

## THE DEATH OF KING SAUL

### Introduction:

1. Chapters 27, 29 and 30 brought us to the end of David's time in exile.
2. Chapter 28 illustrated how far Saul had fallen by telling of his visit with the necromancer in Endor.
3. Finally, we come to the tragic end of the life of Israel's first king.

- I. The Defeat of Israel (31:1-7)
  - A. When Samuel appeared and spoke to Saul, he informed him that the Philistines would defeat Israel and that Saul and his sons would be killed.
  - B. This battle is the fulfillment of Samuel's words.
  - C. The Philistines were gathered at Aphek while Israel was assembled at Jezreel (29:1).
  - D. As the Philistines advanced toward the valley of Jezreel, Israel seems to have made Mount Gilboa their last line of defense.
  - E. However, when the Philistines overtook the Israelites in the valley, they pursued them into the mountains and continued the slaughter.
  - F. Here, three of Saul's sons were killed – Malchishua, Abinadab and Jonathan.
    1. There is a lesson to be learned from the death of Jonathan.
    2. Sometimes the innocent suffer because of the sins of others.
    3. Still, Jonathan died as a hero, fighting for the people of God.
  - G. Also, Mount Gilboa was the place where King Saul died.
    1. Unlike Jonathan, however, Saul's death was one of cowardice.
    2. He was wounded by the archers and feared that he would be tortured by the Philistines.
      - a. Interestingly, the word "hit" actually means, "to appear" or "to find." This account is the only time it is translated as "hit" (cf. 1 Chronicles 10:3).
      - b. Also, the word "wounded" means "to writhe, fear, tremble, travail, be in anguish."
      - c. Thus, some translations say that the archers found Saul and he was greatly distressed (or afraid) because of them.
    3. In his fear, Saul ordered his armor-bearer to kill him.
    4. When he refused, Saul fell upon his own sword and took his own life.
      - a. Saul is one of seven men mentioned in Scripture who took their own lives.
      - b. Abimelech (Judges 9:54); Samson (Judges 16:26-30); Saul (1 Samuel 31:4); Saul's armor-bearer (1 Samuel 31:5); Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23); Zimri (1 Kings 16:18); and Judas (Matthew 27:5)
    5. Saul's armor-bearer followed his example and killed himself.
    6. Also, the men of Saul's household were killed in the battle.
  - H. When the Israelites who lived nearby saw the results of the battle, they fled from their cities and allowed the Philistines to inhabit them.
  - I. Thus, Israel was soundly defeated by the Philistines army.

- II. The Desecration of Saul (31:8-10)
- A. On the next day, when the Philistines came to gather spoils, they found the bodies of Saul and his sons.
  - B. They celebrated their victory by desecrating the body of the fallen king.
    - 1. They cut off his head.
    - 2. They took his armor and sent it from city to city.
    - 3. They gave glory to their idols for this victory.
    - 4. They placed Saul's armor in the temple of the Ashtaroth.
    - 5. They placed Saul's head in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron. 10:10).
    - 5. They fastened the bodies of Saul and his sons to the wall of Bethshan.
  - C. Obviously, God was not pleased with these events.
    - 1. God did not want Israel to have a king like the nations.
    - 2. God did not want Israel to suffer under a king like Saul.
    - 3. Yet, God allowed Israel to have what they asked for in order for them to learn by experience that God was their rightful King (cf. Hosea 13:9-11).
- III. The Daring of the Faithful (31:11-13)
- A. When the men of Jabesh-Gilead heard what had been done to Saul and his sons, they acted with courage to right this wrong.
  - B. They traveled several miles under the cover of darkness to remove the bodies from the wall of Bethshan.
  - C. They brought them back to Jabesh and burned them to remove the mutilated flesh.
  - D. Then, they buried the bones under a tree in Jabesh.
  - E. Finally, they proclaimed a fast for seven days in mourning over the death of Saul and the defeat of Israel.
  - F. There is an important lesson to learn from the men of Jabesh-Gilead.
    - 1. They were the city that Saul had defended in his first battle as King (cf. 11:1-15).
    - 2. Then, Saul gave the glory and credit to God for defending His people.
    - 3. It reminds us of what could have been, had Saul remained faithful to the Lord.
    - 4. Instead, his life ended in tragedy and sorrow.

