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David Hears of Sha'ul's Death
Second Samuel 1: 1-16

David hears of Sha'ul's death DIG: How does the Amalekite's account of Sha'ul's death differ from the biblical account? 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 grounded 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** (**to see link click 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**. However, when **he** and **his** men got back to **Ziklag**, **they** discovered that **the Amalekites** had invaded and kidnapped 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 accidently 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 **armlet**?" 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 **Cg – 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 **Ci – David's Accession to Kingship Over Isra'el**).[190]