

David Hears of Sha'ul's Death

Second Samuel 1:1-16

DIG: How does the Amalekite's account of Sha'ul's death differ from the biblical account (see Bw - Sha'ul Takes His Own Life)? Why did he lie? What does he bring to David? Which of David's responses surprise you the most? It might seem that the Amalekite was punished for a sin he did not in fact commit, but is this really so?

REFLECT: When have you had a loose relationship with the truth to win someone's favor? Where might you be grieving the death of a person or relationship? A small child may cover her eyes in the belief that she cannot see you, and you cannot see her. Do we ever try to do the same thing with God, and isn't it just as ridiculous? The TaNaKh teaches us that the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding (Proverbs 9:10). Think about this. How does "fear ground in love" differ from "fear grounded in sin" Which do you fear the most?

1011 BC

ADONAI graciously prevented David and his men from assisting the Philistines in their battle against Sha'ul and Israel, so David returned to Ziklag (see Bt - Achish Sends David Back to Ziklag), out of the way of the dangerous battle that had gone on the slopes of Mount Gilboa, and completely innocent in the death of the king of Isra'el. When he and his men got back to Ziklag, they discovered that the Amalekites had invaded and kidnaped all their wives and children, and left the town burned to the ground and in ruins.

The Death of Samuel: Second Samuel begins with the words: **After the death of Sha'ul.** This has a familiar ring to it because the books of Joshua, Judges, Second Samuel and Second Kings all begin the same way. Joshua begins with: **After the death of Moses,** and Judges begins with: **After the death of Joshua,** so also Second Samuel begins with: **After the death of Sha'ul.** Although Second Kings being similarly, the corresponding phrase sits differently in the verse and is therefore appropriately rendered in a slightly different way: **After Ahab's death.** Consequently, it seems likely that these books were written/compiled/edited by the same person, and the narrator telegraphs to his readers as sharp a break at Second Samuel 1:1 as he had in Joshua 1:1, Judges 1:1 and Second Kings 1:1.¹⁸⁴ David was about 29 years old at that time.

A Deceitful messenger: When David and his men returned to Ziklag he discovered the Amalekites had attacked his home base and burned it. They had also taken the women and children captive and carried them off as they went on their way (see Bu - [The Timeline for David's Return to Ziklag, and Hearing About Sha'ul's Death](#)). David, his men and their families stayed in Ziklag for two more days. On the third day a man arrived from Sha'ul's camp with signs of mourning: his clothes torn and dust on his head. The distance from Mount Gilboa to Ziklag is more than eighty miles, a three-day trip. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor. "Where have you come from?" David asked him. He answered: I have escaped from the Israelite camp (Second Samuel 1:1b-3). He could have been a slave, a mercenary soldier, but more likely, he was just "camp follower" looking to rob bodies.

"What happened?" David asked, "Tell me." "The men fled from the battle," he replied, "Many of them fell and died." And what is more, continued the man - who obviously thought he was bringing David good news - "Sha'ul and his son Y'honatan are dead." Then David said to the young man who brought the report, "How do you know that Sha'ul and his son Y'honatan are dead?" The young man continued his lie: I just happened to be on Mount Gilboa and there was Sha'ul, leaning on his spear, with the [Philistine] chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit (Second Samuel 1:4-6).

The fanciful tale he told was this: When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said: What can I possibly do to help you? He asked me, "Who are you?" I answered: An Amalekite. He said to me, "I'm in agony and I'm going to die, but I'm just barely hanging on. So please, stand over me and kill me." Supposedly in mortal agony and wanting to die, Sha'ul was unable - or at least temporarily unwilling - to take his own life.

So I stood over him and killed him (something that David had never done, even though he had more than one opportunity to do so) because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive once the Philistines captured him. It was not likely that the king would have been so isolated in the thick of the battle, with no armor bearer or royal bodyguard, that he had to depend on an Amalekite to accidentally wander on the scene to kill him. The Amalekite continued: And I took the crown (the primary symbol of his royal authority) that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord (Second Samuel 1:7-10). What was he supposed to say? "I slithered around like a coward, waiting for Sha'ul to fall so that, when the way was clear, I could sneak in and steal his crown and armband?" Hardly. Certainly he had to explain how he obtained the items, but how much *more* gallant it sounded if, in the thick of battle, he kindly and coolly assisted Sha'ul in his death? How much *more* his reward?¹⁸⁵

He knew that David was to be the next king and was looking for some reward, not really knowing David's heart about the matter. But the problem was that he lied to do it. He found the body of Sha'ul before the Philistines got there and stole the royal crown from his head and band from his arm. The Spirit of God tells us that clearly Sha'ul was dead when he fell on his sword (First Samuel 31:4-6).¹⁸⁶

The Amalekite's account of Sha'ul's death differs in several important respects from the biblical record. First Samuel 31 says that the king committed suicide (see Bw - [Sha'ul Takes His Own Life](#)), but here the Amalekite said he killed him; there Sha'ul was critically wounded by archers, here his enemies were charioteers (the very reason Sha'ul retreated to Mount Gilboa was to negate the advantage that the Philistines had with their chariots); there the Philistines took his armor, here the Amalekite brought Sha'ul's crown and armlet to David.

David's Mourning: Having once been a valued member of Sha'ul's court, David undoubtedly recognized the crown and armlet in the hands of the Amalekite. But the messenger could scarcely have been prepared for the response of David and his men. Then, instead of rejoicing, David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Sha'ul and his son Y'honatan, and for the army of ADONAI and for the nation of Isra'el, because they had fallen by the sword (Second Samuel 1:11-12). The messenger obviously didn't know David's heart. In David's eyes, Sha'ul was never his enemy (Second Samuel 22:1).

The Safety of Fear: After the initial shock wore off, David said to the young man who brought the report, "Where are you from?" "I am the son of a resident alien, an Amalekite," he answered. With that information, it would seem that David had learned all he needed to know concerning the messenger. Since his father was a resident alien living in Sha'ul's realm, the man could be expected to have at least a minimal knowledge of Isra'el's basic traditions, including the holiness of the LORD's anointed.¹⁸⁷

Not only that, if he were a loyal resident alien and had found the dead bodies of the king and his sons, he would have sought to hide them and protect them from the enemy, not steal from them. So it's likely that the messenger was a genuine Amalekite, but not a resident alien in Isra'el. More likely, he was a "camp follower" who made his living scavenging after the Philistine army. By claiming to be the son of a resident alien, the man was asking for certain privileges specified in the Torah (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Leviticus 19:33, 24:22; Deuteronomy 24:17), privileges he certainly didn't deserve.¹⁸⁸

Then David asked him, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" David didn't know he was lying at that time. At this point David believed the Amalekites account. Then, apparently without giving him time to answer, David called one of his men and said: **Go, strike him down! So he struck him down, and he died.** Instead of getting a reward, as he was obviously anticipating, he was executed. For David had said to him, "Your blood is on your own head, meaning *the blood you have shed in the cause of your own death. Your own mouth testified against you when you said: I killed YHVH's anointed*" (2 Samuel 1:13-16). The Amalekite received justice, but it was justice mixed with irony. He was punished for what he *said* . . . not for what he *did*. He received what he should have received even though it was not based upon fact. The judgment of YHVH found him, found him in his lie and repaid him in line with his intent - if not his deed!

We serve a God who delights in truth in the innermost parts (Psalm 51:6 Darby Bible Translation), who sets our secret sins in the light of His presence (Psalm 90:8). But this will not be the last episode - there will be other "Amalekites" in the congregations of God. Ananias and Sapphira would feel the need to boost their self-esteem within the Jerusalem Church (Acts 5:1-11 in light of Acts 4:32-37) and end up in twin graves for it. Even if we could fool kings and judges, Yeshua has taught us that no one will escape final judgment for unbelievers (see the commentary on Revelation Fo - **The Great White Throne Judgment**), or loss of reward for believers (see my commentary on Revelation Cc - **For We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**). Yet strangely, we find ourselves believing this absurd notion that if we have duped the eye of mankind, we have eluded heaven's gaze as well. We must understand that there is *nothing* concealed that will not be disclosed. Messiah should know, He's the one Ha'Shem has appointed to judge our secrets (Romans 2:16).¹⁸⁹

After hearing about the death of Sha'ul and mourning the kidnapping of their wives and children, David and his men left to hunt down and crush the Amalekites (see Bz - **David Destroys the Amalekites**), and recover their loved ones (Second Samuel 1:1a).

With the death of Sha'ul and his three sons at Mount Gilboa, the question of succession is now raised. Ish-Bosheth, Sha'ul's youngest son, was still alive and would reign among the tribes of the northern Kingdom of Isra'el, though we haven't encountered him yet (see Cf - **War Between the Houses of David and Sha'ul**). David's claim to the throne was not acknowledged or recognized everywhere. The books of Samuel are partially intended to answer the question, "Who is suitable to reign as king over Isra'el?" Sha'ul had shown himself to be clearly unsuitable, and his disgraceful death confirmed the fact that the future king must be different than the first one. By contrast, the Bible describes the remarkable way in which the Spirit prepared and protected David. He was without question, suitable as Sha'ul's successor (see Ch - **David's Accession to Kingship Over Isra'el**).¹⁹⁰