

FIRST SAMUEL

4. What did David's men propose to do to him? _____
5. What did the priest bring to David? _____
6. What was the priest's name? _____
7. How many men went with David? _____
8. How many stayed behind? _____
9. Whom did David's men find in a field? _____
10. To whom did David send some of the spoil
he took? _____

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 31

Vv. 1- 6 *Saul's death.* Samuel had told Saul that he would die in battle. This came to pass as the armies of Israel and Philistia met in battle on Mt. Gilboa. Saul fell on his sword and killed himself. His sons were killed with him in this fatal battle.

Vv. 7-13 *Saul's burial.* The Philistines cut off Saul's head and stripped off his armor. They put his armor in the house of their gods the Ash-taroth. They fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. The men of Jabesh-Gilead heard that Saul's body was hanging on Beth-shan. They came by night and took the body and gave it a decent burial.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *The word of God is sure.* Saul had done everything he could to try to thwart God's will. Even though he had disobeyed God on at least two outstanding occasions, he evidently thought he could escape the ultimate punish-

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ment which was pronounced against him. Samuel had predicted that Saul would die in battle. Saul did die as Samuel said. We may rest well assured that the Word of God cannot be broken. The prophecies of God are sure to be fulfilled.

2. *Faithful friends are priceless.* Saul had befriended the men of Jabesh-Gilead by rescuing them out of the hands of Nahash, the king of the Ammonites. The men of Jabesh-Gilead did not forget that Saul had helped them in the early days of his kingship. They did what they could to see that Saul's body was given a fitting burial. At the risk of their own lives they crossed the Jordan river. Traveling by night they came to the wall of Beth-shan and took down the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons. They took these bones back to their town and gave them an honorable burial.

Saul's Last Battle, 31:1-13.

Saul's Death. 31:1-6

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

2 And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons.

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

4 Then said Saul to his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armor-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

5 And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.

6 So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together.

1. Why did Israel fight in the mountains? 31:1

The Israelites seemed to prefer the hill country for their battlefield. They were forced to fight Jaban, the king of Hazor, in the lowlands in the days of Joshua (Joshua 11:1). At that time the Canaanites fought with horses and chariots (Joshua 11:4), equipment which the Israelites did not appear to use in the battle until the later days of the kings of Israel (I Kings 20:25; II Kings 9:16; et al.). Israel evidently held a good reputation for fighting in the hill country, and their enemies thought that they were not able to fight in the valleys (I Kings 20:23). The chariots of their enemies would be able to roll more freely in the plains and the valleys, so Israel would have every advantage as they went into this final battle under Saul. They would have the physical advantage of the terrain as they went into this final battle against the Philistines. The most important advantage was not theirs. They did not have the blessings of God.

2. Why were Saul's sons with him? 31:2

In earlier battles Jonathan was the leader of the sons of Saul. On occasions he had been in charge of at least one thousand men. It was his bravery that brought an initial victory as he and his armor-bearers surprised the Philistine garrison. Abinadab and Melchishua may also have been in charge of a detachment of soldiers. Israel needed all her men in this great battle. Her kings' sons were not exempt from military duty.

3. How badly was Saul wounded? 31:3

The Philistines were better equipped in many ways than the Israelites. They used their bowmen with great advantage in the fighting on the mountain slopes. It was these men who finally caught up with Saul and his three sons. Jonathan, Abinadab and Melchishua were evidently

mortally wounded by the Philistines themselves. Saul's wounds left him able to converse with his armor-bearers and finally to fall on his own sword, though dying. The Greek translation of the Bible, made some two hundred years before Christ, viewed this situation as one depicting Saul being wounded in the abdomen. He might have expected this wound to be fatal, and it certainly kept him from engaging in further battle. He was not so severely wounded that he could not kill himself. He was wounded so badly that he despaired of living, or else he would have not asked his armor-bearer to slay him. The words used in the various translations as well as in the original text point to his being wounded under the breast cartilage. This would put the wound in his abdomen and bowels and probably would have resulted in his ultimate death.

4. *Why did the armor-bearer refuse to kill Saul?* 31:4

Saul wanted his armor-bearer to kill him so that the Philistines could not make sport of him (Judges 19:25). Cases such as his and that of Abimelech (Judges 9:54) indicate that enemies of the day quite often amused themselves with the helpless but conscious warriors whom they found. Whether the armor-bearer was in a too-distressed state of mind or had too much reverence for his lord cannot be made out with certainty. The latter seems more probable. When the armor-bearer refused to kill Saul, Saul fell on his own sword and died. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died with him.

5. *How did Saul die?* 31:6

The archers of the Philistines overtook him; and when they got him in range, they wounded him. Saul then called upon his armor-bearer to run him through with his sword, but the armor-bearer would not do this. Saul wanted to die at the hands of a friend rather than at the hands of the Philistines who would cool their courage by maltreating him; but the armor-bearer was afraid, since he was

supposed to be answerable for the king's life. Saul then inflicted death upon himself with his sword, and the armor-bearer also fell upon his own sword and died with his king. On that day then Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer all died. It is said that all his house, or all the warriors who went out with him as a part of his house or his household, were slain in this battle. Neither Abner nor Saul's son, Ish-botheth, was included: for the latter did not go out to battle, and although the former was Saul's cousin and commander-in-chief, he did not belong to his house nor was he considered his servant. Saul's taking his own sword and falling upon it is one of the very rare instances of suicide in the Old Testament. In view of it, the older commentators discuss the question of Saul's final salvation, generally with an unfavorable verdict.

Saul's Burial. 31:7-13

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.

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

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

10 And they put his armor in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

11 And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul;

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 Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there.

13 And they took their bones, and buried *them* under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

6. *What was the outcome of the battle of Mt. Gilboa?*
31:7

The principal engagement of the war took place in the plain of Jezreel. When the Israelites were obliged to yield, they fled up the mountains of Gilboa and were pursued and slain there. The Philistines followed Saul, smote his three sons, and fought fiercely against Saul himself. When the men of Israel upon the hillsides that were opposite to the valley of Jezreel and the Jordan saw that the troops fled and Saul and his sons were dead, they took flight out of the cities; whereupon the Philistines nailed the bodies of Saul and his sons to the wall of Beth-shean. This presupposes the capture of that city, from which it is evident that they had occupied the land as far as the Jordan. All the northern part of the land of Israel, in other words, the whole land with the exception of Perea and the land of Judah, came into the hands of the Philistines when Saul was slain.

7. *Where was Saul's corpse gibbeted?* 31:10

On the following day, when the Philistines stripped the slain, they found Saul and his three sons lying upon Gilboa. Having cut off their heads and plundered their weapons, they sent them as trophies into the land of the Philistines, passing them round about among the different towns and hamlets of their land to announce the joyful news in the idol-temples and to the people. The corpses they fastened to the town-wall of Beth-shean, a city in the valley of the Jordan (see Joshua 17:11). It is not stated that the Philistines plundered the bodies of Saul's sons and mutilated them by cutting off their heads; but it is evident from verse twelve, where the Jabesh-gileadites are said to

have taken down from the wall of Beth-shean not Saul's body only, but the bodies of his sons also, that the Philistines had treated the corpses of Saul's sons in just the same manner as that of Saul himself. The writer speaks distinctly of the abuse of Saul's body, because it was his death that he had chiefly in mind at the time.

8. *Was Saul's body burned? 31:11-13*

The men of Jabesh in Gilead had special reason to remember Saul with gratitude (see I Samuel 11:1-11); and they undertook to remove the disgrace that had been heaped upon Israel by the gibbeting of the king's corpse. All the brave men of the town set out to Beth-shean, took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall, brought them to Jabesh and burned them there. It was not the custom in Israel to burn the corpse, but to bury it in the ground. The former treatment was restricted to the worst criminals (see Leviticus 20:14). Consequently the Chaldées interpreted the word "burned" as relating to the burning of spices, a custom which is met afterwards as a special honor shown to certain of the kings of Judah on the occasion of their burial (II Chronicles 16:14; 21:19; Jeremiah 34:5). In these later instances, however, it is written that the men did "make a burning for him"; whereas here it is stated distinctly that "they burned them." The reason for the burning of the bodies in the case of Saul and his sons is seen in the peculiarity of the circumstances. The bodies were mutilated by the removal of the heads, and therefore a regular burial of the dead was impossible. Moreover these men were anxious lest the Philistines follow up their victory, come to Jabesh, and desecrate the bodies still further. Then, too, this burning was not a complete burning to ashes, but merely a burning of the skin and flesh; so that the bones still remained; were buried in the ground under a shady tree; and were later fetched away and buried in Saul's family

grave at Zela, in the land of Benjamin (II Samuel 21:11 ff), as an act of kindness on the part of David.

9. *What judgment of God is seen in Saul's death?*

In the ignominious fate of Saul there was manifested the righteous judgment of God in consequence of the hardening of his heart. The love which the citizens of Jabesh displayed in their treatment of the corpses of Saul and his sons, had reference not to the king as rejected by God, but to the king as anointed of Jehovah, and was a practical condemnation, not of the divine judgment which had fallen upon Saul, but of the cruelty of the enemies of Israel and its anointed. For although Saul had waged war almost incessantly against the Philistines, it is not known that in any one of his victories he had ever been guilty of such cruelties towards the conquered and slaughtered foe as could justify this barbarous revenge on the part of the uncircumcised upon his lifeless corpse. Throughout the whole narrative one can almost hear the words of the prophet of God who had tried to admonish the king and had declared, "Behold, to hearken is better than sacrifice; and to obey is better than the fat of rams."

CHAPTER 31 IN REVIEW

1. On what mountain did Israel fight the Philistines? _____
2. What sons of Saul were slain? _____
3. Who wounded Saul? _____
4. Whom did Saul ask to slay him? _____
5. How did Saul die? _____
6. Where did the Philistines put Saul's armor? _____
7. Where was Saul's body hanged? _____
8. What men took down his body? _____
9. What did the rescuers do with Saul's body? _____
10. How long did they mourn for Saul? _____