

I Samuel Lesson 31

I Samuel Chapter 31

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Memory verses for this week: *1 Cor 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*

Introduction: We continue our study on Samuel this week. In last week's lesson, we studied about David returning back to Ziklag from the battle that was to begin with Israel and the Philistines to find that the Amalekites had invaded and burned the city and taken the women and children captive. After a time of mourning, David led his men to overtake the invaders and recovered all of their families and took a great spoil from the Amalekites. In this final chapter of I Samuel, we return to the events surrounding Saul. While David was in pursuit of their families from the Amalekites, Saul was coming to a showdown with the Philistines. This picks up where we left off in chapter 28 concerning Saul and the battle that ensues where Saul and his 3 sons are killed.

I. Saul's Death and Defeat

1 Sam 31:1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa.

1 Sam 31:2 And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons.

Verse one picks up right where we stopped in Chapter 28. Saul had just learned that he would face death the following day after spending the night at a séance with the witch of Endor. Samuel had attempted to pray and try several other avenues to reach God, but finally stooped so low as to have a witch call up Samuel to find out what would transpire. Israel's defeat and Saul's death were pronounced by Samuel.

The fighting was intense and the Israelites battled the Philistines here at Mt. Gilboa. This was a mountainous country that rose up from the southeastern end of the valley of Jezreel. The battle went poorly for Israel and many died there on Mount Gilboa. The rest of the troops along with Saul and his sons fled in defeat with the Philistines hard on their heels. Unfortunately for Saul, the Philistines overtook them and three of Saul's sons died here. (Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua.)

1 Sam 31:3 And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers.

Although he temporarily escaped, the battle went sore against Saul and the archers hit him and he was severely wounded. The wounds were very bad, and Saul was mortally wounded.

Matthew Henry said the watching of his sons die may have been worse than death itself for King Saul.

He sees his sons fall before him. The victorious Philistines pressed most forcibly upon the king of Israel and those about him. His three sons were next him, it is probable, and they were all three slain before his face, to his great grief (for they were the hopes of his family) and to his great terror, for they were now the guard of his person, and he could conclude no other than that his own turn would come next. His sons are named (v. 2), and it grieves us to find Jonathan among them: that wise, valiant, good man, who was as much David's friend as Saul was his enemy, yet falls with the rest. Duty to his father would not permit him to stay at home, or to retire when the armies engaged; and Providence so orders it that he falls in the common fate of his family, though he never involved himself in the guilt of it.

1. God would hereby complete the vexation of Saul in his dying moments, and the judgment that was to be executed upon his house. If the family must fall, Jonathan, that is one of it, must fall with it. 2. He would hereby make David's way to the crown the more clear and open. For, though Jonathan himself would have cheerfully resigned all his title and interest to him (we have no reason to suspect any other), yet it is very probable that many of the people would have made use of his name for the support of the house of Saul, or at least would have come in but slowly to David. i

1 Sam 31:4 Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

1 Sam 31:5 And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.

After being severely wounded, Saul perceived that his death was imminent. Dreading the insult and possible torture of being killed by the Philistines, Saul urges his armor bearer to finish the job. The young man feared to kill God's anointed and refuses to take part in Saul's death. Upon his refusal, Saul took out his own sword and fell on it. There is some confusion as to when exactly Saul died. It says that the armour bearer perceived that Saul had died, and that he fell upon his sword and liked died. However, in II Samuel Chapter 1, we read of the testimony of an Amalekite speaking to David who said he passed by and Saul was still alive and he actually killed him.

2 Sam 1:5 And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?

iHenry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

2 Sam 1:6 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 horsemen followed hard after him.

2 Sam 1:7 And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I.

2 Sam 1:8 And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite.

2 Sam 1:9 He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me.

2 Sam 1:10 So I stood upon 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.

J. Vernon McGee said this about the archer that shot King Saul.

It is the beginning of the end for Saul. First he was hit in battle by an archer. Apparently it was someone who did not recognize that he had hit the king. It was, shall we say, a real bull's-eye. It is also tragic that Jonathan was slain in this battle. This is remarkable because on another occasion when Jonathan was fighting the Philistines, he slew 250 of the enemy at one time. This shows how hopelessly outnumbered Israel was at this time. This could well have been a battle in which David and Jonathan would have been on opposite sides, but God had intervened. So we find that Saul is wounded. .ii

1 Sam 31:6 So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together.

1 Sam 31:7 And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

Saul's death with his three sons and armourbearer caused the Israel forces to retreat. This was a dark day for Israel. The remainder of Saul's forces on the other side of the valley of Jezreel perceived their king was dead and they fled. So did all of Israel of that region on that side of the Jordan River. The distance from Mount Gilboa where the battle began over to Jordan was about fifteen miles as the crow flies. The Philistines moved in and occupied the empty cities of Israel in that region.

II. Saul's Body is Rescued by the Men of Jabesh-Gilead

iiJ. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1981 by J. Vernon McGee.

1 Sam 31:8 And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa.

1 Sam 31:9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people.

1 Sam 31:10 And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.

Verse 8 returns to the immediate aftermath of the battle. Saul had just cause in not wanting to perish directly in the hands of the Philistines. When they found his body the next day, they not only strip his armour, but they cut off his head. They sent the armour back to Philistia as a trophy of their great victory. They put it in the house of their false gods and celebrated the victory in their pagan temples.

Saul's armour wound up in the temple of Ashtaroth who was a pagan feminine idol of the Canaanites. The Philistines took the decapitated body of Saul and nailed it to the wall of a city name Bethshan. This was a city on the edge of the western side of the Jordan River valley. As Saul had feared, the Philistines endeavor to inflict every indignity they could upon him.

1 Sam 31:11 And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul;

1 Sam 31:12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there.

1 Sam 31:13 And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

Jabeshgilead was an Israelite community in Gilead about ten miles east of the Jordan River. When word reached them of what had happened to Saul and how the Philistines had desecrated his body, the immediately arose and traveled through the night to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons. They accomplish their goal and recover Saul and his son's bodies and take them back to Jabesh. There is not harmony among the various opinions as to what happened next. It was foreign to Hebrew custom to cremate bodies of the dead, so many view that there was a burning made for them. In other words, they had a great fire as a memorial to them. That certainly was the case in the burial of later Jewish kings.

2 Chr 16:13 And Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the one and fortieth year of his reign.

2 Chr 16:14 And they buried him in his own sepulchres, which he had made for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and divers kinds of spices prepared by the apothecaries' art: and they made a very great burning for him.

2 Chr 21:18 And after all this the LORD smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease.

2 Chr 21:19 And it came to pass, that in process of time, after the end of two years, his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness: so he died of sore diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers.

I'm not one to question God's Word and believe the Word of God says things exactly as it was meant to be said. I personally believe that due to the condition of the bodies and the time that had elapsed, that they burned the bodies just as it says. If this was the case, then they may have feared that the Philistines might come and try to further abuse the bodies of Saul and his sons. One way or the other, they bury the bones and the city of Jabesh mourned seven days by fasting over their dead king. David would soon recognize the men of Jabesh for their gallantry in honoring Saul.

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.