is shown in the permanent record of this lamentation, *The Song of the Bow*. David wanted it to be taught to the people of Israel to give them ways to express their own grief. This poetic lament is also recorded in the archives of Israel to preserve it for future generations.

The gravity of the fall of the king of Israel is shown in the serious consequences that may result.

The enemies of the Lord and of Israel will have cause to rejoice. Don't tell of the fallen in Philistia lest they rejoice over his death and give praise to their false gods. It took several years into David's reign before he finally fully defeated the Philistines and secured Israel's borders.

The land in Israel may suffer lasting harm. Gilboa is the place where Saul died. In poetic imagery it is as though the blood and desecrated shield of Saul and Jonathan would poison the land. And for several long years of horrible civil war, the land was ravaged.

Why is this such a disaster for Israel?

## **The Greatness of the Fallen**

**(v. 22-23)**

David extols Saul and Jonathan, describing their achievements.

<sup>22</sup> "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.

<sup>23</sup> "Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!  
In life and in death they were not divided;  
they were swifter than eagles;  
they were stronger than lions.

They were great in their accomplishments. Saul and Jonathan are acclaimed for their mighty deeds as warriors. This stanza is why the lament became known as the song of the bow. In a brief image of bow and sword, Saul and Jonathan are eulogized.

They were great in their friendships. We must always remember that in the beginning, Saul loved David. David brought him relief and peace from his affliction. David's music comforted him. David's battlefield accomplishments at first pleased him. For all Saul's flaws and failures, David loved him in return. He had often addressed him as "father", a term of respectful endearment. That there is no mention of Saul's hatred and treachery in this song indicates David's great and godly heart.

The love between David and Jonathan is well attested in the scripture. Though it is often misused to justify homosexual love, which is not what was between David and Jonathan. It is a sign of wicked and perverted hearts who would seek to take the strong bond between warriors and friends and turn it into the perversion of homosexual lust. It is a great loss when we as Christian men cannot love one another with strong godly bonds and be free to say so. It is a stupid American macho that sometimes prevents us. And it is a vile wickedness that wants to pervert all forms of masculine love into some sexual innuendo.

And yes, just for the record, we believe and declare that the Bible teaches that sexual lust in the heart for someone of the same gender, whether contemplated or acted on, is sin against God. If you are struggling with this form of sexual sin, just like anyone struggling with other forms of sexual sin, repent of it. Believe and bow to God's Word on this subject. You can, by grace and in community, turn your heart away from sinful desire and focus it on godly desires. In this church, if you are struggling with this, we welcome you with God's agenda for purity, therefore for repentance, restoration and renewal. May you know that you are loved with Christ-like love that wants to be an instrument of change in your life.

### **The Grief for the Fallen**

**(v. 24-27)**

David expresses his own personal grief, particularly over the death and loss of Jonathan.

<sup>24</sup> "You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,  
who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,  
who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

<sup>25</sup> "How the mighty have fallen  
in the midst of the battle!

"Jonathan lies slain on your high places.

<sup>26</sup> I am distressed for you, my brother  
Jonathan;

very pleasant have you been to me;  
your love to me was extraordinary,  
surpassing the love of women.

<sup>27</sup> "How the mighty have fallen,  
and the weapons of war perished!"

The women are called to weep over Saul. The irony here is that those who rejoiced and danced and celebrated the victories of David should now weep and mourn over the fall of the house of Saul. He brought them national and personal wealth. Weep, for in his death the people and the nation have suffered a great loss. They are not to rejoice that Saul is dead. They are not to rejoice now that David will ascend. This is not the time. As the preacher in Ecclesiastes said, "There is a time for rejoicing; and there is a time for weeping." This is the time for weeping. Rejoicing is reserved for another day.

How the mighty have fallen... This is the theme. Israel is called to weep and to be warned. It is a song of lament, of sadness and grief. But it is also a song of warning. There is no one so great and so mighty and so exalted that God cannot bring down.

David grieves personally over the loss of Jonathan. They had a great love. It was the unyielding bond of godly men and warriors. He is not here talking about the love for

wives but the love that the women of Israel had for David, the poet-champion-warrior of Israel.

Oh how the mighty have fallen. Jonathan's greatness is traced all through 1 Samuel. His was a loyal, sacrificial, self-giving love He shielded David. He helped David. He was willing to give up his right to the throne in order to acknowledge God's anointing of David. How tragic the fall of this great friend.

---

## Reflect and Respond

Think how easy it is to have an outward smiling face toward those who oppose us while our inward thoughts are full of enmity and anger. Yet we are told over and over again to put those through aside and put on thoughts that are righteous. How do you think about those who dislike you, oppose you or even consider you their enemy?

God takes away the first in order that He might establish the second. Saul's reign and ruin are a part of that canonical thread. Listen to how the transition from Saul to David images the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Saul's rule was in the first order. It was a real rule but not the final regency.

Saul's rule was like the kings in the world. It was part of the elemental things of the world.

Saul's rule temporary and transitory. It was not intended to be permanent.

Saul's rule failed. It was unable to accomplish what the kingdom was intended to be.

Saul's rule was ended by a death. Through his death, the way was made for the new king.

Saul's rule was the environment of the true king's childhood and work. Our Lord lived under the Law until He fulfilled and finished it.

Saul's rule was honored, respected and submitted to by the true king.

Saul's rule highlighted the brightness of the coming king. And it still does.

Blessed be the greater David, the true king. He has brought about the final kingdom. He has finished the old by fulfilling its purpose. He has respected and honored the old while bringing in the new. The Lord's death brought an end of the old, but not yet. There is now a civil war raging in the world since the death of the old and establishing of the new. But someday the true king will ascend the throne and all will be well, all will be well. O Lord, haeten the day.