

2ND SAMUEL

Week 2, chapters 1 and 2

Saul and Jonathon are dead and so the road is now clear for David's ascension to the throne of Israel. The writer and editor of the Samuel Scroll has gone to great lengths to demonstrate that David did not murder or overthrow King Saul, whom David continued to insist was "Yehoveh's anointed". David's path had many missteps; but none of them involved his forcefully grabbing the reins of power over Israel from Saul and giving them to himself.

But the even larger point that the ancient editor sought to demonstrate was that it was Yehoveh's will that was being accomplished and it was Yehoveh's doing that has brought about His will. Yet notice something: while God's supernatural providence has guided the situation all along, everything was accomplished in co-operation with human beings. The Lord didn't create mankind as hamsters in a cage, there for observation and the divine amusement as the Father went about His business. Very few things are accomplished on earth, on a **purely** supernatural level, without man's hand somewhere in the process.

I'd like to begin today by giving you a word of encouragement based upon what David has shown us. Believers love to remind one another that we are Christ's hands on this earth during his temporary absence; yet what we tend to do is pray and then sit idly and patiently (perhaps a bit stubbornly) with the pious claim that "we're waiting for God to move". But the Scriptures show us that more often than not, it is God waiting for us to move.

Notice how in the Bible, in both Testaments, that prayer is not usually an end in itself, unless its purpose is only to praise the Lord. Rather prayer is a means of preparation for action: **our** action. If we decide that we ought to travel from Florida to Montana by car, a logical and wise first step is to purchase a good map as a guide. But once we have that map, gathered advice and have carefully studied all of the many paths that are open for us to get to our destination, we must decide on one. That is like prayer.

However our looking at that map, even spending hours charting a particular path on it, does not get us to where we want to go. We still have to get into the car and begin the journey, understanding that there is risk of accident or breakdown; we might get delayed or somewhere along the way it is entirely possible that we'll make a wrong turn and get lost, or that circumstances beyond our control means we'll have to alter our route. But the going is the issue, not the planning.

All too often the modern Christian wants to buy the map, plan the route, and then sit passively waiting for God to supernaturally pick us up from Florida and set us gently down in Montana. No effort and no risk. Thinking that if we actually took such a drastic step as to get out of our chair and pack the car, fill it with gas, push down on the accelerator and set out on the road that now we're doing a "work" and thus not showing faith in God.

Noah had to build an Ark with his own hands in order to escape the Flood; had he not he and all of his family would have perished. Abraham had to leave much of his family whom he loved behind and walk a dangerous and arduous path to find the new land that God would give to him; otherwise God would have to choose someone else. The mild and introverted Moses had to personally confront the Pharaoh to get Israel out of Egypt. Joshua had to pick up spear and sword, put himself in harms way, and battle many enemies in order to acquire Israel's land inheritance. And David had to escape the deadly clutches of even a man that God had put into power, organize an army, make alliances and shun others, give orders and fight wars so that he might one day deliver Israel from the Philistines and establish a physical Kingdom of God on earth (no matter how imperfect or short lived it might be).

We have studied many Bible characters on our journey through the Tanach; and here in 2nd Samuel David continues to show us that faith without works is dead. But also that no matter how good our intentions, no matter the depth of our love for God, we WILL make mistakes, we WILL at times displease God, we WILL fail occasionally, and we WILL suffer some battle scars along the way. But the absolute worst thing we can do is nothing.

(Rev 3:14-16 CJB) ¹⁴ "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Laodicea, write: 'Here is the message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God's creation:

¹⁵ "I know what you are doing: you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth!

We've watched David do some things that upset us, and witnessed God prevent David from doing MORE awful things that David fully intended to do. We'll see several additional examples of this in the coming the chapters. And yet, despite his many failures and character flaws, David was held up by the Lord as a good example for us all. Why? Was David perfect? No. It's because David took a stand for God. It's because David was a doer, not merely a hearer. David prayed, and then followed it up with action. David trusted God that if he made a mistake, God would set it right.

(Act 13:21-22 CJB) ²¹ Then they (Israel) asked for a king, and God gave them Sha'ul Ben-Kish, a man from the tribe of Binyamin. After forty years,

²² God removed him and raised up David as king for them, making his approval known with these words, 'I found David Ben-Yishai to be a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want.'

Let's see what David **does** when he finds out that a certain young man claims that he has performed a mercy killing upon King Saul.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 1: 13 – end

Essentially, after hearing the tragic news and reacting in grief over it, David wants to go over this young Amalekite's story one more time. Recall that this soldier was fighting as one of Saul's men. He was not a Hebrew. Rather he identifies himself as a **ger** (an Amalekite **ger**); he was a 2nd generation foreigner living among Israel and while politically loyal to Israel he did not want to be counted as an Israelite. He preferred to maintain his status as a gentile and a stranger to the national life of Israel. I won't review it today, but recall how last week's lesson closed with a solid connection between the nature of this **ger** in David's day and the nature of a person in modern times who says that they want salvation in Israel's Savior, but at the same time they do not want be part of Israel (on any level) or of Israel's covenants with God. And effectively the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament tell us that a desire for such an arrangement is an oxymoron (actually it is self-deception); it can certainly be stated, even established as a church doctrine, but it cannot exist in reality because the very notion of a redeeming Messiah abides only within the structure of Israel's covenant relationship with the God of Israel.

After hearing the young man's story again, David asks the only question that really matters to him: "How is it that you weren't afraid to raise your hand to destroy Adonai's anointed?" In other words not "afraid" in the sense of being frightened of the man, Saul, or of fearing that some Israelite might see it happen, misunderstand and take offense and punish this young fighter. Rather the meaning is how could this fellow think that (from a divine perspective) he has the right to put asunder that which God has established? David never wavered from his position that regardless of the King's behavior God had established and anointed him as king and so Sha'ul was not to be harmed.

David wasted no time in having the Amalekite *ger* executed, which means David fully believed the man's story. From David's perspective, once an Amalekite always an Amalekite. David tells the fellow that his blood is on his own head. This is a Hebraism that means the killing of Saul is a crime of blood (a specific category of crimes) for which there is no atonement and no mercy. All crimes of this nature are capital crimes. Recall that there were several trespasses listed in The Levitical Law for which the blood of an innocent animal was not acceptable as a substitute for the blood (the life) of the violator. Therefore rather than an animal's blood being (symbolically) on the criminals head (as atonement for him) only his own blood can satisfy God's justice. And one of those crimes was unjustifiable killing of a man.

David determined that there was no justification under any circumstance for killing God's anointed king; therefore the young Amalekite had to lose his own life in return. Yet, we have a problem; the story of this Amalekite finishing off Saul doesn't at all match with what we read in 1st Samuel 31. According to 1st Samuel 31 Saul wasn't killed by anyone; he committed suicide because his armor bearer made the right choice and wouldn't kill the king regardless of the king's pleas to do so. How are we to think about this? Do we have a substantial Scriptural discrepancy?

As you can imagine this issue has been a source of debate for centuries, but never more so since the Enlightenment era and the birth of literary criticism as a means to study the Bible. We could spend a great deal of time with this matter so I'll just boil it all down so that we can move along. There are two basic schools of thought: 1) this is Biblical error, brought about due to the weaving together of two entirely separate ancient traditions concerning the death of Saul, or 2) the Amalekite man was a liar and he didn't do what he said he had done.

Until the age of literary criticism the answer seemed obvious enough; the Amalekite man thought that he could curry favor from David by claiming to have rid David's path to the throne

of Israel of its biggest obstacle, the current king. Even the idea of placing Saul's crown and signet bracelet before David is suspicious because why would he think that David should have any right to it?

When we examine the two different accounts of Saul's death we find that in 1st Samuel 31 Saul's armor bearer was present, Saul killed himself, he had been shot by an arrow, 3 of Saul's sons died alongside him, and there is no mention of chariots.

In the 2nd Samuel account of the young Amalekite man there was no armor bearer, the young man killed Saul, only 1 son dies (Jonathan), and there are chariots and cavalry closing in on Saul.

One of the major give-a-ways as to the very dubious account of the Amalekite **ger** is the mention of chariots. Saul and his sons had escaped up into the heights of Mt. Gilboa where they were killed. A man on horseback probably could have made his way up there with difficulty; but certainly not chariots. Chariots are the equivalent of modern day tanks: they don't do well in mountainous areas or on steep grades. Chariots needed room to operate and maneuver; they needed to be deployed on a plain or on lightly rolling terrain like the Jezreel Valley (where the main battle was fought). They don't climb mountains, and they can't operate among boulders or on slopes, or wind their way through a forest of trees. Even cavalry loses much of its advantage in such a battle setting.

That a foot soldier with a bow shot Saul with an arrow makes sense; chariots and cavalry do not. Then we have this statement only a couple of chapters away, in 2nd Samuel 4:

(2Sa 4:9-10 CJB) ⁹ But David answered Rekhav and Ba'anah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Be'eroti, "As ADONAI lives, who has rescued me from every kind of difficulty,

¹⁰ when someone told me, 'Here, Sha'ul is dead,' thinking to himself that he was bringing good news, I didn't reward him for his news but seized him and killed him in Ziklag.

The Amalekite thought by stripping the King and being the one to bring David the "good news"

that Saul was dead; and then by claiming that (even though with great reluctance) it was he who had granted Saul a merciful death blow, he would obtain a reward and possibly become part of David's inner circle. A better assumption is that this man was merely the first to stumble across Saul's body and was an opportunist.

David was so moved by the king's death that he composed a marvelous eulogy for Saul and for his dear friend Jonathan. Verse 18 says that its purpose was to teach Judah archery, or to teach Judah the value of archery. However that translation is about as dubious as was the youthful Amalekite's story. In reality the word is not archery but "bow", **qesheth** in Hebrew. More likely than the idea that David was so impressed that Saul was killed with a bow and arrow that he determined that the men of Judah should learn that particular art of warfare (there is no reason to think that the bow and arrow wasn't already a well known weapon for Israel), that **qesheth** (The Bow) was merely the title of this lovely ode. So the idea is that David wrote this eulogy called "The Bow" so that the people of Judah would learn it and fondly remember Israel's first king, Saul, and David's closest friend, Jonathan.

We are told that this beautiful work called The Bow was recorded in the **sefer Yashar** (the Book of Jashar). In other words this is a reminder for us that whoever wrote and edited the Samuel Scroll was not an eyewitness to the events. He (or more likely, they) were not journalists or war correspondents who reported on what they saw; rather they were compilers who perhaps interviewed people who were there, wrote down traditions that had developed about the events, and even studied other documents in order to present a coherent account of the time period from the last Judge on into the era of the Kings of Israel. Don't let this reality bother you: our New Testament Gospels (especially the ones called the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke) were also created in the same way (and there is no serious debate about this).

The Book of Jashar has been lost to history. We only know of its existence due to mentions of it in the Bible and in a handful of other ancient Hebrew documents. That said; an anonymous person created a forgery in the mid-1700's that was supposed to be this work. Although academia has always discredited it (with sound reason) not just a few teachers and pastors have been duped into thinking that this is the actual **sefer Yashar** as spoken of here; it is not. In fact, this book is being reprinted and sold to this day. Unless you're just curious, don't waste your money.

The poem stands by itself and we'll not dissect it except for a couple of points. Starting in verse 21 is a kind of curse being heaped on Mt. Gilboa for being the place where Saul and Jonathan were cut down. This is not a real curse, but merely a Middle Eastern way of

expressing support for the dead and anger at anyone and everything involved.

Where our CJB says the hills should receive no water of any kind, it is so that there will be “no fields with good crops”. That misses the point. What it says in the Hebrew is that no **sadeh** that produces **terumah** should grow there (as the result of moisture deprivation). **Sadeh** is indeed a field, but **terumah** is actually a ritual offering of grain. What we call a wave offering or a heave offering is what’s being referred to. So the idea isn’t that no plants or grain should ever grow there on Mt. Gilboa; rather only not the BEST grain that is given the honor to be ritually waved at the Temple by the priests.

Later in verse 21 it speaks of “the shield of Saul as if he had not been anointed by oil”; poor translation. We’ll find this same translation in a few Bible versions but it’s a feeble attempt to rework a difficult sentence. The problem has always been that the grammar plainly makes the shield as the object that is being anointed with oil, and not Saul. This didn’t seem to make sense to some of the translators so they decided that they were dealing with a copyist error and rearranged the sentence to make Saul the anointed object.

But in reality, it was indeed the shield. Shields in Saul’s day were often made of leather. It would take a man of extraordinary strength and size, along with an extremely thinly pounded metal sheet to form a useful shield. So leather (which was abundant) was the typical material for a shield (some societies, like the Philistines, had developed advanced metal working technology and may have been employing metal shields, but not Israel). Anyone who has ever owned horses knows that you need to keep a saddle cleaned and lubricated or it cracks and deteriorates. But Rashi also points out that before warriors went out to battle they would put extra oil on their leather shields so that as the enemy’s weapons struck them, they tended to slide off in a glancing blow. That is the intention of this passage about oil and Saul and his shield.

The last issue of any consequence in this eulogy is in verse 26. Frankly, it distresses me greatly to even have to address this, because until our modern era there was no controversy. The issue is that it says that Y’honatan’s love for David was deeper than the love of women. In the last few years this has been made into evidence that supports a gay love affair between David and Jonathan. This would be laughable if it weren’t for so many member-starved denominations using it to condone homosexuality so that they can get the ever growing gay population into their pews before their competition does.

Briefly: the word “love” among societies where king/vassal relationships existed as a typical and customary political system, denoted the nature of the expected relationship between the king and his vassal. In other words when the relationship was a political relationship, the word “love” was most closely synonymous with the phrase “happily loyal”. So a vassal freely offered loyalty to a king, and the king magnanimously offered his faithful protection and care in return. The intent was that this would be a desirable if not ideal kind of political arrangement (even though, of course, not the optimal one as far as the vassal was concerned). This was more often than not a useful fiction among the conqueror and his conquered, but nonetheless this is the ancient formula.

Thus what we have in verse 26 is a contrast between the great and unusually genuine degree of political loyalty and faithfulness between David and his friend Jonathan (who was the heir to the throne of Israel as Saul’s dynasty) as contrasted to the rather limited kind of love between a man and woman that revolved around sexual intimacy, producing children, and the labor a woman was expected to produce for a man’s household.

In this era a vassal could only be loyal to one king. If it happened otherwise this was, of course, treason. But a man commonly had more than one wife and (if he could support them) some number of concubines as well. So the degree of faithfulness and loyalty of a vassal to his king regularly outweighed the rather dispersed and watered-down loyalty a man would have with a number of women in his harem, and thus also what one of several wives and concubines might have with her husband.

Let’s move on to 2nd Samuel chapter 2.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 2 all

Circumstances begin to move rapidly. With little fanfare we see David anointed as King of Judah in this chapter.

Verse 1 has David inquiring of God about where he should go. As Alfred Edersheim rightly says, “this was not a time for further mourning. As far as David’s men were concerned there was no further necessity for David’s self-imposed exile”. Remember, as of the outset of chapter 2 David and his men were still in Philistine territory, and therefore still in a vassal

relationship with Achish, the King of Gath. Since Saul was dead and David's Philistine village of Ziklag in ruins, David wondered what to do next. Or better, where to go next (no doubt at the urging on his men and their families). So he asks the Lord if he should go back to Judah; Yehoveh says yes. Then he asks WHERE in Judah, and Yehoveh says Hebron.

We began today's lesson by talking about the juxtaposition of prayer and action in our lives, and that prayer is not the end-game; it is but the necessary preparation for our action. Inquiring of God is prayer, no matter how one does it. That we fold hands, bow heads, and close eyes and say words in certain settings is a developed tradition, not a Biblical formula or mandate. To "pray" is a rather common term that means to inquire of a superior in an attitude of submission. Only in our day has it become exclusively a religious term. In the not too distant past "prayer" was used to describe a person approaching a king or a nobleman, asking for something.

So here we find David in prayer to Yehoveh, in the form of using the Urim and Thummim. We can tell that this was the method of prayer by the nature of the question and the response. Each question would have been in the form of yes or no, this or the other. Again note that once David asked a question of God and felt he got his answer, he acted. God said yes to David's inquiry of going to Judah, and then yes to Hebron as the place in Judah he should go. The very next verse has David packing up his two wives, Achinoam and Avigayil, and leaving for Hebron. His entire army (they were all still in Ziklag) also packed up their families and moved with David.

Hebron, the city, is about 19 miles SSW of Jerusalem. Hebron at an earlier date was known as Kiryat Arba; it was frequented by the Patriarchs and thus regarded as a very special, sacred and important place to the Hebrews. But the wording of this verse speaks of the cities (plural) of Hebron, which can only mean that Hebron was both the name of the city and the name of the general region where several villages and towns existed.

No doubt David's two wives were pleased for this choice because for them it was a homecoming. Both were from towns either near the city of Hebron or actually in the region called Hebron. We don't know how long David was in Hebron before "the men of Judah" came to him and anointed him as their King.

We've covered this before, but it bears repeating; notice that generally ever since the tribes of Israel crossed over the Jordan they were divided into coalitions. As of the time of David there

were 3: the house of Judah, the house of Israel, and Gilead (in the Trans-Jordan). Before his death Saul held the loyalty of most of the house of Israel and of Gilead, but not the house of Judah. It's hard to overstate the importance of a modern Christian and Jew understanding these designations and this territorial and political reality because it will play a central role throughout the remainder of the Bible. It also helps to untangle many prophecies (fulfilled and future), and it is also relevant to current events in the modern State of Israel.

The men of Judah who came to David to make him king were undoubtedly the same men who earlier were called the elders of Judah. These were the recognized clan leaders who formed the tribe of Judah, and certainly at least some of the clans of Simeon. They would have been the recipients of the gifts that David looted from the Amalekites he killed. David had cleverly used that loot to re-establish good relations with his own tribe (since he had run away to Philistia and given loyalty to a Philistine Lord in order to steer clear of King Saul).

Now, did these male leaders of Judah actually ceremonially anoint David with oil and thus make him king? Or is this "anointing" just an expression? We can only speculate. Anointing was an official act and therefore something generally reserved for prophets and priests to perform. And since in Israel establishing a king was seen as a divine prerogative, it's hard to imagine that these laymen, these "men of Judah", would have done this without a priest or prophet officiating (although none is mentioned). Recall that years earlier (back in 1st Samuel 16) we saw Samuel (a combination priest and prophet) anoint David, although at the time it doesn't appear that David was aware that the anointing was symbolic of God establishing him as Israel's king.

Thus here in verse 4 of 2nd Samuel chapter 2, earthly reality catches up to spiritual finality. The God-pattern of the Reality of Duality again resurfaces as David, who had so long ago been given the keys to the Kingdom by Yehoveh, only at this moment actually gains the earthly throne. Even now, however, it is probably only the residents of the strategically and economically important Hebron area that will bow down to him, and it will take some months (perhaps years) before all the clans of Judah accept David's leadership.

We'll continue with this next time.