

1 Samuel 31

As we resume the battle between Israel and the Philistines that was imminent in Chapter 29, how was the battle going (v. 1)? The battle had turned so badly for Israel that they were in full retreat, back to their own camp. Just as Samuel had prophesied (28:19), the Philistines quickly and easily defeated Israel in the broad plains of the Valley of Jezreel.¹

What else did Samuel prophecy in 28:18-19? The death of Saul and his sons.

Did that prophecy come true (v. 2)? Yes. Saul's sons died in battle; Saul would soon follow.

The death of Saul's sons was tragic, yet very important in God's plan for the future of Israel.

In what way? In removing the logical heirs to Saul's throne, God cleared the way for David to become the next king of Israel. We know that if Jonathan had survived, he would have gladly yielded the throne to David (18:1-4). But the same could not be said of Saul's other sons, so God was merciful to the nation (and to David) in taking Saul's sons in battle.

What was the next major incident in the battle (vv. 3-5)? Saul, struck by many arrows and severely wounded, knew the battle was completely lost. He pleaded with his armor bearer to kill him, and when he would not, Saul killed himself (Saul took a sword and fell on it). His armor bearer followed suit and fell on his sword.

As Saul faced the end of his life which he knew was coming, how did he react? What was absent from his mindset? As sad as anything is in this account, sad is the *absence* of any kind of sorrow or repentance or crying out to God at all on Saul's part. He was told the previous day that he would die (28:19), yet he does not seem to have prepared his soul to meet God in any way. Isn't it interesting that he's very concerned about his image with the enemy but shows little concern for his relationship with God whom he is about to meet?

What was the reaction of the rest of the Israelites to their impending defeat (v. 7)? The victory of the Philistines was so complete that even those on the other side of the Jordan abandoned their towns and fled. With the Philistine army now occupying territory on the other side of the Jordan, they had cut Israel in half, drawing a line from west to east. The rest of the nation was ripe for total conquest by the Philistines.

What did the Philistines do the next day (vv. 8-10)? The Philistines decapitated Saul and fastened his corpse on the wall of their nearby town of Beth-shan. In the ancient Near East the treatment of a corpse was very significant. If people honored a person, they treated his corpse with care and gave it an honorable burial, but if they did not respect him, they treated his dead body with contempt.

What did the valiant men of Jabesh Gilead do when they heard what the Philistines had done to Saul (vv. 11-13)? They journeyed through the night and....rescuing Saul's corpse from further humiliation, they took down the bodies of Saul and his sons and gave them a proper burial. And they fasted for seven days.

These valiant men were later recognized for their *gratitude*. Many years before, Saul had rescued Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites (11:1-11), It was told the Jabesh-Gileadites that they could surrender and have their right eyes gouged out, or else they would all die. They sent a call for help, not expecting the rest of Israel to come to their aid, but the newly-crowned King Saul gathered 330,000 soldiers together and struck down the Ammonites. Here they repaid the kindness God had shown them from the hand of Saul. Upon taking the throne David rightly thanked these valiant men for their kindness to the memory of Saul, Jonathan and Saul's other sons (2 Samuel 2:4-7).

Saul had served as her king for how long? 42 years when he died (13:1).

Why did Saul not receive God's blessing, falling out of favor with God? Saul's downfall was all about trust and disobedience. God gave him clear direction. Yet he chose to operate in in his own strength using his own "common sense." He failed to view himself as God's servant.

What are the keys to living an obedient life?

Saul's sin, hardened rebellion, and eventual ruin affected far more people than himself and even his immediate family. It literally endangered the entire people of Israel.

This shows why leaders have a higher responsibility, because their fall can endanger many more people than the fall of someone who is not a leader. This is why the New Testament openly presents a higher standard for leaders, even saying they should be *blameless* before the world and God's people (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6).

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "1 Samuel," The Bible Knowledge Commentary: J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Victor Books, 1985), 455.