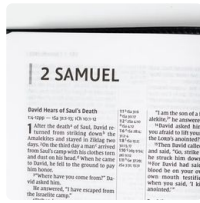


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2 Samuel 1 - 2



2 Samuel - Steve Gregg

In this passage, Steve Gregg discusses the events of 2 Samuel 1-2, starting with the death of Saul and his armor-bearer. Gregg explores the contradictions in the accounts of Saul's death and David's attitude towards Saul's legacy. He also discusses David's rise to power and his efforts to reconcile with the rest of Israel. Gregg notes the importance of understanding the political and social context of these events to fully grasp their significance.

Transcript

Returning to 2 Samuel now, and we will give no separate introduction to this book, because when we began 1 Samuel, I gave an introduction to the books of Samuel. Originally, they were one book, and therefore, they don't need separate introductions. So, really, 2 Samuel 1 could be viewed simply as 1 Samuel 32.

That is, it's the next chapter after the last chapter of 1 Samuel. In the last chapter of 1 Samuel, what we could simply refer to as the previous chapter to this one, Saul and his three sons died in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. Saul's death was actually a suicide, although he had been wounded.

He wished to be dispatched by his armor bearer, but his armor bearer would not raise up his hand against the Lord's anointed. So, Saul had to, basically, he didn't have to, but he did choose to take his own life, which, by the way, might have been the course that any of us would have wished to take. I mean, he was dying.

He was wounded by arrows. He would certainly die, but if he didn't die quickly enough, the Philistines would have come upon him and tortured him and probably dismembered him and did all kinds of horrible things to him to abuse him, something he figured, well, I'm going to die anyway. I'd just as soon die without all that, and so he fell on his sword and killed himself.

His armor bearer, who had been unwilling to kill Saul, even at Saul's request, then saw that his master was dead and he fell on his own sword and killed himself also. That's loyalty for you. It's amazing that the man would do that, because after Saul was dead,

there's no more King Saul to be loyal to.

Why kill yourself? Now, obviously, the armor bearer stood to be killed or abused by the Philistines, too, though he would not have been targeted as much as the king would be. I mean, the armor bearer is a much less significant flunky of the king, and so the Philistines might not make an example of him or target him for special abuse. And, as it turned out, the Philistines didn't even come upon the bodies until the next day.

That means the guy had the whole night to go somewhere else and flee. But, obviously, in the emotion of the moment, you know, it's a crazy time in the middle of a war, people dying all around you, and finally you see the king and the three crown princes die. I mean, as far as the armor bearer is concerned, it's all over now.

What's to live for? And so, seeing the king dead, he dies also himself. Now, somebody asked me yesterday, how would this story then be known to us? If everyone was dead, how would we know what really happened? After all, we're going to find a slightly different account of the story given by a reporter. In 2 Samuel chapter 1, the story is told by a man running from the battle, and he tells the story differently than we've read of it in chapter 31 of 1 Samuel.

And how do we know then, if the report came the way it did in 2 Samuel chapter 1, how do we know what happened in chapter 31 of 1 Samuel? And the answer, no doubt, is this, that although we've only read about the death of the king and his sons, it's probably a huge mistake to imagine that the king and his sons were standing alone on the hillside there. I mean, they would have been surrounded by their troops. There was a massive slaughter of their troops, but some survivors.

I mean, the Amalekite who came running to David in this chapter was a survivor who had been there, and there were no doubt others who could report what really happened at a later date. Once the dust had settled and they were recounting the battle, there were probably a number of witnesses who saw the death of Saul take place. And unlike the armor-bearer, they did not take their own lives as a result, and they lived to tell the tale.

We don't read about them. We only read about what transacted between Saul and his armor-bearer, and we get the impression it was just the two men standing alone on a hill. But how likely is that? A king is leading his troops in war, and they leave him all by himself on a mountain where he can get killed.

The troops would certainly be surrounding him, and so there would have been many witnesses to his actual death. However, there's one man who probably didn't witness the death of Saul, but wanted to take credit for it with David, because David was clearly, as everybody knew, a man who was a rival. At least Saul saw David as a rival for the throne of Israel, and rightly so.

Although David did not press his rights on this matter, David had been anointed by the prophet of God to be the next king to replace Saul. The spirit of God had left Saul and come upon David. David was truly the new king, and he had been the new king for a long time, although he wasn't generally recognized as such.

God had anointed him as king, but the people still had followed Saul. But Saul was... I mean, everybody knew Saul was persecuting David. Saul was David's enemy.

David was the man who stood to gain the most by Saul's death. That is, David would be elevated to the position of king, most people would assume. And this one man has decided that he will take credit for the death of Saul, and he'll bring news to David, and he'll hopefully receive a reward of gratitude from David for having dispatched David's enemy.

However, that's not how things turned out for the man. He greatly miscalculated David's sentiments about Saul, as did the Philistine lord Achish of the city of Gath, who also assumed that David was hostile towards Saul, and therefore trusted him to be on the side of the Philistines in battle. David had defected to the Philistines and convinced them that he was their friend and Saul's enemy.

And, of course, any thinking person would assume that this would be the case, the way that Saul was persecuting David. Of course, they would expect that David would be Saul's enemy. That's not how David saw it, though.

David was a loyal subject of Saul. Saul might be crazy and demon-possessed and unjust and an unprovoked persecutor, but David still saw him as his king. He still saw Saul as the Lord's anointed, and David was loyal to Israel and to the king.

But that's a rather unusual sentiment for a man in David's position to have, and people did not expect him to have that sentiment. So the king Achish was easily deceived by David to be a true defector. And, likewise, this man, the Amalekite that we will read of in this chapter, figured David would probably be delighted that Saul was now dead and would wish to reward the person who had dispatched him.

And so here's how the story progresses. 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. 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. Now, notice how this starts. It starts as if we know all the information in 1 Samuel, because this was just a continuation, originally the same book.

So it talks about the death of Saul, which has been reported previously, but not in 2 Samuel it hasn't been. It talks about David having returned from the slaughter of the

Amalekites. Well, that's what happened in 1 Samuel chapter 30.

This book assumes you know about what happened in the previous two chapters, which of course underscores the fact that this is not really a new book at all that we're starting. We're just continuing the same one. And so this man came with the clothing torn, dust on his head, all the signs of mourning.

Now, he wasn't mourning for Saul. He was mourning because of the defeat of Israel against the Philistines. And he was bringing bad news to David, but also what he hoped would be seen by David as good news of the death of Saul.

And David said to him, where have you come from? And he said to him, I have escaped from the camp of Israel. 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. So David said to the young man who told him, how do you know that Saul and Jonathan, his son, are dead? And 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. Now, when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, here I am.

And he said to me, who are you? So I answered him, I am an Amalekite. And 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. So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he'd fallen.

And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm and I brought them here to my Lord. Now, the fact that this man actually had the crown and the bracelet or the armband of the king with him and could present them to David means he really did at least have some kind of exposure to the dead body of Saul. He may have just been the first to come upon the body after it was slain and no one else had stripped the body of these things yet.

And so he took advantage. It's hard to say. But we know that this man didn't kill Saul, because we're told how Saul died in just the previous chapter.

And obviously, some people point this out as one of the great contradictions in the Bible. Well, it is a contradiction. There's a contradiction between what happened and what this man said happened.

The Bible often records the reports of things that aren't told by honest men. And when an honest man contradicts the truth, of course, we have the record of a contradiction here. We have the true story of how Saul died in 1 Samuel chapter 31.

It was by a suicide. And then we have this man's report, which was different and which contradicts it. There's a contradiction in the Bible, but the Bible isn't contradicting itself.

This man is contradicting what the Bible said. And his contradiction, his story simply happens to be recorded. The fact that the Bible records the reports of people who aren't telling the truth is not a flaw of the Bible.

If the man really said this, then it's to the virtue of the biblical writers. If they told the truth, he really said that. He really did.

But it's not true what he said. He didn't kill Saul. Now, it's interesting how he crafted his story.

He apparently didn't know how Saul had really died, except that he saw Saul on his sword, I guess. But he does not even mention specifically that Saul had been wounded. We know from the previous account that Saul had been shot with arrows and was therefore fading fast, but not fast enough for his liking.

And therefore he wanted to be dispatched quickly. And so he fell on his sword. But this man does not even mention that Saul was wounded, unless it is implied in his statement in verse 10 where he says, I was sure he could not live after he had fallen.

But what fallen means is debatable. Some scholars, many, believe it means that after he had lost the battle, Israel and their king had fallen in battle. Not fallen dead, not even necessarily fallen wounded, but just fallen prey to their enemies and lost.

So this man might not even be speaking of Saul having been wounded. He said he found Saul leaning on his spear. Now, this might be because he was wounded and felt like he had to be propped up, or it might be that he was just depressed and just about ready to collapse with exhaustion or something else.

But the man does not mention that Saul was mortally wounded. It's not part of his story. Therefore, he may not have known that Saul was mortally wounded.

He may have simply been representing it as if Saul was defeated, depressed, suicidal, just had lost his will to live, and therefore Saul asked the man to kill him. Now, the man in that case would simply be killing Saul because Saul wanted to commit suicide and didn't have the guts to do it himself because he was depressed, not because he was necessarily wounded unto death. Now, he did say in verse 10, I was sure he could not live after he had fallen, but that might mean that he would in fact not live with himself or live with the defeat.

He might kill himself or ask someone else besides the Amalekite to kill him, and therefore the Amalekite obliged him and slew him. It's hard to say. What's interesting about this is the man claims to be an Amalekite, and he may well have been.

Some people feel that he was lying even about that because as an Amalekite he would be less guilty for having killed the king of Israel. If he was in fact a disloyal Israelite and had killed his own king, he might expect to be treated as a traitor, but if he could claim to be an Amalekite, the Amalekites wouldn't have any specific duty to be loyal to the king of Israel and his deed would not be seen so much as treachery or as an act of treason. So he might not have even been an Amalekite, but he probably was.

Many scholars believe he might not have been. But the point is, if he was an Amalekite, how did he live this long anyway? Saul had been commanded in chapter 15 of 1 Samuel to go and wipe out all the Amalekites and leave none that breathed, and Saul had gone and killed a lot of them, but apparently there were some who had escaped. Possibly some had already been taken into captivity earlier and were attached to Israel as servants or whatever, and so this man had escaped the genocide of his people at the hands of Saul.

If his story had turned out to be true, it would be rather ironic that Saul, who had failed to kill off all the Amalekites when he was told to, ended up being killed by an Amalekite who should never have been around. But of course the story wasn't true, so it's a moot point. Interestingly though, David had just returned from having slaughtered Amalekites who had stolen his wives and children and his stuff and those of his men.

David was not really favorably disposed toward Amalekites at this particular moment in time. The Amalekites were slated for annihilation, and most recently David had to go and rescue his wives from being kidnapped by Amalekites, and this man claiming to be an Amalekite, whether he really was one or not, was not actually going to say something that would endear him to David. But most importantly, David was furious, as it turns out, that the man claimed to have killed Saul.

Now David may have taken the man's story at face value. He may have actually believed that it really happened just that way. However, later on in chapter 4, when David is answering those two treacherous men who killed Ish-bosheth, and they thought they'd get a reward from David for bringing Ish-bosheth's head to him, again they certainly miscalculated David's feelings toward the house of Saul, Ish-bosheth being the last surviving son of Saul.

In chapter 4, verse 10, David said, When someone told me, saying, Look, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag, the one who thought I would give him a reward for his news. Now David, when he heard this news from the Amalekite, he could see the man was an opportunist. Now it's possible that David believed the man's story, but still the man bringing the report to David in the manner that he did would be expecting a reward.

But David might have even recognized that the man could be lying. He could just be the man lucky enough to first come upon the corpse of Saul and say, Hey, I'll take the crown,

I'll take it to David, I'll claim I killed David's enemy, and David will reward me. Whether David believed the story or not, he said in verse 11, he took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him.

And they mourned and wept and fasted until the evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the Lord, for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. And 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. David said to him, How was it that you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? Then David called one of the young men and said, Go near and execute him.

And he struck him so that he died. And he 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. Now remember, David had more than once had opportunity to kill Saul himself and would have been very justified in one sense, because at the very time that David was able to kill Saul, when he encountered him in the cave or even when Saul was sleeping that time and David was able to go up and take the spear that was poked into the ground near Saul's head, he could have thrust him through.

David on those occasions said, God forbid that I should do harm to the Lord's anointed. David had a conscience about it, although David, if anyone, would have had a right to. David had been anointed to be the successor to Saul, so if he acted as other kings in other countries did, he would have killed his rival.

Furthermore, even if David had not been anointed to be the next king, David was being pursued with a death sentence on his head when he had done nothing wrong. The king was a murderous king. If David didn't have the right to kill Saul, who did? Certainly not some Amalekite.

Now it seems clear that if David did take this man's story seriously and did believe the man, that David did not believe in euthanasia. Because I'll tell you the truth, if I were in Saul's condition, I would kind of want someone to dispatch me too. If I had been wounded, I was dying, the enemy was coming, these barbarians were going to come and they're going to physically abuse me and so forth, I'd just as soon send me off to heaven quick, you know, or wherever I'm going.

If I'm going there anyway, let me go there soon before the torture begins. I mean, I'm sympathetic toward that. I can see why Saul would want that.

But on this man's report, David didn't believe that was an okay thing. Now on the other hand, the man did not mention that Saul was mortally wounded. If in fact the man was really just suggesting that Saul was totally depressed over the loss of the war and didn't want to live anymore and gave this man permission to kill him, perhaps a permission that Saul would have felt differently about a few days later after he'd recovered from the

shock and the depression, and that this man simply took the opportunity to kill him so that David could be king, and this might be what the man was suggesting.

Then of course it's not even a matter of mercy killing, it's just a matter of taking advantage of a moment when Saul's not going to defend himself and where he gives someone permission to kill him and say, okay, I'll do this for David. Whatever David thought and whatever the man was claiming is not clear. All that David says, you've testified against yourself.

Now it says in chapter 4 verse 10 that David had him arrested in Ziklag and then killed him. We don't read of the arrest, but we do read that after the report was given, we have verses 11 and 12 how that David and his men mourned until evening. Apparently they kept the man in custody until evening, and then David called the man out.

So they did arrest him, and they didn't immediately execute him. David first went through his mourning for Saul, and then he executed the man and said, you know, you don't even need a trial. You've testified against yourself.

You have already pled guilty. You've said that you yourself have killed Saul, the Lord's anointed. You kill the king, you get killed.

That's just how it goes. And so he killed the man. After that, David composed and probably sang a lamentation for Saul and Jonathan, especially for Jonathan, but Saul is mourned in it as well.

This lamentation, most Bible scholars say it's one of the best pieces of Hebrew poetry in the Bible. I've never had any particular aptitude for assessing how good poetry is. Like so many people say about art or other things, I know what I like, but I don't know what's really good.

I don't know much about it. And I don't know whether I would have thought this is the best poetry in the Bible or not. Some of the psalms, actually, I like better.

But there are, I guess, ways in which this psalm is composed that the literary experts say, oh, this is one of the greatest, greatest pieces of poetry in the Bible. And actually, I'm more moved, although this is a very moving lamentation, I'm much more moved at David's lament over Absalom, which came later on. But it says, David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son.

And he told them to teach the children of Judah the song of the bow, which is what he called this. He gave it a name, the song of the bow. Indeed, it is written in the book of Jasher.

Now, Jasher means the just. And there apparently was a book of Hebrew poetry, or at least a book of Hebrew exploits, of righteous warriors in Israel that was called the book

of the just, the book of Jasher. We don't have that book today.

It's mentioned also in the book of Judges. And so the book of Jasher was a collection, apparently, of poems, maybe historical accounts of some of the great heroes, the righteous heroes of Israel and their exploits in battle. There is, in fact, a book of Jasher available in print today, but it's not the same one in all likelihood.

It's not hard for some forger to read in the Bible that there was a book called Jasher, and we don't have it. So I could write one and call it that and sell it, and people think, wow, we found the hidden book of Jasher that no one knew about. Yeah, well, I don't think there's any scholar who believes the present available book of Jasher is the original.

So we don't have it. But David, this particular imitation is included in the book of Jasher, or was when the book of Jasher was available. And he instructed that the men of Judah should sing it.

Now, this is interesting because, of course, Saul and Jonathan were not of the tribe of Judah. They were of the tribe of Benjamin. And if anything, David, as a member of the tribe of Judah, would expect the people of Judah to be more on his side than on Saul's.

Saul had been an enemy to David, and now that Saul was dead, it's clear that the people of Judah were disposed toward making David their king, even if the rest of Israel was not. Yet David insisted that those of his own tribe should never forget this song and should memorize it and sing it. It's a song in honor of the fallen kings of the tribe of Benjamin who had been the previous administration.

Now, generally speaking, you don't find in any ancient country when a new king comes to power who's not of the former dynasty, when a new dynasty begins, they don't usually praise the former dynasty. They usually purge them. They usually go through and kill all the survivors of the previous dynasty because, well, the nation has already been loyal to that other dynasty.

Whether they'll be loyal to the new one or not remains to be seen. And therefore, if there's survivors of the old dynasty, usually the new king does what he can to eliminate them all just to prevent any future loyalty to that old dynasty from erupting into a revolt against his regime. Now, David wasn't that way.

There were very few surviving sons or grandsons of Saul that we know about. There was Ishbosheth, Saul's son, and there was Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, son of Jonathan. And Ishbosheth in particular was a rival to David for the rule of Israel.

And yet David did not do anything to demonize Saul's legacy or Saul's family or anything like that, which you might think a man with political aspirations would do. In fact, he could easily have said some very true and condemning things about Saul because Saul had been, in the latter part of his reign, demon possessed, crazy, unjust. He slaughtered

all the priests of Nob with no good reason.

He threw spears at his own son and at his own chief captain, David, so that David had to flee. And then he pursued David, who was not doing him any harm. Saul was an idiot.

He was a jerk. He was a horrible, horrible ruler in the end because he was so unjust and so insane. And David could have said so.

And David would be the one who would have the most grievance against him because David was the target of his hostility. And yet David sings of his death, and he mentions nothing of anything negative about Saul. He doesn't say much positive about him either.

He does call him mighty. And he does indicate that the daughters of Israel should weep over Saul in verse 24 because they prospered. Their standard of living was improved under Saul's reign.

He doesn't say anything about the morality of Saul, which could not be spoken very highly of. But if you can't say something good, don't say anything at all. And so he didn't.

But here's how his lament goes. The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places. How the mighty have fallen.

Tell it not in Gath. Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon. Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.

Now Gath, of course, is a major Philistine city, and Ashkelon was another. There were five such cities, and these are two of them. And he says, don't let the report of Saul's death reach these cities because I don't want the Philistines, even their daughters, to rejoice over our fallen king.

So I hope they never hear this news. Of course they were going to hear it. This is poetic.

He's not suggesting that there's no way that these people would hear about it. He's expressing his wish that the Philistines would never catch wind of this victory they had over Saul. It's a shameful thing when even their little girls can dance and sing and celebrate the fall of a great man.

O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, nor let there be rain upon you, nor fields of offerings. For the shield of the mighty is cast away there. The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

Now, not anointed with oil is not a reference to Saul because Saul was anointed with oil. He's talking about the shield of Saul. Shields in ancient times were made of usually wood.

If someone had the resources, they might have a metal shield. But they covered them

with leather, partly for decorative purposes and partly, I don't know, for what other purposes, but they covered their shields with leather. And, of course, leather had to be kept supple by oiling.

They would anoint their shields so that the leather wouldn't dry and crack. And so when he says the shield of Saul has been cast away on Mount Gilboa, that's the mountain where he died, and it's not anointed with oil, it means that that shield has fallen into disuse and is not being maintained anymore. It is not being polished anymore.

The shield has no owner anymore, is what he's saying. The shield is not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain and from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty.

Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet with luxury, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle. Jonathan was slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan.

You have been very pleasant to me. Your love was to me wonderful, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war have perished.

So he bemoans the loss of the king and Jonathan, and these mighty men. Saul had ruled for 40 years over Israel. That was David's entire lifetime and son, because David was only 30 at this time.

So David had been born when Saul had been reigning for 10 years. David had never known Israel without a monarchy. David had never known Israel in the time of the judges, before there were kings in Israel.

He had never known another king. He was born and raised under the rule of Saul. And therefore, all that he had known for the whole 30 years of his life was this particular political system.

And now it's over. And even though he's going to be anointed king in place of Saul, it's a hard adjustment, and he sees the tragedy of it. Saul may have turned out to be insane, but he was a man with a lot of promise.

He was a man who started out humble, little in his own eyes, a man who was a courageous warrior in the beginning, but who became paranoid and fearful and wimpy and easily angered. The man just became a moral weakling. But he was a mighty man in battle at one time, and that's what David is bemoaning the loss of.

And Jonathan, there's nothing wrong with Jonathan. Jonathan was about as good as they get. It is rather tragic, he says, that Saul and Jonathan, in verse 23, were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided.

They should have been. I mean, it would have been nicer if they had been. If Saul had to die under the judgment of God, as he did, it would be certainly a much more desirable outcome if Jonathan had not died with him, because Jonathan was not guilty of the things his father was guilty of.

Jonathan was an innocent and righteous man who feared God, honored David, surrendered all of his privileges to David, gave David his sword and his armor and essentially his crown. Basically, Jonathan, who was the heir to the throne, surrendered all that to David, because he loved David. I mean, Saul and Jonathan were so different from each other, like night and day, and yet they died together.

And the reason was because Jonathan stayed with his father, at a time when, very possibly, he should have gone with David instead. But even though he had stayed with his father, his sympathies were always with David. And just as he doesn't want the daughters of the Philistines to rejoice over the death of Saul, in verse 20 he commands the daughters of Israel to weep over Saul's death, because they had benefited in terms of their standard of living.

They had dressed better. They had been more prosperous under his reign than they would have been at a previous time without him. So he then eulogizes his friend Jonathan.

He says, Jonathan was slain in your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan. You have been very pleasant to me.

He and Jonathan had planned to co-reign after the death of Saul. Jonathan had said, you know, you will rule and I'll be second to you. But that's not how it turned out.

He said, your love to me was wonderful. It was a wonder, it was a marvel that Jonathan would have the loyalty to David that he did when David was his own rival to the throne. But Jonathan had no ambitions in that way.

He cared about David more than he cared about himself. It's a wonderful thing, a marvelous thing, a surprising thing. And the love that they had for each other was surpassing the love of women.

And that is simply saying that although both of these men had women they loved, their love for each other was simply of a different kind and of a different degree. Men love women differently than they love men. Unless, of course, they're homosexuals.

And because of our own day, the prominence of awareness of homosexual issues it's

very difficult for modern people to read these words, Jonathan, your love for me was surpassing the love of women. I mean, people with perverted minds, they read this and they say, oh, you see, they were homosexuals. No, the love they had for each other was not the kind of love that men have for women.

It was not sexual, it was not romantic, it was a different kind of love. It was something far superior even to romantic love. It was loyalty.

It was brotherly loyalty, faithfulness, willingness to sacrifice everything for each other. I mean, a man might have that kind of love for a woman, but it's not the same kind of love that is generally thought to exist between men and women. It's a comradeship between two men.

It's a different thing. And so David has lost a compatriot. He's lost a dear brother and friend, and he's sincerely mourning.

Now, David's mourning over this, of course, would not go unnoticed, and therefore his grief over the death of Saul and Jonathan would communicate to the people of Israel that David had no hand in this. David did not even approve of it. David did not want Saul dead.

In fact, by killing the Amalekite, it might have been that David felt like that's all he could do, lest he be considered to be an accomplice in the death of the king. After all, the rest of Israel would hear that this Amalekite had claimed to kill Saul, and if David had just let him live, Israel might consider that David had seen this as an expedient that he approved of. And so by killing this man, he showed that he truly was not on the side of those that killed Saul.

And by writing this song and publishing it, there was another way that he communicated that. David was going to be very careful in all of his dealings with Israel and with Saul's survivors and so forth to show that he was not their rival in his own mind. They were rivaling him, but he wasn't against them.

They were not his enemies as far as he was concerned, and he did not treat them as enemies. He loved his enemies. Now this should be set in contrast to some of the psalms that David wrote on other occasions that are called imprecatory psalms.

Imprecatory psalms, if you don't know the word imprecatory or imprecation, an imprecation is a wishing of ill on somebody. And there are a number of psalms that David and other writers wrote that are imprecations on evil people and wishing them ill, wishing that God would judge them, wishing that their path would be slippery and they'd fall and that bad things would happen to them. And there are psalms that David wrote like that.

But what's interesting is that when you read the psalms of David that wish evil on bad

people, it's wishing evil on them because of their badness, not because of their mistreatment of David. It's not because they were personal foes of his, but because they were enemies of God, that God took God's side. I mean David took God's side in the controversy.

There are people who will oppose you, but their whole reason for doing so is because you're godly, and the real issue with them is they're opposing God. Remember what God said to Samuel, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. And so also when people oppose and mistreat Christians, sometimes it's a personal matter, maybe they just don't like your looks, but a lot of times they're persecuting you for righteousness sake because you're standing with God.

And it's not you they hate, it's God they hate. And David wished evil on those who hated God, on those who forsook his law. Sometimes those people overlapped with the people who hated him because those people were seeking to overthrow God's purposes and God's kingdom.

But David, as far as personal vendettas against people who were just mean to him, he really didn't have it in him to hold a grudge. He never seemed to hold a grudge against Saul, the man who had done the most to seek to destroy David for no good reason. Later on when Absalom, his son, rebelled against him and actually sought to kill him, but Absalom died in battle, David mourned him too.

So much so that Joab thought that David was going to give the people the impression that he cared more about Absalom than he cared about Israel. And so Joab actually had to rebuke David for that. But David really, when people treated him badly, he mourned their death.

He didn't wish them ill. Just like Jesus pronounced woes on the scribes and Pharisees because of the evil they were doing, not to him, but what they were doing in terms of making God's reputation bad. But when people actually killed him, he said, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing. Jesus didn't hold personal grudges. And David didn't appear to, at least not early on.

Later on in his life, you get the impression that David did have a few grudges toward Joab and Shimei and some others as he gave Solomon instructions about what to do about those guys. But at this stage in his life, he was truly grieved when his enemy fell. Chapter 2. It happened after this that David inquired of Yahweh, saying, Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah? Now David had been in a voluntary exile in Ziklag.

He had gone into the Philistine territory to flee from Saul. And he and his men were still exiled from Israel and from Judah. They couldn't go home.

Well, now Saul was dead. You think, Oh good, we can go home. Well, they could.

But David didn't want to make, he wanted to make sure that was what God wanted him to do. So he said, God, shall we go home? Shall we go back to Judah and live in a city instead of out here in Philistine territory? And the Lord said to him, Go up. And David said, Where shall I go up? And the Lord said, To Hebron.

So Hebron is where David went. And it became his first royal capital city until Jerusalem was conquered. So David went up there and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal, the Carmelite.

And David brought up the men who were with him, every man with his household. So they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. So these 600 men who were with David while he was fleeing from Saul and their families finally got to move into a town and live, you know, a settled domestic existence rather than a continual military existence and in flight all the time.

And they were actually able to live in one of the cities of the Jewish people as opposed to a foreign country. So things actually normalized for them considerably. Then the men of Judah came and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

And they told David, saying, The men of Jabesh-Gilead were the ones who buried Saul. So David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead and said to them, You are blessed of the Lord, for you have shown this kindness to your Lord, to Saul, and have buried him. And now may the Lord show kindness and truth to you.

I also will repay you this kindness because you have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands be strengthened, which is just an idiom that means be encouraged, and be valiant, for your master Saul is dead and also the house of Judah has anointed me king over them. Now it was only the tribe of Judah that anointed David at this point.

And he reigned for seven and a half years as only the king of Judah and not over the rest of Israel. The rest of Israel perhaps was reticent, reluctant, suspicious. I mean they did after all have an heir to the throne in Ish-bosheth.

Saul had been the king. His sons had been the princes. And although three of the princes died on Gilboa with their father, one still survived.

And the most natural thing would be for him to be made king. And in fact that's what does happen in the next verse. But Israel would not be sure whether they should continue with the dynasty that was in place after all God had anointed Saul.

And the anointing of David had been secret. It's possible that many people in Israel did not know that Samuel had also anointed David. But Saul had been the anointed of the Lord and his son would be the natural successor.

So it was not initially the case that the other tribes came to David and said be our ruler. Instead they thought they'd after all David had also been associated with the Philistines for several years and they weren't probably sure what side he was on. He had not been involved in this last battle.

Which means he not only didn't fight on the side of the Philistines but he didn't fight against the Philistines either. Saul had died in battle and David had been had sat there sitting on their hands doing nothing to save him. Doing nothing.

They just sat out. And in times of war we even saw that even among David's men the ones who actually went out to battle had resentment toward the ones who didn't participate. So there were those in Israel who looked on David and wondered about his loyalties.

You know you didn't participate. You didn't help us in this battle. You've been living among the Philistines for a year or more.

And you know we have another king an heir of Saul. It just didn't occur to most of them to make David their king. But the tribe of Judah were David's own tribe.

And they would find it no doubt advantageous to have a king of their own tribe rather than a king of the tribe of Benjamin. Now that Saul was dead there was a power vacuum. It was only slightly filled by the presence of Ish-bosheth but he was a weak and ineffectual person.

And he never really had any power. In fact he was ruled over by his general Abner the whole time that he lived. And so the people of Judah probably figured well David is our hero.

He's of our tribe. And there were tribal rivalries in a big way in Israel. And so the people of Judah would say rather have a king of our own tribe than one of Benjamin.

Especially this weakling Ish-bosheth. Why would we prefer a king who's such a weakling as he is to a valiant warrior who's been a hero of the nation for years and who's of our own tribe. So they came and made David the king but the rest of Israel didn't.

However, David made motions of conciliation with the rest of Israel. And that's when he sent these messengers to Jabeshphileh. These people he heard who had risked their lives to go and recover the bodies of Saul and his sons.

We saw it in the last chapter or not the last chapter the last chapter of 1 Samuel. And when Saul and his sons died the Philistines had beheaded them and put the skull of Saul in the house of Dagon their god. And then they had mounted the bodies of Saul and his sons the decapitated bodies apparently on the wall of the city of Beth-shan which was one of the cities the Philistines took over when the Israelites fled.

And therefore the bodies of these men were there to be left to the vultures to eat as they hung on the wall left to this kind of undignified treatment. And the men of Jabesh-Gilead who felt a debt to Saul because Saul's first courageous exploits when he first became king was to rescue these very people from Jabesh-Gilead from the attackers of the Ammonites who wanted to put their eyes out. And so Saul had been their hero they had been very much indebted to him from his earliest exploits.

And so just as Saul to save Jabesh-Gilead had marched all night to rescue them these men at least many of them probably an armed group from Jabesh-Gilead marched all night and probably by night stole the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and the other sons and took them back probably wrapped them up took them back across the river into Jabesh-Gilead which is on the east of the Jordan. And they burned them first of all probably for a couple of reasons one would be so that their bodies would no longer be something the Philistines could recover and show indignity to also probably to destroy the signs of the abuse they'd suffered. And their bones which didn't burn were given a decent burial under a tree.

And so David heard about that and they said that was a courageous thing you men of Jabesh-Gilead did. You risked your lives in order to show honor to a man that you had a genuine debt to and I commend you for that. And he says I'm going to show kindness to you.

I'm now the new king in Judah. And he might have been saying I'd be glad to have you with me. I'd be glad to have I'd like to be your king too.

He didn't say as much. He just said I'm going to show kindness to you. And that left open the possibility that they might choose to be in his kingdom as opposed to Ish-bosheth's.

But if not he was not going to be an enemy to them. He was not going to you know ever be their enemy since he admired what they had done. Verse 8 But Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahaniam.

Now Mahaniam is the place of two camps. If you remember in Genesis when Jacob was returning into Israel from Syria where he'd been for 20 years as he crossed into Israel he saw two camps of angels. He saw an army of angels and his own camps.

He named the place Mahaniam two camps because there was a camp of angels he saw and his own camp. And so this was on the border of Israel on the eastern side. Ish-bosheth apparently had been rescued by Abner from the indignity and death that his brothers and father had suffered and had taken him across the Jordan to a relatively safer place and installed him as king.

Now Abner is the one who made Ish-bosheth king. Abner was the general the chief of

staff of the army. And he made Ish-bosheth king over Gilead, over the Asherites, over Jezreel, over Ephraim, over Benjamin, and over all Israel.

Now Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, was 40 years old when he began to reign over Israel. And he reigned for two years. Only the house of Judah followed David.

And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months. Now there's a bit of a chronological thing to work out here because we will find that Ish-bosheth dies after two years reigning. And David then is accepted as the king by all of Israel.

When Ish-bosheth is out of the way, Israel no longer seeks an heir of Saul, but they seek David to be their king. So David became king over all of Israel, but that was after seven and a half years reigning in Hebron over Judah. But he became king of Israel when Ish-bosheth died.

But Ish-bosheth only reigned for two years. And David reigned for seven and a half years. After the death of Saul.

So what happened to the other five and a half years of Ish-bosheth? In other words, if Ish-bosheth became king as soon as Saul died, and David became king in Judah as soon as Saul died, if they began their reign at the same time, and Ish-bosheth's death marked the end of David's limited reign and the beginning of his universal reign, how was it that Ish-bosheth's reign was only two years and David's was seven and a half? The solution would seem to require that Ish-bosheth was not installed immediately after Saul's death. It's possible that he was such a weakling, and he really was a weak man, that even Abner wasn't sure whether he should install him as king. He'd be such a weak leader.

It's possible that Israel was ruled over by the army, by martial law. Perhaps that Abner himself ruled temporarily until it could be decided what to do with the throne. And after maybe five and a half years, perhaps of grooming Ish-bosheth, perhaps trying to get him to the place where he could be a respectable king, he finally installed him.

Probably after David had already been reigning in Judah for five and a half years. And then Ish-bosheth was installed and reigned for two years. So that when Ish-bosheth was killed, after two years, David had reigned for seven and a half by that time.

Another possibility always exists, and that is that the numbers have somehow been altered in the transmission of the text. I always mention that because that's a possibility that sometimes happens. But it's not necessary to think so.

It is possible to imagine that Abner ruled the country as a military leader until such a time as Ish-bosheth could be thought suited to be the ruler. Now, Ish-bosheth was 40 years old when he began to rule. If that was, as I've suggested, possibly five years after the death of Saul, Saul reigned for 40 years, that would mean Ish-bosheth had been born

five years into the reign of Saul.

That is, Saul had reigned for five years when Ish-bosheth was born. Saul died then when Ish-bosheth was 35, and five more years have passed now, so he's 40 when he begins to rule. That's one way to work those numbers.

And that would make Ish-bosheth just five years older than David, because David then would be 35 when Ish-bosheth came to power, if this scenario is correct. Anyway, those chronological things are not the easiest in the world to work out. But let's look at this strange story that follows.

Now Abner, the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. Now, this is the forces of the northern kingdom under Ish-bosheth. Apparently, now that Ish-bosheth is in power of a sort, it's time to try to recover Judah for the house of Saul, which now is being ruled over by David.

And Joab, the son of Zeruah, and the servants of David went out to meet them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down one on one side of the pool and one on the other side of the pool. Then Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise and compete before us.

And Joab said, Let them arise. So they arose and went over by number, 12 from Benjamin, followers of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, and 12 from the servants of David. And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side, so they fell down together.

Therefore that place was called the field of sharp swords, which is in Gibeon. So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David. Now, we're not finished considering that, but let's try to figure out what's really going on here.

It's a strange story. What is really going on? Well, of course, Joab, the son of Zeruah, Joab is David's cousin, and the general, sort of the default general of his army. He's not been appointed in a formal sense like he was after he conquered Jerusalem, but for the time being, Joab was serving as David's chief military officer since David was no longer leading armies.

He was now a king, not a fighter. Joab was David's cousin. Zeruah was the sister of David.

You read of this in 1 Chronicles 2, verses 15 and 16. It mentions the sons of Jesse, David being the seventh in that list on verse 15. And the next verse, 1 Chronicles 2, 16, mentions, and their sisters were, and one of them was Zeruah.

So, where most men are referred to by their father's name, son of usually means son of

whoever their father is, these men, which are Joab, Azahel, and Abishai, they're always called the sons of Zeruah, probably because it was through Zeruah that they were connected to David. Therefore, their mother's identity was more important than their father's, because she was a relative of the king. And so, they are cousins of the king.

Anyway, Joab is the leader of David's armies. Abner, the leader of Ishbosheth's armies. They meet at this place called the Pool of Gibeon.

This pool is actually in Ishbosheth's territory, not David's. And therefore, it's interesting, it would appear that Joab was the aggressor. Joab took his troops into Ishbosheth's territory for this confrontation.

This pool has been unearthed by archaeologists. It's cut out of solid stone. And it's about 36 feet in diameter.

It's a large pool. Why they met there is not told. And what exactly they did there is not explained.

But we have to read between the lines, I guess. They picked 12 men from each side, probably champions, and had them fight each other simultaneously. Now, this was either just for sport, or more likely, it was a contest of champions, a little bit like when David faced Goliath.

The idea being, let's not just kill each other off. After all, we're all Israelites. Why should Israelites kill Israelites? Instead of having a major war, where we're all killing our own brothers off, our own cousins, our fellow Israelites, why don't we just have a contest of champions, just like the Philistines had done? They sent out their champion.

We sent out ours. We defeated him. And the war was essentially won on our side.

And so the idea would be, probably, let's have 12 of your champions and 12 of ours fight. Now, why not one? Probably 12 was representative of the number of the total tribes of Israel. The idea being, whichever side would win would rule all 12 tribes.

Each man, although they were all from the tribe of Benjamin on one side, and all from the tribe of Judah on the other, probably represented the 12 men, 12 tribes, so that whichever side would win, the 12 men standing would represent the 12 tribes going over to the side of the winner. So that instead of there being war, there could be a decision made whether David's going to rule everybody or whether Ish-bosheth's going to rule all 12 tribes. And so here the two generals sit down like spectators.

Instead of fighting each other, they get their champions up there. And it turned out rather strange, because when they said, let the games begin, there wasn't much of a contest. The men were pretty well matched.

Each man grabbed the head of the other guy and stuck his sword into him. That means everyone got stabbed at the same moment. And they all dropped dead.

Kind of an ugly scene. But it left the decision of who's going to reign the whole nation undecided. So that had to be decided by conventional war.

It didn't work out to do it that way with the representatives. So it says, when these men all fell down dead, it says that there was a war then. In verse 17, there was a very fierce battle in that day.

And Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David. Let me quickly take the rest of this chapter. There's just one story that's rather interesting.

Now the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab and Abishai and Azahel. These were all valiant men. Azahel was particularly a fast runner.

Not a particularly smart man. Not a particularly valiant fighter. But a real fast runner.

I guess if you're fast and smart, that can serve you well. This man was fast but not very smart. And so he pursued after Abner.

As the children of Israel and Abner's troops were in retreat and fleeing, Azahel didn't want to let Abner get away. And in going, he did not turn. He says, so Azahel pursued Abner.

And of course, he was fast. So he was able to catch up with Abner. And Abner could not escape him.

And in going, he did not turn from the right hand or to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, are you Azahel? And he said, I am. Here they're running together.

No doubt very much out of breath, but having a conversation. And Abner said to him, turn aside to your right hand or to your left and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself. There's a lot of dead bodies around here.

Why don't you stop and collect some armor for yourself? Armor is at a premium in those days. And you could actually get yourself a nice suit of armor if you just leave me alone and just plunder some of the dead. But Azahel would not turn aside from following him.

So Abner said again to Azahel, turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab? I mean, Joab was an intimidating guy. Even David was intimidated by Joab.

And Azahel was not quite so intimidating. He was probably a lighter weight guy, probably thin. He was probably like a runner rather than like a wrestler or like a fighter.

And so he says, listen, I could strike you to the ground, but I'm not looking forward to facing your brother about that. Your brother Joab scares me. So don't make me kill you.

However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore, Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of his spear so that the spear came out of his back. So it's not even the sharp end.

And Abner was a pretty strong man himself. And he was able to actually pierce this man through without a sharp instrument, the blunt end of the spear. And so he fell down there and died on the spot, but not instantly.

He died slowly, unfortunately. So it was that as many as came to the place where Azahel fell down and died stood still. Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner.

And the sun was going down when they came to the hill of Amnah, or Ammah, which is before Giah by the road to the wilderness of Gibeon. Now the children of Benjamin gathered together behind Abner and became a unit and took their stand on the top of a hill. Then Abner called to Joab and said, shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren? See, this war was a civil war between Israelites and Israelites.

That's no doubt why they tried to settle it without a war in the first place. Why will we allow Israelite swords to consume Israelite men? Why don't you turn back? Are you just going to try to wipe out the whole family? And Joab said, as God lives, unless you had spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren. Then Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore.

Then Abner and his men went on all that night through the plain, crossed over the Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim, back to headquarters. Now Joab returned from pursuing Abner, and when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants, 19 men and Azahel. But the servants of David had struck down of Benjamin and Abner's men 360 men who died.

So David's forces were definitely more skilled, more aggressive, and more successful. Here was a battle between two armies. 20 Jews fell, and 360 Israelites fell, very unbalanced.

Then they took up Azahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak. So both generals have gone back to headquarters, back to their kings.

And this was the first attempt to reunite the tribes under one king after Saul's death. David had ruled for five and a half years or so over Judah, and Ish-bosheth had just been

made ruler in the northern kingdom, and it just seemed now that there's a king in Israel, might as well try to reunite the kingdom under him. But it wasn't going to happen.

They tried to do it through a contest. It didn't work. They tried to do it through war, and really, clearly Ish-bosheth's troops lost that battle.

But Joab didn't press his victory and go on and claim the whole country for David. He went back to Hebron, and that ended that particular episode. And we'll stop there and come back to the next episode.