

**Refine Women's Ministry**  
**David Lesson 11 (Last): Tragic End of Saul's Reign- 1 Samuel 31**  
April 25, 2018 by Kim Peelen

*Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, and in their death they were not parted;  
They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. 2 Samuel 1:23*

*Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.  
But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away." 1 Samuel 12: 24, 25*

*He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands. Psalm 78:70 – 72*

Since the last chapters of 1 Samuel switch between the battlefield action and David's rescue of Ziklag in southern Judah, here is a recap of the army movements before the major battle:

**Saul's Final Battle: 1 Samuel 28:1, 2; 29:1, 9-11; 31:1**

*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." 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". . . Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping by the spring with is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines were proceeding on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were proceeding on in the rear with Achish. But Achish replied to David, "I know that you are pleasing in my sight, like an angel of God; nevertheless the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He must not go up with us to the battle.' Now then, arise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who have come with you, and as soon as you have arisen early in the morning and have light, depart." So David arose early, he and his men, to depart in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines [Ziklag]. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel. . . Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.*

David and his small army of men have faithfully fought alongside the Philistines for over a year, gaining the trust of Achish, king of Gath. However, officers of Achish do not share his confidence in Israel's most famous warrior, and demand that the king dismiss him and his men, which he reluctantly does just before the battle. God sovereignly extracts David from the difficult dilemma of fighting against his countrymen, and orchestrates his arrival in Ziklag in time to pursue the Amalekite kidnappers of its women and children (1 Samuel 30). While David hunts the marauders in the south, the battle unfolds in the northern valley of Jezreel.

**Samuel's Prophecy Fulfilled – Saul and His Sons Die: 1 Chronicles 10:2-8**  
**Cross reference in 1 Samuel 31: 2-8**

*And the Philistines closely pursued Saul and his sons; and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab [Ishvi] and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. And the battle became heavy against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me." but his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took*

*his sword and fell on it. And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell on his sword and died. Thus Saul died with his three sons, and all those of his house died together.*

Samuel's words from the grave come to pass: *"Moreover the LORD WILL give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me"* 1 Samuel 28:19a. It is Saul himself who deals the deathblow, because his armor bearer refused to raise his hand against the LORD's anointed. It is interesting to note that David was once Saul's armor bearer, and could have been the one Saul requested to end his life.

### **Samuel's Prophecy Fulfilled- Defeat and Retreat of Israel: 1 Chronicles 10:7 cf 1 Samuel 31:7**

*When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that they had fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and lived in them.*

The second part of Samuel's prophecy precisely comes to pass as well: *"Indeed, the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!"* A humiliating defeat: the army of the LORD retreats from the enemy and residents of Israel abandon their homes to the enemy - a complete reversal from their miraculous victory against Goliath and the Philistines.

### **Saul's Humiliation in Death: Samuel 31: 8-10 cf 1 Chronicles 10: 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. 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. They put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.*

**Beth-shan** is a city located at the junction of the Jezreel and Jordan valleys, likely on a well-travelled road where many will see Saul's mutilated body.

**Temple of Ashtaroath** (also Ashtoreths, Astarte) is where Canaanites or Philistines could pay homage to the sister-wife of Baal, the goddess of sex and war by placing weapons of defeated enemies such as Saul's sword before her. Recall Israel stored the weapons of Goliath behind the ephod in the house of the LORD (1 Samuel 21:9). The parallel passage in **1 Chronicles 10:10** varies slightly: *And they put his armor in the house of their gods and fastened his head in the house of Dagon.* The Philistines reserve Saul's head for the temple of their supreme god, who is father of Baal and Ashtaroath. Dagon's house is likely the same temple where the Philistines placed the captured Ark of God in 1 Samuel 5, but God demonstrated His supremacy by knocking over the Dagon idol several times.

What a humiliation for the weapons of Israel's first king to be offered to the vile goddess Astarte! Before Saul became king, Samuel warned the Israelites against these false gods, saying *"If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone, and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."* So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath and served the LORD alone. The LORD honored the repentance of Israel so the Philistines were

*subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:3-13). However, the people are soon dissatisfied serving God only, so reject the LORD and demand a king "that we may be like all the nations, **that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles**" 1 Samuel 8:20.*

So, God gave the people an earthly king for forty years, but now Saul and his sons are dead and the army of the LORD is crushed by the enemy. Samuel's warning comes true, "*You must not turn aside, for then you would go after futile things which can not profit or deliver, because they are futile. For the LORD will not abandon His people on account of His great name, because the LORD has been pleased to make you a people for Himself. Only fear the LORD and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, both you and your king will be swept away*" 1 Samuel 12:21-25.

### **Jabesh-gilead Repays a Debt: 1 Samuel 31:11-13**

*Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 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. They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.*

Jabesh-gilead is a town in eastern tribal area of Manasseh, just east of the Jordan River and together with the tribes of Reuben and Gad forms the area 'beyond the Jordan'.

### **Background on Jabesh-gilead: Judges 19 – 21**

First Samuel begins with the birth of Samuel, the last judge of Israel, and his life forms the framework around which Israel transitions from a collection of spiritually struggling tribes ruled by judges to a united nation under one monarch. When Samuel anoints Saul the first king, Israel is in spiritual bankruptcy: *in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes* Judges 21:25. The town of Jabesh-gilead figures prominently in the bizarre, Benjaminite Civil War described in the last chapters of Judges.

A Levite and his concubine journey home and stay overnight in Gibeah, a town of Benjamin (becomes Saul's headquarters as king). When wicked men make illicit demands of the Levite, he gives his concubine to them and they assault her to death (very similar to Gen. 19). When the Levite discovers her body the next morning, **he cuts her into 12 pieces, sending parts to the 12 tribes to demand justice**. In response to this horrible sin, the sons of Israel *assembled as one man to the LORD at Mizpah*, develop a plan to punish the crime, and swear *none of us shall give his daughter to Benjamin in marriage. Then the tribes of Israel sent men through the entire tribe of Benjamin, saying, "Now then, deliver up the men, the worthless fellows in Gibeah, that we may put them to death and remove this wickedness from Israel."* But the sons of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brothers, the sons of Israel. And the sons of Benjamin gathered from the cities to Gibeah, to go out to battle against the sons of Israel.

Civil war erupts and Benjamin is defeated, leaving only 600 male survivors who escape to the wilderness. With no available women for them to marry because *the children of Israel have*

sworn an oath, saying, 'Cursed be the one who gives a wife to Benjamin', the sons of Israel realize the tribe of Benjamin will eventually die out (no wives, no children), so they devise a wicked plan. Since Jabesh-gilead did not participate in the war against Gibeah, *the congregation instructs the warriors, "Go and strike the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with the edge of the sword, with the women and the little ones; you shall utterly destroy every man and every woman who has lain with a man."* They spare 400 virgins of the town in order to give them to the surviving men of Benjamin as wives. However, 200 more virgins are needed, so they allow the remaining Benjaminite men to 'catch a wife' from the maidens of Shiloh during their annual festival. In their thinking, this plan 'honors' their oath to not voluntarily give their girls to them (even though they slaughter an innocent town!!!) This tragic, convoluted account illustrates vividly the depth of sin when *everyone did what was right in his own eyes!*

Years later, in first Samuel 11, Nahash the Ammonite [a descendant of Lot] besieges Jabesh-gilead and its residents beg the newly anointed King Saul [who is a Benjaminite] to help them. *Then the spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, "Whoever does not come out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen."* Then the dread of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out as one man. . . The next morning they struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day (1 Samuel 11:6, 7, 11). Saul's message method is no accident. While under the control of the Spirit of God, Saul blatantly alludes to the infamous incident that started the Benjaminite Civil War to rally Israel's disparate tribes to help Jabesh-gilead. It works, and Saul rescues Jabesh-gilead in his first recorded battle as king.

The townspeople do not forget Saul and his sons' help to rescue them from the Ammonites, so the men of Jabesh risk their lives to retrieve the body of Saul from public humiliation. The valiant men of Jabesh show kindness and respect by removing, burning [because it is mutilated], burying, and officially mourning their fallen king and his sons in their town.

**In your groups discuss David's song after he hears Saul and his sons are dead -**

Because David leaves for Ziklag before the battle, it is a few days before the news of Saul's death reaches him. *Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword 2 Samuel 1:11, 12.*

**David's Lament for Saul and His Sons: 2 Samuel 1:7 - 17**

*Then David chanted with this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he told them to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow; behold, it is written in the book of Jashar.*

1. What prompts David to compose this song?
2. What instructions does he have for his song? Why do you think he wants others to sing it?

## Song of The Bow

v 19 *Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How have the mighty fallen!*

v 20 *Tell it not in Gath, Proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon;*

*Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.*

v 21 *O mountains of Gilboa, Let not dew or rain be on you, nor fields of offerings;*

*For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, The shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.*

3. How does David describe his enemy Saul?

4. What does David NOT want to happen in the towns of the Philistines (Gath, Ashkelon)?

5. Why does David desire Mount Gilboa to NOT enjoy water to grow food – what has happened on it? Note: ‘anointing a shield with oil’ cleanses it after battle and prepares it for the next.

v 22 *From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,*

*The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, And the sword of Saul did not return empty.*

v 23 *Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life,*

*And in their death they were not parted; They were swifter than eagles,*

*They were stronger than lions.*

v 24 *O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet,*

*Who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.*

6. Describe David’s attitude towards Saul – what is he remembering about Israel’s king?

7. Do you detect any rejoicing or any relief now that David’s tormentor Saul is dead? Why can David respond this way?

8. Could you have written such a song about an enemy who unjustly pursued you for years?

v 25 *How have the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places.*

v 26 *I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; You have been very pleasant to me.*

*Your love to me was more wonderful Than the love of women.*

v 27 *How have the mighty fallen, And the weapons of war perished!*

9. Describe David’s grief over Jonathan’s death.

10. From how David has lived his life so far, do you think David will remember and honor his covenants with Jonathan now that both he and Saul are dead? (see 1 Sam. 18:3, 4; 20:14-17; 23:16-18). Why or why not?

## Summary:

God in His perfect timing finally resolves the enmity between Saul and David on the battlefield on Mount Gilboa when Israel's king falls on his sword. Rather than rejoicing, David mourns deeply over Saul and his sons' deaths, even instructing his followers to memorize his lament that honors the fallen ruler. There will be no riotous celebration over the death of the LORD's anointed, even though it means David finally will ascend the throne of Israel after years of living as a fugitive and enemy of the state. A godly ruler lives righteously and gives honor towards the LORD and His creatures in all circumstances, and David not only demonstrates this repeatedly during his time in exile, but also at the crucial moment he becomes God's ruler over the sons of Israel. The LORD truly found a man after His own heart!

The closing verses of 1 Samuel end with the residents of Jabesh rescuing the mutilated bodies of Saul and his sons and giving them an honorable burial. However, the 1 Chronicles 10 account adds the following commentary on Saul's reign: ***So Saul died for his trespass, which he committed against the LORD, which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.*** Saul did not end his life, God did!

Sin did not disqualify Saul from being king, but **UNREPENTANT SIN** was his undoing – his refusal to confess his disobedience, repent from it, and obey the commands of the LORD. Saul and David were both filled with the Holy Spirit yet one sought his own glory and will, while the other pursued obedience and submission to The LORD and His commands. Which kind of follower of Jesus will you be? My prayer is that David becomes a friend who encourages you to live an intentional, faith-filled life and *to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* Ephesians 4:1-3.

## Homework

1. Read Judges 19 – 21 for the complete history of the Benjaminite War. Record any thoughts.
2. Read Deuteronomy 17:14 – 20. What are the kings of Israel to do? Why? Do you think Saul did this? How would this exercise benefit you?
3. Read 2 Samuel 1 to give more information on David's response to Saul's death. Record any thoughts that encourage or surprise you.
4. Read 1 Samuel through 2 Samuel 1:27 for a final time. Who are the three main characters in this book? What are their roles, callings from God? What encourages you the most in the book? Thank the LORD for giving His Word to study and share!