

"LIFE AND DEATH"

1 Samuel 31:1-13

1. The battle turns against Israel.

1 Samuel 31:1... Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

The Philistines attacked deep into Israelite territory, and Saul's army assembled and prepared for battle at Mount Gilboa. Because of his rebellion against the Lord, Saul was not ready for battle. In fact, he was gripped by fear!

1 Samuel 28:1–5... Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." **2** David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." So Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life." **3** Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists. **4** So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa. **5** When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.

Instead of taking his fear to the Lord Saul made things worse by seeking God's voice through a spirit medium—the *witch of Endor*. Strangely, God did speak to Saul, but He spoke words of judgment through the prophet Samuel whom the witch called up from the dead. Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would die the next day (**1 Samuel 28:19**) . . . **1 Samuel 31:1** is the next day.)

Did Saul's army see fear in his eyes and lose heart? In any case, they fled from the Philistines.

2. The death of Saul's sons.

1 Samuel 31:2... The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul.

Tragically, Saul's sons were caught up in the judgment of God against their father Saul. Jonathan died heroically as we might expect—*loyally fighting for his God, his country, and his father the king to the very end.*

God cleared the deck as far as Saul's logical heirs to the throne was concerned. This cleared the way for David to become the next king of Israel. David would have to deal with Ishbosheth, the one surviving son of Saul before taking the undisputed throne of Israel (**2 Samuel 2:8-4:12**).

3. The tragic end of King Saul.

1 Samuel 31:3–6... The battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers. **4** Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. **5** When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him. **6** Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together.

Saul's life did not start out like it finished. Forty years earlier Saul had been a handsome young man who had all the marks of a true leader. But, little by little he had allowed compromise to worm its way into his heart. As a result, he descended into weakness and wickedness. When Saul died, he was only a short distance from Ramah where he had been crowned king forty years earlier. Spiritually, however, he might as well have been on another planet. The epitaph on his tombstone could have read . . .

1 Samuel 26:21... "Behold, *I have played the fool* and have committed a serious error."

This is definitely a depressing scene. Beyond the dead bodies and the defeat by Israel's mortal enemy, the saddest part of the whole thing is the absence of even a hint of repentance or crying out to God on the part of King Saul. Even though he knew he was going to die, **HE DID NOT PREPARE HIS SOUL TO MEET GOD!**

Many people put off getting right with God until a later time, assuming the Holy Spirit will still be dealing with their heart and that they will still want to get right with God. F.B. Meyer observed . . .

"It is a very solemn thought! No career could begin with fairer, brighter prospects than Saul had, and none could close in more absolute midnight of despair; and yet such a fate may befall us, unless we watch, and pray, and walk humbly with our God."

In **2 Samuel 1:4-10**, there is another version of the story of Saul's ultimate demise. Is this a contradiction or a fabrication? I believe that the Amalekite was the first one to find Saul's dead body and that he told David that he killed him thinking that David would be pleased and would give him a handsome reward.

4. A significant defeat for Israel.

1 Samuel 31:7... When the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled; then the Philistines came and lived in them.

The victory of the Philistines was so overwhelming that even those on the other side of the valley and even those on the other side of the Jordan river fled in terror before the Philistines. Saul's rebellion affected far more people than himself and his immediate family. It literally endangered the entire nation of Israel.

This illustrates the fact that spiritual leaders have a big responsibility. Their failure to love the Lord and to obey Him can place many more people in the

crosshairs of the enemy. This is why the New Testament openly presents a higher standard for leaders, even saying they should be *blameless* for just cause before the world and God's people (1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6).

4. The Philistines disgrace the corpses of King Saul and his sons.

1 Samuel 31:8–10... It came about on the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. **9** They cut off his head and stripped off his weapons, and sent *them* throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. **10** They put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

Saul's tragic death gave an opportunity for the enemies of the Lord to disgrace His name and to mock the living God. In that culture, to have your dead body treated this way was the ultimate humiliation.

5. The bravery and nobility of the men of Jabesh Gilead

1 Samuel 31:11–13... Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, **12** all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. **13** They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

Glory to God, He always has valiant men and women who are ready and willing to do the tough stuff! Saul is gone, God is getting ready to raise up David to be the next king of Israel.

The brave men of Jabesh Gilead must have remembered how Saul had delivered their city from the Ammonites (**1 Samuel 11:1-11**). When David heard of Saul's death, he did not rejoice. In fact, he mourned and composed a song in honor of Saul and Jonathan (***The Song of the Bow*, 2 Samuel 1:19-27**). In spite of all that Saul did to David, the future king spoke well of Saul after his death. Furthermore, when David did become king of Judah, he

thanked the men of Jabesh Gilead for their bold gesture of kindness to Saul and his sons (**2 Samuel 2:4-7**)!

LESSONS TO LEARN . . .

The Truth About Death

2 Samuel 14:14... "For we will surely die and are like water spilled on the ground which cannot be gathered up again. Yet God does not take away life, but plans ways so that the banished one will not be cast out from him."

Romans 6:23... the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Hebrews 9:27... And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment.

Saul's death serves as a clear reminder that death is coming for all of us. This pitiful scene is a tragic, but clear reminder that death plays no favorites. Unless the Lord returns in our lifetime, none of us are getting out of this world alive.

The Facts of Life

The reality is this—*we can die like a loser, or we can die like a winner*. A lack of commitment to Christ will always lead to life of compromise. When life is lived like this, death is a tragedy.

On the other hand, when a believer is committed to Christ and lives to please Him death is a victory!

Psalms 116:15... Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones.

Philippians 1:21... For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

How you live determines how you will die!

Make Your Life Count

Decide tonight what you want your legacy to be. Make your life count for God. Don't waste your life on the frivolous things of this world. Don't die like a loser. Die like a winner!

2 Timothy 4:6–8... For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. **7** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; **8** in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.