II Samuel ch.1
"*Responses to the Death of Saul*"

Introduction:

With the opening of this new book, the account of the history of the early Israelite monarchy moves into its second stage, the era of King David. And in this portion of the story, the narrator begins by focusing the reader's attention on the end of Saul's life, his death and that of his sons on Mount Gilboa (things that were recorded at the conclusion of the previous book-I Sam.31). This episode in the story emphasizes David's grief, especially as expressed in his elegy of Saul and Jonathan. The fall of Saul and his house was pre-ordained by God, and in one sense it was a necessary stage in David's rise to power, but at the same time it was also a tragedy for the nation, and David treated it as such.

Conservative Biblical scholars have long observed that the Spirit of God guided the composition of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings in conscious dependence on the revelation given in the Book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy God through Moses challenged the Israelites to live in obedience to the covenant that He had made with them in the land that He had given to them. From there the historical narratives of Joshua through Kings record how generations of Israelites responded to God's admonitions through Moses. In these books, the reader will notice numerous patterns that repeat themselves as the stories in the narratives unfold. At the beginning of the Book of Joshua, we are told that what happened under Joshua's leadership took place "*after the death of Moses*". At the beginning of the Book of Judges, we are told that those events followed "*after the death of Joshua*". These notations inform the reader that what follows is a chronicle of a new phase in Israel's history. In the Book of Joshua, we read about the era of the initial conquest of Canaan. In the Book of Judges, we read about the era of the disintegration of Israel as a cohesive nation that continually failed to be obedient to God's admonitions through Moses. In the same way we are informed at the beginning of this Book that what takes place next took place "*after the death of Saul*." This informs us that once again we are reading about a new phase of Israel's history. This phase of Israel's history was the beginning of what would be the closest thing to a golden age that Israel would ever have. The Davidic kingdom (for a time carried on by Solomon) would come closer to fulfilling the ideal of the Deuteronomic instruction than any other period in Israel's history, and this would bring the greatest time of blessing in Israel's history.

In this chapter, which functions as the first part of the portion of the Book devoted to the transition from the rule of Saul to the rule of David, we read how David spontaneously displayed his loyalty, respect, and admiration for his fallen king. David, having learned of Saul's death from a man who claimed to have killed Saul, does not rejoice or reward the man who killed his enemy, instead he has the man executed for the hubris of acting against God's chosen servant. Then, grief stricken, David uttered a stirring tribute to both the fallen king and the king's son who was David's dearest friend. The words he uttered gave testimony to David's

solidarity with Israel's first dynastic family. David's reaction to the death of Saul, a man who had been his enemy for many years tells us a lot about David's character. It shows the respect that David had for God and for His decrees, and it reveals once again why he was the ideal choice to be Israel's next king.

Finally, in the closing of First Samuel (chs.30-31) Saul's defeat at Gilboa was subordinated to David's minor victory over the Amalekite raiders. The point of the contrast was to convey that David's minor victory would prove to be more significant in the long run for Israel, than the devastating defeat that Saul had suffered. This was to emphasize the idea that David represented the future that God intended for Israel.

I. <u>The Report of Saul's Death to David</u>: (vs.1-16)

In verses one and two we read, "*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.*" The notation that Saul was already dead as this account begins, among other things, ties the narrative in this chapter to the events that were recorded in First Samuel chapters thirty and thirty-one. We are also told that the events recorded here were after David and his men had returned from "*from the slaughter of the Amalekites*". The engagement had required David and his men to pursue the Amalekite raiders into southern Canaan and the northern portion of the Sinai Peninsula (which was the Amalekites' native territory), a journey that had taken them far from the field of battle where Saul and Jonathan had died. In the account of the Amalekites' attack on Ziklag we are told that those raiders burned the town (30:2). This might give modern readers the impression that there was not much of a town for David and his men to return to. However, it is helpful to understand that homes and other structures in Canaan at that time were not constructed of wood, but rather they were built with stone and mud bricks. Therefore, the fires would have destroyed crops and property, but they would not have consumed the structures themselves that were in the town, so there would have been a standing town for the men to return to.

According to the narrative, David and his men had been back for two days after their attack on the Amalekites. During the time they had been back, the messenger was travelling from the site of the battle to Ziklag, meaning that the timeline would have been that David had arrived back at Ziklag in the latter part of the day of the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. It would have taken a runner three days to travel the ninety miles from Mount Gilboa to Ziklag. Since the man arrived at Ziklag three days after David returned from the conflict with the Amalekites, this reinforces the conclusion that the events recorded in chapters thirty and thirty-one took place simultaneously.

There are a number of things to take note of that can help the reader interpret the overall story. First, it is significant that the messenger went to David and not to Saul's only remaining son Ishbosheth. This would seem to indicate that he

anticipated that David, rather than Ishbosheth, would be the next king. Second, David must have realized immediately that the man was bearing bad news, for he was displaying the customary outward signs of grief (clothes torn and with dust on his head - I Sam.4:12; II Sam.13:31; Job 2:12). David could tell from the messenger's appearance that one of the armies had suffered a tragic defeat. But because he did not know who the messenger was, it was impossible to discern from mere appearances which side had lost, it could have either been Achish and the Philistines or Saul and the Israelites who had suffered a defeat. It should be noted that if the man was lying about the events that he recounted to David (a matter that will be examined later in the study), his gestures of having torn clothing and dirt on his head may have been planned to lend dramatic weight to his story. Third, it is hard to miss the irony of an Amalekite making a beeline to David to inform him of Saul's death and prostrating himself before David as he did so. At the same time, it must be remembered that there are two things that are known to the reader that were not known to either David or the Amalekite. David did not know at this point that the messenger was in fact an Amalekite, and the messenger did not know that David had just returned from a decisive victory over the Amalekites.

The reader should also note that what we read here in verses two through five echoes a similar account. In First Samuel (4:12-17) we read about a messenger who reports on a battle to Eli the head priest. The point of the similarity seems to be that the author of Samuel wanted to establish a deliberate connection between the two stories in order to set up an analogy between the fates of Saul's house and that of Eli's. These parallel stories indicate that God has established a providential connection between a leader's conduct with his fate and the fate of his house. A degenerate leader, whether it is himself who has sinned or his sons, will ultimately be deposed and come to a tragic end. For just as Eli and his sons died on the same day, so did Saul and his sons.

In verse three we read, "*And David said to him, 'Where have you come from?' So he said to him, 'I have escaped from the camp of Israel*.'" David's desire to know where the man had come from was doubtlessly prompted by the man's appearance. The question "*where do you come from*" did not represent the same question that David will ask later in this narrative (vs.13), even though it is phrased similarly in English (*where are you from?*). Here David was asking a geographical question, while later he would ask about the man's ethnic background. The messenger answered that he had escaped from the Israelite camp. As is true with the English translation, the Hebrew word translated as "*escaped*" usually carried the sense of eluding some sort of danger. This would indicate that he was saying that in some sense he was a part of the Israelite force that had been defeated by the Philistines.

In verse four we read, "*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*.'" News from the northern battlefield would have been particularly important to David since it would contain information regarding people, whether Israelites or Philistines, who were

playing key roles in shaping his life. Quite naturally, therefore, David asked about what had happened. In response, the messenger described an absolute military rout, where the entire Israelite army had fled from the enemy, with many injured and dead. Worst of all, King Saul and the primary heir to the throne, Jonathan, were dead. The Hebrew word translated as "*the people*" is used in Samuel at various times to refer either to the populace in general, or to those serving in the army, and here it refers to the soldiers. Since only the death of Jonathan is mentioned (when there were three sons who died in the recent battle) it suggests one of two things. Either this man was aware that Jonathan and David shared a close relationship, or Jonathan was mentioned because he was the son destined to take the throne after his father.

In verse five we read, "*So David said to the young man who told him, 'How do you know that Saul and Jonathan his son are dead?*" The messenger's claims—if true—were so serious and tragic that David refused to accept them at face value; instead, he probed into the credibility of the messenger's information source. David wanted to ascertain whether the man was passing on rumors or facts. In this verse, the author identified the messenger as a "*young*" man. The Hebrew term "*na'ar*" could also refer to someone who was in a subordinate position like a servant, an attendant, or possibly even a low-ranking soldier.

In verse six we begin to read the messenger's account of what took place on the battlefield, "*Then 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*.'" The messenger began his report to David by stating that he "*happened*" (a better rendering of the Hebrew is "*just happened*") to be on Mount Gilboa (which was the scene of Saul's last battle). And there he encountered the wounded Saul, who was supporting himself by leaning on his spear. Meanwhile, Philistine chariots (which were feared by the other ancient Near Eastern people of the time) were almost upon him.

In verses seven and eight we read, "*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'*." According to the messenger, at this point Saul saw him and called out to him. The man replied with the response commonly used by servants that here is translated as "*here I am*", but which conveys the idea "*what can I do for you?*" Then the messenger said that Saul replied, "*who are you?*", a question Saul might have asked to make sure that the man was not a Philistine, or an agent of the Philistines, who might abuse the Israelite king if he had the chance. The young man then identified himself as an Amalekite. It is surprising that this individual would admit his ethnicity to both Saul in the past and David here, since both of these men had in the past waged campaigns against the Amalekites.

In verses nine and ten we read, "*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 had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his*

arm, and have brought them here to my lord.'" The Amalekite's account of what took place at Saul's death deviates in several important respects from that given in First Samuel chapter thirty-one. These differences can be seen when we look at the two passages side by side:

I Samuel 31:2-6	II Samuel 1:6-10
2 Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. 3 The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. 5 And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. 6 So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.	6 Then 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. 7 Now when he looked behind him, he saw me and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' 8 And he said to me, 'Who are you?' So I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite'. 9 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'. 10 So I stood over him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord."

The question that arises when we look at these two accounts of the same incident is, how do we explain these discrepancies without in some way undermining the doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture? There are basically three proposed explanations that are offered regarding how to view these accounts:

1. The narrator has transmitted two mutually contradictory accounts that derived from separate literary sources that were used as references when the author composed this book
2. The accounts can be harmonized so that both are essentially saying the same things (for example when Saul's armor-bearer refused to kill him, the king tried to fall on his own sword but was too weak to do so. Saul then turned and saw the Amalekite, who, in response to the king's request, complied by killing him. Then, after the Amalekite had taken the king's crown and armlet and fled, Saul's armor-bearer killed himself)
3. One of the two accounts is false

The first proposed answer is unacceptable because it is rooted in the belief that the Bible is purely a human creation and therefore contains multiple errors. The second proposed answer is flawed because the attempts at harmonization simply gloss over the important differences between the accounts without effectively demonstrating how both accounts could still be true. And some of the contradictory elements of the account simply cannot be legitimately harmonized:

I Samuel ch.31	II Samuel ch.1
The king committed suicide	The king was killed by the Amalekite
The king was wounded by archers	The king was a victim of charioteers
The armor-bearer is present	The armor-bearer is absent

The basic mistake made in the first two proposals is the assumption that both accounts represent an attempt to give a faithful account of what transpired at the death of Saul. A far better conclusion is that the Amalekite was lying to David, while the narrator in First Samuel gave an honest objective account of what actually happened. The following details support the conclusion that the Amalekite was lying:

- The idea that Saul was completely alone when he was wounded
- It is inexplicable that Saul would ask to be delivered from a terrible fate at the hand of a hated enemy, by asking for aid from someone who was identified with another equally despised enemy
- The repeated use of the Hebrew expression translated here as "*there was*" (which is normally translated as either "*behold*" or "*lo*"). This is terminology that is more suited to the description of things seen in a dream or vision. Therefore, this might be a hint that the report that follows was a lie.
- The messenger's reference to charioteers pursuing Saul is another hint that the story is a fabrication, because the account in First Samuel makes it clear that in the battle the Israelites fled to the mountains, and a chariot would not be effective in the type of terrain where Saul died. It would have made no sense for the Philistines to have pursued Saul in this way.
- Why would a person who was associated with the Israelite army be lingering around a field of dead soldiers while the Philistines were still in hot pursuit?
- Saul's armor-bearer who witnessed Saul's suicide was so convinced that his master was dead that he took his own life. This conclusion that Saul was dead by someone who likely had significant military experience makes it highly unlikely that Saul survived his own self-inflicted wound.

The reality was most likely that this Amalekite found Saul's body sometime later on the same day that Saul had died, after the Philistine soldiers had moved on to raid the abandoned Israelite cities. This would have been before the Philistines returned to loot the fallen soldiers (which took place the following day). Therefore, the Amalekite was doing the same thing that the Philistines would later do, looting the corpses. Therefore, he was actually an opportunistic thief who had accidentally

stumbled across Saul's corpse and imagined he could give the jewelry and information to David in exchange for a great reward.

It is true that there is no indication in this narrative that David questioned the veracity of the Amalekite's account; on the contrary, he acted on the assumption that the words were true. However, that was because at the time he did not become aware that there was another version of the story. But in the end, this narrative account not only provides interesting historical data but also clears David of any suspicions that may have been aroused by his possession of Saul's royal jewelry. For David had acquired them not by participating in the battle against Saul but they were given to him by someone who claimed to be Saul's killer.

In the messenger's account, he emphasized that Saul was on the verge of death. And so, he pictured himself as acting out of compassion. There is quite an ironic sense to the messenger's story, because Saul had been told by God to eradicate the Amalekites. He chose not to do so and then lied about what actually happened. Now, an Amalekite, was lying about having killed Saul. The height of the irony is that this man should not have survived to see that day.

The crown and armlet were symbols of royal status. These were given to the individual at coronation, and the crown was an emblem worn on the forehead. In the other cultures that surrounded Israel, monarchs would have a number of crowns that were designed to be worn in different circumstances. So, it is possible that this crown would have been one suited to being worn in warfare.

In verses eleven and twelve we read, "*Therefore David 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 evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword*." Undoubtedly, the messenger was surprised by the response of David and his men to the news that Saul was dead. For when David learned that his most determined enemy was dead, he did not rejoice. Instead, he and his men expressed profound grief in response to the news. Having once been a valued member of Saul's court, David undoubtedly recognized the crown and armlet in the hands of the Amalekite. Most likely, David and his men tore their clothes at this point rather than when they first heard the news (vs.4), because they waited until the report of Saul's death was verified to their satisfaction. The anguish was not only for Saul's death but also for the royal family and because the defeat at Gilboa was indeed a national tragedy. The narrator went out of his way to emphasize the depth of David's grief by heaping up verbs that implied lamentation. Just how much this is emphasized is seen in the fact that this is the only place in the Old Testament where all three verbs are used together. David and his men also fasted, but only until the evening. This was apparently David's general practice in such situations. Again, the expression "*the people*" can refer to different groups depending on the context, here it is used to refer to the soldiers that were with Saul and Jonathan who also died in the battle with the Philistines. Even though such expressions of grief would have been expected in a situation like this, it was not perfunctory, but genuine. Interestingly, the only account of deep mourning for Saul in this Book was

led by the person that Saul hated the most and whom he had persecuted for years. In this way David's response here is similar to how Jesus wept over Jerusalem even as the leaders of the Jews were pursuing plans to kill Him.

In verse thirteen we read, "*Then 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*.'" Given what we were told in the last verse (about the men all weeping and fasting until evening), this part of the conversation must have taken place at the end of the day. And therefore, here the narrative returns to the interchange between David and the messenger. Before doing or saying anything else, David inquired about the messenger's ethnicity. In addition to repeating the information that he was an Amalekite (vs.8), the messenger affirmed that he was the son of an "*alien*". The designation "*son of an alien*" meant that this Amalekite was part of a family that had been accepted into Israel as a foreign resident. As such he would have been acquainted with the conflict that existed between Saul and David. The reality was that a resident alien was distinguished from a foreigner who was simply passing through Israel's land. Resident aliens had a special status both with privileges and responsibilities. They were protected by the stipulations of the Law, but at the same time they were bound by the obligations and penalties that were recorded in the Law (Lev.24:22). Therefore, by identifying himself as a resident alien, the messenger revealed to David that he had lived among the Israelites long enough to be well familiar with its values, including the sacrosanct status of Yahweh's anointed. Therefore, if the man had not identified himself in this way, the charge from David most likely would have been framed differently.

In verse fourteen we read, "*So David said to him, 'How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?*" It is helpful for the reader to keep in mind that David had just returned from not only defeating an enemy who had attacked his people, he had engaged in a holy war campaign against the Amalekites in fulfillment of the commandments of the Law of God. Specifically fulfilling a responsibility that Saul had failed to fulfill. Now before him was not only a member of the race that was under the ban from God, he was also claiming to have killed "*Yahweh's anointed*" This phrase pointed to the close relationship that existed between Yahweh and the king, a relationship that made the king sacrosanct in God's sight.

In verse fifteen we read, "*Then David called one of the young men and said, 'Go near, and execute him!' And he struck him so that he died*." At this juncture, the fact that the messenger had not actually killed Saul is not important, because as far as David knows, the man had done it. Therefore, David did not hesitate to execute judgment on him. Because destroying Yahweh's anointed was tantamount to rejecting Yahweh Himself, since killing the king would represent the ultimate rejection of Yahweh's designated leader. And since David had no other account of the incident, he took the Amalekite's story at face value. And so, far from receiving the reward that he had expected, he received the punishment of death. As David would later order his men to execute the murderers of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul (4:12), so here he called one of his men to strike down the young man who had

claimed to have killed Saul. The command to execute "*strike him down*" was a common one in the early days of Israel's monarchy (I Sam.22:18; I Kings 2:29). In this case the subsequent statement, "*So he struck him down*", uses a different verb from that used earlier in the verse, probably to form an inclusio with verse one. The latter verb is the same as that used of David's striking down Goliath (I Sam.17:50). Interestingly, this latter term is used for only the second time in the book with it having the sense of "*execute*". Because of this it creates a parallel with the account of Saul slaying the priests of Yahweh in First Samuel chapter twenty-two. This serves to put Saul's unjust crime in sharp contrast with the actions of David's just retribution. Because Saul had the priests murdered because he perceived that they were loyal to David, whereas David's order to execute the Amalekite was an expression of his loyalty to Saul and ultimately to the will of Yahweh.

The execution of the Amalekite would have further demonstrated that David never had any intention of engaging in or supporting any attack on Saul, regardless of what might be said by David's enemies. For though he had opportunities to kill Saul he would not take the life of God's anointed, nor would he tolerate anyone else in Israel doing so.

In verse sixteen we read, "*So David 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*.'"" The messenger's false testimony, far from ingratiating him with David, had sealed his doom. It is ironic that Saul lost his kingdom because he failed to annihilate the Amalekites, and now one who said he was an Amalekite died because he claimed to have destroyed Saul. No doubt the Amalekite expected David to reward him, and this probably explains why the man had gone to David rather than Ishbosheth, because he was convinced that David would appreciate being told that his rival was dead. In saying that "*your own mouth has testified against you*", David was declaring that the man had willingly confessed to his crime. The point of the statement was to lay the blame on the accused for their death, rather than the fault being on the one who pronounced sentence. In the Old Testament, the word "*testified*" was a forensic term.

The way that this verse is harmonized with the later account of the same incident in 4:10 is that David here pronounced that the execution would take place. He did not do it himself but ordered someone else to do it.

II. David's Lament Over the Death of Saul and Jonathan: (vs.17-27)

In verse seventeen we read, "*Then David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son*". In this lamentation, David did not express anything theological, it was purely an expression of human emotion in response to the sad news of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. This marks the third poem to appear in the books of Samuel. The first was Hannah's thanksgiving song (I Sam.2:1-10), and the second was the women's victory song after the defeat of Goliath and the Philistines (I Sam.18:7). This lament is like a funeral dirge or a eulogy in song. Therefore, this is different from a Psalm of lament. The difference is that in the more usual psalms of lament there is an address to God, petitions are

directed to God, and praise is directed to God for His intervention. Those psalms are oriented around situational crises. However, this is a personal reflection on the loss of two men, who for different reasons, were dear to David. The only other similar lament recorded by David is that which he composed in response to the death of Abner (3:33–34). The poem itself is recorded in verses nineteen through twenty-seven. The repeated phrase in the poem, "*how the mighty have fallen*", expresses the theme of the lament (vs.19, 25, 27). It also, in a sense, functions as bookends (in verses 19 & 27) that bracket everything that is said between the first and last verse of the poem, indicating that what is said in between fleshes out the sense in which these men demonstrated their greatness. The fourfold use of the title "*the mighty*" refers specifically to Saul and Jonathan, not to the fallen Israelite soldiers in general, since this is a lament specifically given in memory of Saul and Jonathan.

In verse eighteen we read, "*and he told them to teach the children of Judah the Song of the Bow; indeed it is written in the Book of Jasher*". Though some scholars dispute this, most have concluded that the words "*the Song of the Bow*" represents the title of the poetic lament. In regard to the title of the song of lament, it is observed that because of the culture of the Hebrew language we find that in the Old Testament the authors were adept at the use of metonymy (a figure of speech where a concept or object is referred to by the name of something closely associated with it), sometimes referring to prominent leaders not by their names or their official titles, but by some common object intended to represent them (i.e., Elijah and Elisha are called the "*chariots and horsemen of Israel*" II Kings 2:12; 13:14). In this case, a bow was one of the weapons that Jonathan gave to David (I Sam.18:4) and with it he signaled to David a warning (I Sam.20:18-22).

Also in this verse, we are informed that David ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament (in Hebrew the words "*the children of Judah*" is a general reference to all those who were descendants of the patriarch Judah, and thus who were of that tribe). The reason that David ordered this was in order to establish a lasting tribute to Israel's first royal family who had given their lives fighting for Israel. It became part of the canon of literature that defined ancient Israelite society. This piece of oral and written literature played the valuable roles of preserving the memory of a crucial event in Israelite history while reinforcing the office of kingship through its portrayal of the king as the agent through whom prosperity was brought to Israel. We are told that the poem was included in "*the Book of Jasher*". This piece of literature, literally entitled "*the Scroll of the Righteous*", is no longer extant; it is believed to have been a work that dealt with the heroic exploits of the Israelites. There is one other Old Testament reference to this literature and that is in the Book of Joshua (10:13).

In verse nineteen we read, "*'The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!*'" The first noun in the poem is translated differently in different versions. As is seen above, the NKJV translates the Hebrew noun as "*beauty*" (as does the NASU & NET), while the ESV translates it as "*glory*", the CSB as "*splendor*", and the NIV as "*gazelle*". All of these are legitimate translations

of the noun. But given the various metaphorical images in the poem, it is likely that the original reader would have read this as a double entendre, bringing to mind the imagery of a gazelle that represented the most glorious and splendid individual in Israel, who is the primary subject of the poem. The imagery of a majestic gazelle, master of the rugged hills of Israel, lying dead in a place of prominence and seeming protection, would vividly reflect the tragic reality of Jonathan's death. What further supports this is that this Hebrew word is used as a simile for a fleet-footed warrior in the immediate context (2:18), and elsewhere (I Chron.12:8). Additionally, Saul and Jonathan are compared to eagles and lions later in this same poem (vs.23), and the simile of a gazelle or deer is employed in connection with heights later in the Book (22:34; cf. Hab 3:19). Therefore, that Jonathan would be compared to a gazelle is entirely appropriate in the context. And although Saul and Jonathan are each named four times in David's lament (Saul-vs.21, 22, 23, 24; Jonathan, vs.22, 23, 25, 26), Jonathan is given prominence of position when the two are first mentioned together (vs.22) and he is also featured alone in one coda (vs.25). It is therefore not surprising that he would be alluded to alone, even if not by name, at the beginning of the poem.

Readers will recognize that the expression "*high places*" was often used in the OT to designate open air worship sites (many of which were not authorized). However, that sense of the expression isn't meant here. Instead, the more basic meaning of the Hebrew word is expressed, a place of elevation, and thus it refers to the topographical higher elevations of Mount Gilboa where Saul and Jonathan fell. In no sense was David slighting Saul, simply giving preference to Jonathan. The pronoun "*your*" modifying the expression "*high places*" has Israel (the land) as its antecedent.

In verse twenty we read, "*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*." Here David warned against speaking about this tragedy in Philistia lest the Philistine maidens rejoice just as the Israelite maidens had sung of the triumphs of Saul and David years before (I Sam.18:7). We are to remember that David had spent sixteen months under the protection of the Philistine city of Gath, but this statement in the song makes it clear that David had remained staunchly loyal to Israel in spite of the gullible Achish being his benefactor during that time. He expressed here that he had no desire that Israel's great loss should become the cause of celebration among the Philistines. It is likely that Gath and Ashkelon are meant to be representative of all the Philistine cities. The cultural history behind this verse is that women were often enlisted to celebrate military victories by singing and dancing in the ancient world. The Hebrew verb translated as "*proclaim*" almost always implies good news—in this case, of course, this would have been good news only from the standpoint of the Philistines. In the course of David's lament, this admonition appears in poetic opposition to the latter instruction to the daughters of Israel to weep for Saul (vs.24).

In verse twenty-one we are, "*O mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor 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 David turned to call down a curse on the mountains of Gilboa, the site of the Israelite defeat where Saul and Jonathan died. Topographically, Gilboa is not a solitary mountain peak, nor a series of peaks, but rather a ridge some eight miles long and three to five miles wide running southeast and south from Jezreel. It forms the watershed between the plain of Esdraelon and the plain around Beth-shean, dropping away sharply to the north and east. It slopes gradually to the west, however, and on this gentle fertile terrain, barley, wheat, figs and olives are grown. It was on this western slope to which rain and dew were denied by the curse of this poem. David was saying that the mountains of Gilboa should be denied life-giving water because it was on Mount Gilboa that Saul and Jonathan's blood had poured out. The Hebrew word translated as "*offerings*" should be rendered as "*terraced fields*" (as in the NIV), because the verbal root word "mwd" means to be made high or exalted. But David did not refer to Saul or Jonathan by name, instead he referred to a desecration of the anointed shield of the mighty ones. This reference relates to a reality at that time that shields were constructed of wood that was overlaid with leather. Because of this the leather had to be treated with oil to maintain it, and so this seems to be a reference to how Saul's and Jonathan's shields would deteriorate over time since they were no longer around to care for them. And it was a symbolic reference again to how they had fallen in battle.

In verse twenty-two we read, "*From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty.*" Here David recounted how Saul and Jonathan were both renowned for their battlefield successes. During their military careers Jonathan was known and celebrated for his use of the bow in battle, while Saul was known for his prowess with the sword. It is consistent in the OT that blood and fat are often used as a word pair to refer to the entirety of a sacrifice, therefore, this seems to picture the efforts of Saul and Jonathan in warfare as being the offerings of sacrifices to God as His servants. Here the designation "*mighty*" is applied not to Saul and Jonathan, but to their Philistine enemies. The idea in doing this was that the greater the stature of one's defeated foe, the greater was the victory that was gained in defeating them. Some of the imagery in this verse relates to common uses of metaphors in that age, where arrows were depicted as drinking the blood of those into whom they were shot, and swords devouring the flesh of those who were slashed by them.

In verse twenty-three we read, "*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.*" David was expressing that the king and his son were inseparable in life as in death, and that they would continue to be honored in death as in life. Since a lamentation was like modern eulogies, David refrained from speaking of Saul's flaws and instead focused on his virtues. In reality the bond that kept Saul and Jonathan together reflected more the loyalty of Jonathan to his

father than Saul's loyalty to Jonathan. Also, Jonathan and Saul were further praised by David as individuals who possessed not only skill but also speed and strength in battle: "*they were swifter than eagles*" and "*stronger than lions*". Despite the view of a number of commentators who see these words as pious hypocrisy, the truth is that Jonathan remained loyal to his father, never leaving his father's side even though they had very different assessments of David.

The Hebrew word translated here as "*eagles*", could also be used to refer to vultures, but here it clearly refers to eagles as they were seen as the monarchs of the birds and were proverbial for swiftness.

In verse twenty-four we read, "*O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxury; who put ornaments of gold on your apparel*." Though the Philistine daughters were to remain silent (vs.20), the "*daughters of Israel*" by contrast were to "*weep for Saul*" (vs.24). Therefore, this is a counterpoint to what was expressed in that previous verse. The reference here is specifically to the women in Saul's court who had been enriched by him. The idea being that Saul would no longer be bringing back prizes of war for them to enjoy. They were to mourn the loss of the one who clothed them in scarlet and finery, who adorned their garments with ornaments of gold. The idea is not that Saul had personally distributed these manifestations of wealth as clothing colored with imported dyes and brooches of worked gold; but his military successes provided these things. In that day, scarlet was the color of kings and the wealthy, but in the context, scarlet and gold refers to the rich booty which Saul and Jonathan gained during the wars they had fought in.

In verse twenty-five we read, "*How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan was slain in your high places*." David returns to the mournful thesis of the lament, first expressed in verse nineteen, as he grieves that "*the mighty have fallen in battle*". The reuse of the phrase here, with its expansion through the addition of the phrase "*in the midst of the battle*", suggests that this and the next verse express the thematic center of the poem. Among the dead was David's soul mate Jonathan, who lay slain on the mountain side.

In verse twenty-six we read, "*I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women*." The mention of his best friend's death elicits the most personal expression of David's grief found in the poem. With the death of Jonathan, David lost his most trusted confidant and companion. Jonathan's affirmations of support (I Sam.18:3–4; 19:1–7; 20:1–42; 23:16–18) had come at key moments in David's life and had enabled David to emotionally survive through the most difficult of times. Because of the perverse orientation of our times, David's very personal expression of emotion here has been twisted so that some choose to claim that he and Jonathan shared a homosexual liaison. They do this as an attempt to justify an ungodly lifestyle. However, a simple awareness of a few realities demonstrates the absolute fallacy of this perspective. Among other things, David's affection for Jonathan needs to be understood in light of the parameters of social relations that existed in ancient Israelite society. Marriages in ancient Israel very rarely resulted from

romantic impulses, instead, they took place primarily for the benefit of the tribe and the couples' immediate families. Often the priorities were increasing the size and strength of the social group through procreation and to increase their prosperity through the establishment of advantageous formal ties with other families. A man's wife was his partner in procreation and parenting, but not necessarily his best friend, confidant, or social peer. For David, Jonathan was the peer, friend, and confidant that no wife could ever have been in that society; and his untimely death left a gaping hole in David's soul. In addition to this, they were bound together by their mutual passion for and devotion to Yahweh. And also the two men were comrades who fought side by side in ongoing warfare, a circumstance that even in the modern world can often result in a closeness that goes beyond that which one can share with one's spouse. Finally, added to this is the reality that genuine political loyalty was often expressed in love language. And therefore, Jonathan's "*love*" for David should be understood to have covenantal connotations, referring to the commitment that they had made to each other to be allies in the midst of adversity. Indeed, the Hebrew word for "*love*" is translated "*friendship*" in a similar context (Ps.109:4–5).

A subtle grammatical change in expression should be noted here. There is a shift in this verse to the second person pronoun (*you*), and it was done to express David's personal sense of loss.

In verse twenty-seven we read, "*How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*" The reference here to "*the weapons of war*" that "*have perished*" refers metonymically to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. As noted above, a metonym is a figure of speech that replaces the name of a thing with the name of something else with which it is closely associated. So, just as Jonathan is pictured in the metaphor of a gazelle in the first line of David's lament, so here, he and Saul are pictured in the metaphor of being weapons of war. That this was David's intent is seen in how the parallelism in the verse equates the "*weapons of war*" with the expression "*mighty ones*" which is a clear reference to Saul and Jonathan.

Conclusion:

In this chapter, our expectations are subverted. After Saul's relentless and unprovoked hostility toward David, and after the Divine pronouncement that David would replace Saul as king, it would be natural to expect that the news of Saul's death would be greeted with joy and celebration. But this chapter reminds us that it was in truth a tragedy. It was the end of a man who had great potential, and his fall resulted in the loss of others who were innocent or even righteous. This lament is characterized by both passion and restraint. While giving full vent to his feelings upon hearing the report of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, David expresses no bitterness toward his mortal enemy Saul. He represents the godly perspective on judgment. It is right and necessary, but it is God's place, and it is not a joyful thing.