

2 Samuel 1

March 31, 2021

In the lament that closes this chapter we can discern the voice of David, the “sweet psalmist of Israel.” Its poetic skill could easily rank it among the seventy three psalms that he wrote.

But there is one glaring difference. Where is God in this poem? Not present. It is a purely secular elegy, listing Saul’s military accomplishments (with apparent sincerity) but never linking his life with the Lord. One is reminded of funeral orations where the speaker, unable to praise the deceased’s religious life, concedes that he was at least a good provider.

And this is the basic difference between the reign of Saul, now concluded, and the reign of David, about to begin. David will have his failures of judgment and of morals, some shocking. But David is always in contact with the Lord. The priest Abiathar and the prophet Gad accompanied him in exile and he will restore the ranks of both priests and prophets as king. Even more important, we have in the psalms a record of David’s constant inner engagement with God, seeking to know His mind and do His will, ever with praise and thanksgiving.

Saul’s history is a reminder that achievement and success in the world, even to the benefit of God’s people, is but dust if accomplished independently of God.

As for man, his days are like grass;

he flourishes like a flower of the field;

for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,

and its place knows it no more.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to

everlasting on those who fear him,

and his righteousness to children's children,

to those who keep his covenant

and remember to do his commandments.

The Lord has established his throne in the heavens,

and his kingdom rules over all (Pslam 103:15-19).

Notes

1:18 The Hebrew reads literally that “the bow” should be taught to the people of Judah. It probably means that David’s song, set to a tune called “the bow,” was to be taught as a lasting memorial to Saul and Jonathan.

The Book of Jashar, also mentioned in Joshua 10:13, was probably a collection of poems. It is not part of scripture and no copies have survived.

Questions for study and discussion:

1. 1 Samuel chapter 31 tells us that Saul took his own life but here the Amalekite says he killed Saul. How do you explain the discrepancy?
2. What can we learn about David’s character from his reaction to the news of Saul’s death?

3. Is it possible that the Amalekite actually has Saul's crown and armlet?
4. Why are the daughters of the Philistines not to learn of Saul's death? How are the daughters of Israel supposed to react to it?
5. David invokes a curse upon Mount Gilboa in verse 21. Where else in scripture is a curse put upon the ground?