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Edited by R. O. Hutchinson

Excerpt

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THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL

A. DAVID, KING OF JUDAH. I.-IV.

i. 1-16. *How David received the News of Saul's Death.*

AND it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag ; it came even 2 to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head : and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance. And David said 3 unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped. And 4 David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, The people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead ; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also. And David 5

i. 1. And it came &c. Carrying on 1 Sam. xxxi. The two books form only one in the Hebrew. A band of Arabs had looted Keilah, David's headquarters, in his absence. After a successful pursuit he was resting at Ziklag (somewhere in the Negeb, or south country), where the news of Saul's death reached him.

2. the third day. After David had reached Ziklag.

a man came. Runners were the usual news-carriers in Palestine, horses being scarce (cf. Ahimaaz and the Cushite, ch. xviii.). From Mt Gilboa, the scene of the battle, to Ziklag was about 100 miles.

3. escaped. The one word tells the story of disaster.

4. Note David's anxiety to hear ; the man's hesitation to tell (cf. a similar reticence xviii. 32). This and the battle of Aphek (1 Sam. iv.) were two of the worst disasters in the annals of Israel.

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2

2 SAMUEL

I 5-12

said unto the young man that told him, How knowest
 6 thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead? And the
 young man that told him said, As I happened by chance
 upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear;
 and, lo, the chariots and the horsemen followed hard after
 7 him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and
 8 called unto me. And I answered, Here am I. And he
 said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am
 9 an Amalekite. And he said unto me, Stand, I pray thee,
 beside me, and slay me, for anguish hath taken hold of
 10 me; because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood
 beside him, and slew him, because I was sure that he
 could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the
 crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was
 on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.
 11 Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and
 12 likewise all the men that were with him: and they
 mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and
 for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and
 for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the

6. As I happened. The Amalekite was either a slave or a camp follower. His account of Saul's death does not agree with that in 1 Sam. xxxi. There, Saul killed himself; and other details differ. This account (6-10, 13-16) may be taken from some other document. In the confusion of defeat different versions would be published. (See *Introd.* p. ix.)

9. anguish (marg. 'giddiness'). If Saul became dizzy in his flight and was seen leaning upon his sword for support, that would explain how the report spread that he had fallen upon his sword (1 Sam. xxxi. 4).

10. crown. A small circlet worn round the helmet.

bracelet. Such as are seen on the monuments of Assyrian and Egyptian kings, and are still worn by Eastern monarchs.

12. until even. Easterns reckon the day from sunset to sunset.

the people of the Lord. The fallen troops were Jehovah's consecrated warriors fighting His battles against His foes, i.e. foreigners, worshippers of foreign and rival gods (*Introd.* p. xv.).

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I 12-18

2 SAMUEL

3

sword. And David said unto the young man that told **13** him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite. And David said unto him, **14** How wast thou not afraid to put forth thine hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed? And David called one of **15** the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died. And David said unto **16** him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD'S anointed.

17-27. *David's Dirge.*

This sublime song of David is one of the oldest passages in the Old Testament. A later poet, writing in David's name, would undoubtedly (1) have recalled in some way Saul's persecution, and (2) have given a more distinctly religious tone to the poem. It was at first handed down traditionally (hence the text is in parts so corrupt that it is sometimes almost impossible to know the exact meaning): then it found a place in the Book of Jashar, whence the compiler of Samuel took it.

And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul **17** and over Jonathan his son: and he bade them teach the **18** children of Judah *the song of the bow*: behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.

13. a stranger (Heb. *gêr*). One living in Israel as a free man, though of foreign race.

14. For David's own reverence for Saul's sacred person, see 1 Sam. xxiv. 6, xxvi. 11, 16. Saul's armour-bearer dared not kill him even at his own request (*ib.* xxxi. 4).

17. It was usual among the ancients to chant dirges over fallen heroes. So David sang over Abner (iii. 33 f.), and Jeremiah over Josiah (2 Chron. xxxv. 25).

18. the song of the bow. Not a likely title for the dirge. Probably the text is corrupt. 'The song of' is not in the Hebrew; and 'the bow' is not in the LXX. 'And he bade them' means 'and he said'; which seems like the introduction to the song. Transposing the clause to the end of the verse, and omitting 'the song of the bow,' we can read, slightly changing the text, 'And he said, Weep, O Judah.'

the book of Jashar. Probably a collection of ancient national poetry, commemorating the great events and heroes of Hebrew history (Josh. x. 13).

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4

2 SAMUEL

I 19-23

- 19 Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!
How are the mighty fallen!
- 20 Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon;
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
- 21 Ye mountains of Gilboa,
Let there be no dew nor rain upon you, neither fields
of offerings:
For there the shield of the mighty was vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.
- 22 From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the
mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.
- 23 Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their
lives,
And in their death they were not divided;

19. The supreme disgrace was that the Philistines, who were lowlanders, should have routed so utterly the flower of Israel's chivalry among their native hills.

20. This verse is an excellent example of the parallelism, or repetition of the same idea in varying words, which is the chief characteristic of Hebrew poetry. Cf. *vv.* 22, 23.

21. **fields of offerings.** David curses the very ground that drank the blood of Israel's heroes. But the text appears to be corrupt. One early Greek version has, 'O mountains of death.' **vilely cast away.** i.e. cast away and defiled with dust.

not anointed with oil. Either (1) of the shield, left uncared for: or (2) of Saul (marg. 'as of one not anointed'); as though it were the shield of a common mortal, not a king, its glory gone with the life of its mighty lord.

22. Saul's sword and Jonathan's bow were like tireless birds of prey.

23. **lovely and pleasant** (or 'kindly'). This throws light upon Saul's real character before it was darkened by disease; brave, heroic, generous, tender to his sons. David never ceased to love and revere him, even when persecuted by him. This generous consideration for the affliction of his enemy shews the nobility of his own nature.

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I 23-27, II 1-3	2 SAMUEL	5
They were swifter than eagles,		
They were stronger than lions.		
Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,		24
Who clothed you in scarlet delicately,		
Who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.		
How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!		25
Jonathan is slain upon thy high places.		
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:		26
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me:		
Thy love to me was wonderful,		
Passing the love of women.		
How are the mighty fallen,		27
And the weapons of war perished!		

ii. 1-4a. *David, King of Judah.*

And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of **2** the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron. So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam **2** the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And his men that were with him did David bring **3**

24. In his earlier years Saul had greatly bettered the position of Israel by his military successes. Probably disease had robbed him (as Napoleon) of his skill.

27. the weapons of war. i.e. Saul and Jonathan.

ii. 1. David inquired of the Lord. Patient reliance on the Divine Will was one of David's chief virtues. The method of inquiry seems to have been by the ephod, probably a portable case or pouch holding the sacred lots (Urim and Thummim). A question was asked and the lots were cast, one signifying 'yes' and the other 'no.'

Go up. From low-lying Ziklag, where he had been under the protection of the Philistines apparently in active hostility against Judah (1 Sam. xxvii. 10-12).

Hebron. The chief town of Judah, strongly situated.

2. Jezreel and Carmel were small places near Hebron, not the more famous places of the same name in Northern Israel.

For David's romantic wooing of Abigail at Carmel, see 1 Sam. xxv.

up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the
 4 cities of Hebron. And the men of Judah came, and
 there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

4b-7. *David's Embassy to Gilead.*

And they told David, saying, The men of Jabesh-gilead
 5 were they that buried Saul. And David sent messengers
 unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them,
 Blessed be ye of the LORD, that ye have shewed this
 kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried
 6 him. And now the LORD shew kindness and truth unto
 you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because
 7 ye have done this thing. Now therefore let your hands
 be strong, and be ye valiant: for Saul your lord is dead,
 and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over
 them.

8-11. *Ishbosheth, King of Israel.*

8 Now Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, had
 taken Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over

4. **they anointed David king.** The pouring of oil over the king's head endowed him with the Spirit of Jehovah and made his person sacred. David was acceptable to the men of Judah, both as a clansman, and as one who had given them substantial proofs of his friendship (see 1 Sam. xxx. 26 ff.).

5. **this kindness.** Saul had earned the devotion of the Gileadites by his succour of Jabesh from the Ammonites (1 Sam. xi.).

7. **let your hands be strong.** Being king *de facto*, and possibly ignorant of Ishbosheth's claim, David urges Gilead to prepare for war against the Philistines. Eastern Israel, however, held to Saul's house, though the kingship was not yet hereditary.

8. **Abner.** Saul's first cousin (1 Sam. xiv. 50) and commander-in-chief, and now the chief support of Saul's house. To have held together Northern and Eastern Israel for seven years in the face of Judaeans, Philistine and probably Moabite and Ammonite hostility, proves him a man of skill and power. David regarded him with great respect (iii. 38; 1 Sam. xxvi. 15).

Ishbosheth. His name was Ishbaal (1 Chron. viii. 33) = man of Baal'; but the editor, to avoid using the word Baal, altered

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II 8-14

2 SAMUEL

7

to Mahanaim; and he made him king over Gilead, and 9
 over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim,
 and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. (Ish-bosheth 10
 Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign
 over Israel, and he reigned two years.) But the house of
 Judah followed David. And the time that David was 11
 king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years
 and six months.

12-17. *Abner's Expedition against Gibeon.*

And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish- 12
 bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to
 Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants 13
 of David, went out, and met them by the pool of Gibeon;
 and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool,
 and the other on the other side of the pool. And Abner 14
 said to Joab, Let the young men, I pray thee, arise and

the name to Ishbosheth ('man of shame'). So Mephibosheth (iv. 4) stands for Meribbaal (1 Chron. viii. 34), Jerubbesheth (xi. 21) for Jerubbaal (Judg. vii. 1).

Mahanaim. An important town E. of the Jordan, N. of the Jabbok. It was afterwards David's headquarters during Absalom's rebellion (xvii. 24).

9. Gilead. All Israelite territory, E. of the Jordan.

the Ashurites &c. All the rest of Israel except Judah.

10. two years. David was king in Hebron $7\frac{1}{2}$ years. Ish-bosheth must have reigned in Mahanaim for a similar period. Perhaps $5\frac{1}{2}$ years were occupied in establishing his position: and for two years only was his rule acknowledged.

12. It is possible that Abner had heard that the Gibeonites, who had a blood-feud with Saul (xxi. 1 ff.), were helping David.

13. Joab. The first mention of this striking personality. He was David's nephew, son of Zeruiah, David's sister. He was a skilful and successful commander-in-chief. He defeated the Ammonites, capturing their capital; conquered Edom; crushed the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba. He killed by treachery his two possible rivals, Abner and Amasa. He was fierce and revengeful, and, though entirely faithful to David, he had no sympathy with his religious aspirations and reforms.

14. To avoid civil war Abner proposed that the question should be decided by a combat of picked champions.

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8

2 SAMUEL

II 14-23

15 play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise. Then they arose and went over by number; twelve for Benjamin, and for Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the 16 servants of David. And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and *thrust* his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called 17 Helkath-hazzurim, which is in Gibeon. And the battle was very sore that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.

18-23. *The Death of Asahel.*

18 And the three sons of Zeruiah were there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as 19 a wild roe. And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from 20 following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him, and 21 said, Is it thou, Asahel? And he answered, It is I. And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn 22 aside from following of him. And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I 23 hold up my face to Joab thy brother? Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him in the belly, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.

16. **Helkath-hazzurim.** 'The field of sharp knives' (marg.). The LXX reads Helkath-hazzodim, 'the field of liers in wait.'

21. **Turn thee aside.** If Asahel desires spoil, let him attack some less expert warrior. Asahel, the youngest of the three brothers, was probably still a youth.

23. **the hinder end of the spear.** Being tipped with iron, a strong stroke backward was sufficient to kill.

24-32. *The Pursuit.*

But Joab and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun ²⁴ went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon. And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one band, and stood on the top of an hill. Then Abner called to Joab, ²⁵ and said, Shall the sword devour for ever? knowest thou not that it will be bitterness in the latter end? how long shall it be then, ere thou bid the people return from following their brethren? And Joab said, As God liveth, ²⁶ if thou hadst not spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone away, nor followed every one his brother. So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the people stood still, ²⁷ and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more. And Abner and his men went all that night ²⁸ through the Arabah; and they passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and came to Mahanaim. And ²⁹ Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. But the servants of ³⁰ David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, *so that* three hundred and threescore men died. And ³¹ they took up Asahel, and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Beth-lehem. And Joab and his

24. the hill of Ammah &c. These obscure landmarks were evidently familiar to the writer.

25. Abner rallies his men for a last stand.

26 f. Abner appeals to Joab not to embitter further the hostility between Israel and Judah by fresh bloodshed. Joab throws the responsibility of fighting upon Abner's challenge (*v.* 14). The armies had not come to fight.

29. the Arabah. The Jordan Valley. This Abner's men crossed, and mounted by the **Bithron** ('ravine'), a watercourse leading them eastward to Mahanaim.

30 f. The disparity between Joab's and Abner's losses shews that the Israelite levies were no match for David's veterans.

