

II Samuel  
David the King



ישיבת הר עציון





# Amnon Bazak



# II SAMUEL

DAVID THE KING

TRANSLATED BY

David Strauss

Yeshivat Har Etzion  
Maggid Books

*II Samuel  
David the King*

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## *Preface*

# T

he book of Samuel was originally written as one book and was divided into two only later, in the translation of the Septuagint.<sup>1</sup> The book known as II Samuel is a direct continuation of I Samuel, and thus this volume is a continuation of my book, *I Samuel: A King in Israel*. However, the division of the book of Samuel into two is based on logic. To a certain extent, the subject matter of II Samuel stands apart: It covers the period of the reign of David. In the opening chapter of the book, David is informed of the death of Saul, and immediately afterward his reign begins, first in Hevron – over Judah, and later in Jerusalem, over the entire people of Israel.

The chapters of the second part of the book of Samuel touch on some of the most important issues in the Bible, including the selection of the Davidic dynasty as the people of Israel's eternal monarchy; the exceedingly complex episode of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite; and

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1. As was noted in the introduction to *I Samuel: A King in Israel* (Maggid Books, 2024), xv–xvi.

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how David dealt with the troubles that befell him in the aftermath of that episode – Amnon and Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the rebellion of Absalom, and the revolt of Sheba son of Bichri. It can be safely said that this part of the book of Samuel contains the concentration of the most dramatic stories in the whole Bible.

In the introduction to my book on I Samuel, I addressed the process of the composition of the book of Samuel and the main approach that finds expression in it, and I will not repeat what was said there. However, it is my duty to thank everyone who contributed to this book. I would therefore like to express my gratitude once again to my revered teacher, Rabbi Yaakov Medan, head of Yeshivat Har Etzion, and my teacher, Dr. Mordechai Sabato, from both of whom I learned how to approach the study of the Bible, and whose ideas and interpretations play a significant part, directly and indirectly, in this book. Thank you to my friends at the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion, in the framework of which the contents of this book first saw light: to Rabbi Ezra Bick, who stands at the head of the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash; to the editor-in-chief of the Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash Rabbi Reuven Ziegler who assisted in the compilation of the book, and who also serves as editorial director of Maggid Books; and to Dr. Boaz Kallush, who meticulously edited the original chapters. I wish to offer my sincerest thanks to publisher Matthew Miller and the staff at Maggid Books, in particular Rachelle Emanuel, Esther Shafier, Rabbi David Silverstein, and Tani Bayer. I am also most grateful to David Strauss for his skillful translation.

This book is being published during a challenging and difficult time for the people of Israel, following the calamity that occurred on Simhat Torah 5784 and the long war that ensued. I wish to dedicate this book to the memory of my beloved, pure, and righteous students who fell in this battle for the sanctification of God's name, the people, and the land: Ari Zenilman, Yakir Hexter, David Schwartz, and Zechariah Haber, may God avenge their blood. They were all God-fearing, lovers of humanity, Torah scholars, devoted family men, wise and understanding, and valiant heroes. May their memory be a blessing.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to my dear and beloved family for their support and encouragement throughout this journey: to my wife Anat, and to our children Rinat, Talya, Elnatan and his wife Gil, and Hillel. May God bless your strength and find favor in the work of your hands.

Above all, may Your name, our King, be forever blessed and exalted.

Amnon Bazak

Alon Shevut

Tamuz 5775



## *Chapter 1*

# David After Saul's and Jonathan's Deaths

### **“I AM AN AMALEKITE”**

The story of how the information regarding the death of Saul and his sons reached David combines, almost indiscernibly, the two events that transpired at the same time at the end of the book of I Samuel. After the final meeting between David and Saul (I Sam. 26), the text jumps back and forth from what was happening with David to what was happening with Saul. Chapter 27 deals with David's going to Achish; chapter 28 with Saul's visit to the medium in Ein-Dor; chapters 29–30 deal with the story of David and his army's going out to battle together with Achish, and the heavy price that they paid when the Amalekites took their wives and children into captivity; and chapter 31 deals with the death of Saul. Now it becomes clear that the various accounts share a common element – Amalek:

And it was after the death of Saul, when David returned from smiting the *Amalekites*, that David stayed for two days in Tziklag. It was 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

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it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the ground and prostrated himself. And David said to him, “From where have you come?” And he said to him, “I have escaped from the camp of Israel.” And David said to him, “What has happened? I pray you, tell me.” And he answered, “The people fled from the battle, and many of the people fell and died, and Saul and Jonathan his son also died.” (1:1–4)

When Saul went to the medium, he heard from Samuel that he had been sentenced to death for one reason: “Because you did not listen to the voice of the Lord, and did not execute His fierce wrath against *Amalek*, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day” (I Sam. 28:18). Now the text emphasizes that Saul’s death at the hand of the Philistines, which was, as stated, in punishment for his not having smitten Amalek, took place at the same time as Amalek was slaughtered by his successor, David.

This idea is emphasized by the national identity of the person who brought the news of Saul’s death. That same person relates that when Saul saw him –

He looked behind him, he saw me and called out to me. And I answered, “Here am I.” And he said to me, “Who are you?” And I answered [according to the written text: “And he answered”]<sup>1</sup> him: “I am an *Amalekite*.” (vv. 7–8)

The story related here is entirely missing in the previous chapter (I Sam. 31), and we shall deal with this issue below. In any event, according to the Amalekite lad’s account, Saul met his death immediately after the lad revealed his identity to him:

And he said to me, “Stand, I pray you, beside me, and slay me, for the agony has taken hold of me; because my life is still in me.”

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1. Radak, in his usual manner, notes the difference between the way the word is written and the way it is read, and proposes an interesting understanding. According to the way the word is written, *vayomer*, “and he said,” someone else reported to Saul that the lad was an Amalekite because the lad himself did not want to expose his origins.

## Chapter 1: David After Saul's and Jonathan's Deaths

So I stood beside him and slew him, because I was sure that he would not live after he had fallen; and I took the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and I brought them here to my lord. (vv. 9–10)

We see, then, that the last words that Saul heard before dying on account of not having fulfilled God's commandment to wipe out the memory of Amalek were: "I am an Amalekite."

If this is not enough, David once again asks the lad about his identity:

And David said to the young man that told him, "From where are you?" And he answered, "I am the son of an *Amalekite* stranger." (v. 13)

We shall discuss below why it was necessary for David to ask the lad again about his origins, but the repeated mention of the fact that the lad was an Amalekite reinforces the impression that this is indeed a central theme in the chapter.

### THE OBJECTIVE OF THE AMALEKITE'S STORY

The Amalekite lad relates to David what happened to Saul in his final moments, but the story differs from the account in the previous chapter in several of its details:

The text's account (I Sam. 31:3–4)	The lad's account (II Sam. 1:6–10)
And the battle weighed heavily upon Saul, and when <i>the archers found him</i> , he shook because of the archers. Then Saul said to his arms-bearer, "Draw your sword and stab me with it, lest these uncircumcised come and stab me, and make a mockery of me." But his arms-bearer was not willing, for he was very afraid, so Saul took his sword, and fell upon it.	Behold, Saul was leaning upon his spear; and lo, <i>the chariots and the horsemen caught up with him</i> . And he turned around and he saw me and called to me. And I answered, "Here am I." And he said to me, "Who are you?" And I answered him, "I am an Amalekite." And he said to me, "Stand, I pray you, beside me, and slay me, for the agony has taken hold of me; because my life is still in me." So I stood beside him and slew him.

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The less significant differences (who the fighters were who drew close to Saul – whether archers or chariots and horsemen, and whether Saul had with him his sword or his spear) can in one way or other be reconciled,<sup>2</sup> but the major difference between the two accounts relates, of course, to the question of how Saul actually died. According to the account in I Samuel, Saul died when he fell on his sword; there is no mention whatsoever of the Amalekite lad. As Radak writes in the name of earlier commentators, it is reasonable to assume that the lad was lying. Indeed, there is a similarity between what Saul said to his arms-bearer, “Draw your sword and stab me with it,” and the Amalekite lad’s story that Saul said to him, “Stand, I pray you, beside me, and slay me.” It may be assumed that the Amalekite was standing nearby and even witnessed the exchange between Saul and his arms-bearer, and then attributed the event to himself.<sup>3</sup>

But if what we are saying is correct, the question arises: Why did the Amalekite lie about what happened? Why did he attribute Saul’s death to himself? This question is connected to how we understand the harsh sentence that David imposed upon the lad. David reacts sharply to the Amalekite:

And David said to him, “How were you not afraid to raise your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed? And David called one of the young men and said, “Go near, and fall upon him.” And he smote him so that he died. And David said to him, “Your blood is on your own head; for your mouth testified against you, saying: ‘I have slain the Lord’s anointed.’” (vv. 14–16)

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2. It may be argued that there were two sets of pursuers, or that the lad exaggerated in his account. (Archers, by their very nature, stand further away, whereas the lad speaks of real physical proximity: “The chariots and the horsemen caught up with him”).
3. Another understanding, alluded to by Radak, is also possible; namely, that the two accounts complement each other: Saul did not die immediately upon falling on his sword, and he asked the lad to free him from his suffering of a slow death and kill him – a request that the Amalekite was happy to fulfill.

## Chapter 1: David After Saul's and Jonathan's Deaths

Note that David does not claim that the lad killed Saul; rather, he judges him for the very fact that he attributed the act to himself – “For your mouth has testified against you.”

The question remains: Why did David see fit to judge the Amalekite with such severity? Surely, according to his account, all he did was fulfill Saul's request! If Saul wanted to save his honor and not die at the hands of the Philistines, should the lad have refused this request?!

It seems that the answer to this question may be found later in the book. When Rechab and Baanah, two captains of Saul's bands, killed Ish-Bosheth, Saul's surviving son who ruled in his place, and they then brought his head to David thinking that this would bring him joy, David forcefully responded:

When one told me, saying, “Behold, Saul is dead,” and *he was in his own eyes* as if he were one bringing good tidings, I took hold of him and slew him in Tziklag, instead of giving a reward for his tidings.<sup>4</sup> How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house in his bed. (4:10–11)<sup>5</sup>

From here it seems that what bothered David was the way in which the lad related the information about Saul's death: as good tidings, rather than as a report of calamity.

The matter still requires further clarification: Where do we see in our story that the Amalekite lad presented the matter as good news? On the contrary, there are several indications of the very opposite:

1. Already from the beginning, the lad arrives as one who fled in his grief from the battle: “Behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with

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4. In other words, a reward “which he thought I would give him” (Radak, and similarly in Rashi).

5. The references to verses will henceforth be to the book of II Samuel unless otherwise noted.

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his clothes rent and earth upon his head.” Rent clothing is a well-known expression of sorrow and mourning,<sup>6</sup> as is putting earth on one’s head.<sup>7</sup>

2. The lad describes the events in increasingly tragic order: “The people fled from the battle, and many of the people fell and died, and Saul and Jonathan his son also died.” As we shall see below, this account is one of the many similarities between this story and the story of the man who returned to Shilo after Israel’s defeat by the Philistines, but at this point, it shall suffice to note the fact that the messenger also reported the defeat in increasingly tragic order: “Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the Ark of God has been taken” (I Sam. 4:17).<sup>8</sup> From here it would seem that the lad regarded the death of Saul and his sons as the most tragic event.

3. The lad also emphasizes that when he killed Saul he knew that he was merely hastening his death, and that Saul would in any case have died: “So I stood beside him and slew him, because I was sure that he would not live after that he was fallen.”

These points intensify the question: Why was David so angry with the lad that he had him executed?

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- 6. For example, this is what Jacob did following the sale of Joseph (Gen. 37:34), and what Jefthah did when he saw his daughter emerging first from his house (Judges 11:35), and what David did when he heard about Amnon’s death at the hands of Absalom (II Sam. 13:31).
- 7. This is what Joshua, for example, did following the first defeat at Ai: “And Joshua rent his clothes and fell to the earth upon his face before the Ark of the Lord until evening, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their head” (Josh. 7:6). See also II Sam. 13:19: “And Tamar put ashes on her head and rent the garment of many colors that was on her.”
- 8. Without a doubt, the man was right in his understanding of the order of priorities of the listener, Eli, as is proven by his reaction: “And it came to pass, when he made mention of the Ark of God, that he fell from off his seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck broke” (I Sam. 4:18). The question of whether this order of priorities is correct on a fundamental level is discussed at length in our book *I Samuel: A King in Israel* (Maggid Books, 2024), 65–67.

### THE CROWN

It seems that the problematic element comes to the fore toward the end of the lad's story: "And I took the crown that was upon his head and the bracelet that was on his arm, and I brought them here to my lord." If, up until this stage, the Amalekite's account seems reasonable, and perhaps even invites our empathy, with this step the Amalekite veers from the role of reporter. Removing the crown from Saul's head and bringing it to David testifies beyond all doubt that the lad sees Saul's end as an opportunity for crowning David as king.<sup>9</sup> Even if the Amalekite did not express joy over Saul's death, nevertheless, this act involved an act of flattery toward David; it expresses the feeling that if a tragedy had already occurred, he should at least derive from it benefit through what he imagined as being desirable in David's eyes.

But it was precisely this step of the Amalekite that roused David's fury. As we saw throughout the book of I Samuel, David demonstrated great, and sometimes even baffling, respect towards Saul, and prevented any injury toward him, repeating time and time again that Saul was "the Lord's anointed." Thus, for example, David said to his men, who wanted to kill Saul when the latter wandered by himself into the cave in which they were hiding, "Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to raise my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 24:7). In similar fashion, he rebutted Abishai's argument when he went down with him into Saul's camp: "Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 26:11).<sup>10</sup> For this reason, David was probably incapable of pardoning the killing of Saul by the Amalekite. It may be recalled that Saul's lad was unable to fulfill the king's order to stab him with his sword: "But his arms-bearer was not willing, for he was very afraid" (I Sam. 31:4). Presumably, the

9. As is stated at the coronation of Joash: "And he brought out the king's son, *and set the crown* and the royal insignia upon him; and they declared him king and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, 'Long live the king'" (II Kings 11:12). See Ps. 89:40; 132:18.

10. In the continuation of that chapter, David argues with Saul's guards, who fell asleep and failed to notice David and Abishai's penetration into Saul's camp: "As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you did not keep watch over your master, the Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 26:16).

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arms-bearer feared precisely that which David mentioned – raising his hand against the Lord's anointed. In contrast, the words of the Amalekite give no indication of any hesitation regarding his deed, and this adds to the feeling that he was two-faced regarding the events he reported. On the one hand, he portrayed himself as pitying the dying king and feeling sorrow over his death, whereas on the other hand, he was looking to benefit from the role he played in that death.

The fact that the lad was an Amalekite only made matters worse. This may be why David asked him again about his origins, even though he already knew this from the lad's report. Once it became clear that the lad was acting out of personal interests, it was quite possible that his action also involved revenge against Saul. This is how we can understand the meaning of the conversation between David and the lad:

And David said to the young man who told him, “From where are you?” And he answered, “I am the son of an Amalekite stranger.” And David said to him, “How were you not afraid to raise your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?” (vv. 13–14)

By asking the lad first about his origin and only then accusing him of killing the king, we can understand that by highlighting the lad's Amalekite origins, David wished to emphasize the severity of his actions. Killing King Saul was not just an act of mercy; its true motive was revenge against the king who had waged war against his people.

### **THE DEATH OF SAUL AND THAT OF ELI**

As we already noted, the story about the Amalekite lad completes the parallel between the death of Saul and the account of Eli's death at the beginning of the book of I Samuel. The points of correspondence are presented in the following table:

<b>The death of Eli (I Sam. 4)</b>	<b>The death of Saul</b>
And the Philistines pitched in Afek. (v. 1)	Now the Philistines gathered all their hosts to Afek. (I Sam. 29:1)

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And the Philistines fought, and Israel was beaten, and they fled. (v. 10)	Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled (31:1)
And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. (v. 11)	And the Philistines caught up with Saul and his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. (31:2)
And a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head. (v. 12)	A man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent and earth upon his head. (II Sam. 1:2)
And the man said to Eli, "I am he that came out of the battle line, and I fled today from the battle." (v. 16)	And he said to him, "I have escaped from the camp of Israel." (1:3)
And he said, "What has happened, my son?" (v. 16)	And David said to him, "What has happened?" (1:4)
And the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the Ark of God has been taken." (v. 17)	And he answered, "The people fled from the battle, and many of the people fell and died; and Saul and Jonathan his son also died." (1:4)

The two leaders who failed in their positions ended their lives with similar tragedies: Both died on the same day as their sons, a day on which the people of Israel suffered humiliating defeats by the Philistines. This parallel seems to have been noted by the Midrash (Midrash Samuel 11), which completes it by noting that the Benjaminite who ran from the battle line was Saul. The parallelism leaves its negative final imprint on the kingdom of Saul, which ended the same way as did the leadership of Eli. Even though a punishment as severe as that which was decreed upon Eli was not decreed upon Saul, nevertheless, the parallelism itself expresses a negative assessment of the period of his monarchy.

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### **“TO TEACH THE SONS OF JUDAH ARCHERY”**

After dealing with the Amalekite lad who informed him of the deaths of Saul and his sons, David now turns to his personal grief over Saul and Jonathan, expressing it in his famous lamentation.

Before turning to the lamentation itself, let us consider its opening verses:

And David lamented Saul and Jonathan his son with this lamentation, and said: “To teach the sons of Judah archery; behold, it is written in the book of the upright.” (vv. 17–18)

We must first understand the words “to teach the sons of Judah archery,” which are surprising in this context: How is teaching the sons of Judah archery connected to the lamentation? The commentators (Rashi, Radak, and Ralbag) understand that the matter is connected to defeat in war: “Now that the mighty men of Israel have fallen, the sons of Judah must learn to fight and to shoot with a bow” (Rashi).

Radak adds that this section is not an integral part of the lamentation, for it is not reasonable that David should mention the sons of Judah in his lamentation over Saul, the proud son of Benjamin.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the continuation of the verse, “Behold, it is written in the book of the upright,” seems on the simple level to be a side comment of the book’s editor, and this suggests that the beginning of the verse is also not part of the lamentation itself,<sup>12</sup> but rather a statement that stands on its own and is only indirectly connected to the content of the lamentation.

Ralbag adds that the idea of teaching archery is connected to Saul’s fear of the Philistine archers who surrounded him (“And when the archers found him, he shook because of the archers”; I Sam. 31:3). He explains that one of the lessons of the war was the need to reinforce

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<sup>11</sup>. We noted Saul’s identification as representative of the tribe of Benjamin throughout the book of I Samuel; see especially 9:21; 10:21; 22:7.

<sup>12</sup>. Rabbi Isaiah di Trani maintains that these words are indeed part of the lamentation mourning the loss of Saul and Jonathan, who taught the sons of Judah archery. This understanding, however, is forced, both substantively and with respect to the structure of the lamentation.

the Israelite army with archers, for “there was no one in Israel who was skillful in it.”

We can adopt this approach with a certain modification. It is difficult to assume that there were no archers in Israel, but it seems that it was precisely in this war that many archers died. The Benjaminites, Saul's tribe, were well known as sharpshooters. Thus, for example, the camp of Benjamin is described at the time of the incident involving the concubine in Giva: “And the children of Benjamin numbered at that time twenty-six thousand swordsmen out of the cities... among all these people were seven hundred chosen lefthanded men; *each one could sling a stone at a hair, and not miss*” (Judges 20:15–16). The Benjaminites were distinguished in this from the sons of Judah, who were men who bore shields and carried spears (see I Chr. 12:25). Explicit mention of this difference is also made at a later period: “And Asa had an army of men *who bore targets and spears*, three hundred thousand *out of Judah*; and two hundred and eighty thousand *out of Benjamin, who bore shields and drew bows*” (II Chr. 14:7; and see II Chr. 17:17). It is reasonable to assume that many Benjaminites fought in Saul's army and fell in the war, and that many of them were archers – with Jonathan at their head, about whom David laments: “The bow of Jonathan did not turn back” (v. 22). Now Israel needs new archers, and it is possible that David expresses this idea in the introduction to his lamentation over the death of Jonathan the archer.

There is, however, a certain difficulty with the incorporation of such a clearly military issue in the heading of a lamentation dealing with the emotional and national aspects of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Indeed, it is also possible to offer an entirely different understanding of this statement: as a heading that indicates the melody to be used for the entire lamentation. It is well known that many headings in the book of Psalms refer to musical instructions that are unfamiliar to us,<sup>13</sup> and among them we find several headings that are reminiscent of our heading. For example: “To the chief musician, upon *shushan-edut*, a *mikhtam*

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13. For example, “For the chief musician on strings, a psalm of David” (Ps. 4:1); “To the chief musician for flutes, a psalm of David” (5:1); “To the chief musician on strings upon the *sheminit*, a psalm of David” (6:1), and many others.

of David, to teach” (Ps. 60:1).<sup>14</sup> It is possible, then, that the heading of our lamentation should be understood as offering musical instructions.

**“BEHOLD, IT IS WRITTEN IN THE  
BOOK OF THE UPRIGHT”**

Let us move on to the second half of the opening verse: “Behold, it is written in the book of the upright.” On the plain level, this verse attests to the fact that the lamentation appears also in another source that is called “the Book of the Upright” (*sefer hayashar*). This expression is already familiar to us from elsewhere in Tanakh: “Then Joshua spoke to the Lord on the day the Lord delivered up the Amorites to the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, ‘Sun, stand still in Givon; and moon, in the Ayalon valley;’ And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed put until a nation had avenged itself upon its enemies. *Is not this written in the book of the upright?*” (Josh. 10:12–13). What exactly is this book?

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 25a) brings three opinions on the matter. Their common denominator is that they all identify “the book of the upright” as being one of the books of the Bible, and they all connect the identification with the first part of the verse, “to teach the sons of Judah the bow.”

Which is “the book of the upright”? R. Ḥiyya bar Abba said in the name of R. Yohanan: It is the book of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are designated as upright [*yesaharim*] and of whom Balaam says, “Let me die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his” (Num. 23:10). And where is this fact referred to? “Judah, you shall praise your brethren; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies” (Gen. 49:8). What kind of fighting requires the aiming of the hand at the [enemy’s neck]? Surely, archery.

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14. It is interesting to note that that psalm also deals with a military situation: “When he fought against Aram Naharayim and with Aram Tzova, and Joab returned, and smote twelve thousand men of Edom in the Valley of Salt” (v. 2.), and there, too, a difficult situation is described at the beginning of the psalm, bringing the psalmist to cry out: “O God, You have cast us off, You have shattered us, You have shown Your anger” (v. 3).

R. Elazar said: It is the book of Deuteronomy, which is here called the book of the upright, because it contains the words, “And you shall do that which is upright [*yashar*] in the sight of the Lord” (Deut. 6:18). And where does it refer [to Judah's archery]? “With his hands he contended for himself” (33:7). What kind of fighting requires both hands? Surely, archery.

R. Shemuel bar Nahmani said: It is the book of Judges, which is here called the book of the upright, because it contains the verse: “In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right [*yashar*] in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). And where is [Judah's skill in archery] referred to in it? “That the generations of the children of Israel might know, to teach them war” (3:2). Now what kind of warfare requires teaching? Surely, archery.

The differences between the various opinions are interesting in themselves.<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, let us note that *Hazal* relate to other “books” referred to in Tanakh in a similar fashion (and, in their footsteps, Rashi in his commentaries to these references).<sup>16</sup> For example, commenting on the phrase, “the book of the wars of the Lord” (Num. 21:14), they also identify these books with the Torah itself. The underlying assumption here is that Tanakh does not refer to books that are not part of the biblical canon.

According to the plain sense of the text, however, it seems more reasonable to adopt the position of Ralbag here<sup>17</sup> – that we are dealing with a separate book that has not been passed down to us. It is likely that this book was comprised of various songs and poems, including the

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15. For example, the difference between the first approach, which appears to be a possible explanation according to the plain sense of the text for the term “the book of the upright,” and the other approaches, which appear to be midrash. Similarly, the difference between the categories to which the various identifications belong – the Torah, the book of Deuteronomy, or a book of the Prophets. This is not the forum in which to expand upon this matter.

16. We noted this in I Samuel 24; see *I Samuel: A King in Israel*, 401, note 8.

17. This parallels the approach of Ramban and Ibn Ezra regarding “the book of the wars of the Lord”; see their commentaries to the Torah, *ad loc.*

## *II Samuel: David the King*

poem, apparently cited only in part, in the book of Joshua, and David's lamentation over Saul and Jonathan.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF THE LAMENTATION**

Now we can begin with the lamentation itself. First of all, it is important to emphasize that even without any analysis or exegesis, the lamentation radiates a unique intensity, and many of its expressions have become common idioms, especially in the context of mourning and eulogy. Nevertheless, there is still room to briefly discuss the literary structure of the lamentation.

Despite its emotional character, the lamentation has a very clear structure; it divides into five sections organized in chiastic order as follows (exegetical comments on words and expressions can be found in the footnotes):

Your beauty, O Israel,<sup>18</sup> lies slain on your heights! *How have the mighty fallen!* (v. 19)

Tell it not in Gat,<sup>19</sup> proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the

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18. This expression, *hatzevi Yisrael*, is exceedingly obscure. The word *tzevi* in Tanakh means something that is desired. For example: "On that day the plant of the Lord shall be beautiful (*tzevi*) and comely" (Is. 4:2); "But I said, How shall I put you among the sons, and give you a pleasant land, the finest (*tzevi*) heritage" (Jer. 3:19); "On the day that I lifted up My hand to them, to bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had spied out for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is an ornament (*tzevi*) for all the lands" (Ezek. 20:6). In light of this, the commentaries have suggested that *hatzevi Yisrael* refers to the Land of Israel, upon whose high places the mighty have fallen. It is, however, possible, that the reference is to Saul and Jonathan, who are the *tzevi*, the best part, in which case the verse must be read: "Your beauty, O Israel, lies slain upon your heights."

19. There is an alliteration here, a play on sounds, which was greatly developed by the prophet Micah (1:10–15): "Tell (*tagidu*) it not in *Gat*, weep not at all; at Bet le'*Afra* roll yourself in the *dust* (*afar*) ... Bind the chariots to the swift *steeds* (*larekhesh*), O inhabitant of *Lakhish* ... the houses of *Akhziv* shall be a *deceitful thing* (*le'akhzav*) to the kings of Israel. I will yet bring to you, O inhabitant of *Maresha*, him that shall possess (*hayoresh*) you." There may also be a similar alliteration here in the words, "Proclaim it not in the streets (*behutzot*) of Ashkelon," if we assume that in Biblical

## *Chapter 1: David After Saul's and Jonathan's Deaths*

uncircumcised<sup>20</sup> triumph. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew nor rain upon you, neither fields of choice fruits;<sup>21</sup> for there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.<sup>22</sup> (vv. 20–21)

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 never withdrew empty.<sup>23</sup> Saul and Jonathan, the lovely and the pleasant in their lives, even in their death they did not part; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. (vv. 22–23)

*You daughters of Israel*, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, in finery, who draped ornaments of gold over your apparel. (v. 24)

*How have the mighty fallen* in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain upon your heights! I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; wonderful was your love to me, surpassing the love of women. *How have the mighty fallen*, and the weapons of war perished! (vv. 25–27)

The verses that frame the lamentation express mourning and distress, without relating to the content itself. Three times, David laments with the cry, “How have the mighty fallen,” giving special expression to his

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Hebrew, the letter *tzadi* was pronounced as a sibilant similar to the letter *samekh* (as in the Yemenite pronunciation).

20. This designation is reminiscent of Saul's last words to his arms-bearer: “Draw your sword, and stab me with it; lest these uncircumcised come and stab me” (I Sam. 31:4).
21. In other words, David curses the mountains of Gilboa that they should have no blessed fields fit to produce choice fruits (Radak).
22. The words “the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil” are a bit obscure. The commentators explain that it was common practice to anoint shields with oil so that the arrows that hit them would slide off (see Is. 21:5: “Arise, princes, and anoint the shield”). But it is possible that the reference is to Saul himself, who fell as if he hadn't been anointed with oil to rule over Israel (see I Sam. 10:1).
23. In other words, Jonathan's bow and Saul's sword did not turn back until they were filled with the blood of the enemy.

grief over the death of Jonathan, who is mentioned twice by name, in contrast to Saul, who is not mentioned at all in these verses. In the second and fourth sections, the main theme is the reaction to the death of Saul – the concern about the rejoicing of “the daughters of the Philistines” as opposed to the appropriate distress of “the daughters of Israel,” and the symbolic curse of the mountains of Gilboa. Saul is mentioned twice in these verses, while Jonathan is not mentioned at all. In the heart of the lamentation, the middle section, Saul and Jonathan are both mentioned twice, and here David relates to the fallen themselves: to their valor in battle, which found expression in Jonathan’s bow and Saul’s sword, and to the special and tragic bond between them in their lifetimes and in their deaths.<sup>24</sup>

This analysis reveals the outstanding beauty of this lamentation. David is careful to give equal mention to Saul and Jonathan, four times apiece, though he does this in split fashion. The outer frame – the cry of mourning and distress – relates directly to Jonathan, for it is perfectly understandable that the formal bond and tortuous relationship between David and Saul cannot at all be compared to the special connection between David and Jonathan. In the inner frame that deals with the national dimension, the most important consequence of the battle was the fall of the king. In the center of the lamentation, David posits the personalities of Saul and Jonathan, and this reveals his greatness: Despite the enormous difference between Saul’s attitude toward David and Jonathan’s attitude toward him, David honors them equally in the heart of the lamentation, recognizing their greatness and expressing it with intensity, noting their tragic fate.

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24. It should be noted that in contrast to the common expression, “in their lives and in their deaths they did not part,” the cantillation marks suggest a different reading: “Saul and Jonathan, the lovely and the pleasant in their lives; even in their death they did not part.” According to the plain sense of the text, it is difficult to decide between these two possibilities, but without a doubt the common expression well reflects the full tragedy of Jonathan, who chose to remain alongside his father during his lifetime, and thus sealed his fate – to die together with his father (we noted this point throughout the book of I Samuel; see *I Samuel: A King in Israel*, especially the end of chapter 20, and our comments there).

As we noted in the past,<sup>25</sup> the book of Samuel includes three songs: Hannah's song at the beginning (I Sam. 2:1–6), David's lamentation over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in the middle (II Sam. 1:17–26), and the psalm recited by David "on the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul" at the end (II Sam. 22). In Hannah's prayer the hope is expressed that God "shall give strength to His *king* and exalt the horn of His *anointed*" (I Sam. 2:10); David in his lamentation grieves over the fact that "there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not *anointed* with oil"; whereas his song closes the book with thanksgiving to God – "He is the tower of salvation for His *king*; and shows mercy to His *anointed*" (22:51). The lamentation over Saul and Jonathan expresses the sad and difficult stage in the kingdom of Israel; this is a lamentation over the failure of the first attempt to establish a king over Israel. But the setting of Saul's sun is immediately followed by the rising of David's sun, as we shall immediately see in the next chapter.

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25. *I Samuel: A King in Israel*, 30.