

DAVID'S RISE AND SAUL'S FALL

1 Samuel 30:21-31:13

Key Verse: 30:23

David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us."

Last week, we learned how David found strength in the Lord when he was in extreme distress. He didn't snap or panic like his men did. He made decisions by going to God first. God enabled David and his men to pursue the Amalekites and recover all their family members and possessions.

In today's passage, David gives the credit to God for the victory over the Amalekites. In dealing with the plunder, he showed a glimpse of why he would be called "a man after God's own heart." This passage also describes the tragic ending of King Saul's life. We learn how we should fight a good fight of faith to the end.

I. DAVID CREDITS GOD WITH HIS VICTORY (30:21-31)

After inquiring of the Lord, David pursued the Amalekites and found them eating and drinking in the open fields, dancing with joy because of their good fortune (16). David and his men slaughtered them non-stop for almost 24 hours. None of them escaped except 400 young men who fled on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had taken. Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter. He recovered all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock. "This plunder belongs to David!" they said (20; NLT). They acknowledged the fact that if it weren't for David's faith, they wouldn't have gotten the possessions back, not to mention their family. They would have still been weeping, and trying to stone David.

A problem arose because of the great plunder. David and his 400 men returned triumphantly to the Besor Ravine where the 200 men who had been too exhausted to go with them stayed. They came out to welcome them, and David greeted them joyfully. But some troublemakers among his followers said, "They didn't go with us, so they can't have any of the plunder we recovered. Give them their wives and children, and tell them to be gone" (22). Their logic was simple—these men did not fight with them, so they didn't deserve the plunder. They were saying, "We worked hard to get the plunder. We risked our lives fighting the enemy while they were lounging here. Why do we have to share the reward with them?" As his men presented this argument to him, David could have sided with them. After all, it was true that the 400 men risked their lives to pursue the Amalekites after having marched many days under the hot Middle East sun.

But what did David say to them? His answer revealed a glimpse of him as a future shepherd king of Israel. David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us" (23). David didn't say, "Yes, you and I worked hard to earn this

plunder.” He said, “This is what the Lord has given us.” He told them it was God who had given the victory. It was God who had protected them and handed the enemy over to them. It was true that they fought. But it was God who had given them the victory. David was grateful to God for the victory and he was willing to share the plunder that God had given them.

You might say that it was no big deal that David gave the credit to God. But do we always do this when we accomplish something in our lives? It is so easy for us to give the credit to ourselves or someone else. The graduation season is approaching. In graduation ceremonies, many students credit their parents with their accomplishment and rightly so. But rarely do they credit God. This is true when you get an A in class, get a good job or a promotion at work or publish a significant research paper. It is easy for us to quickly say, “Hey, I worked hard to get this.” But when we think about it, we cannot even get up in the morning, let alone accomplish anything, unless God enables us to. God gave us the gift of life, he helps us sustain our physical and spiritual life, and he provides people around us to help accomplish anything we do. So it is important we begin anything with prayer to God first and then remember to credit him when we finish it. Otherwise, we become proud when we succeed and forget to thank him. We despair when we fail and thus fail to glorify his name. We should learn from David that we make a decision by inquiring of him first and then make sure to credit him with anything we accomplish.

David also said, “Who will listen when you talk like this? We share and share alike—those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment” (24; NLT). Verse 25 says that from then on David made this a decree and regulation for Israel. This way, David recognized the contribution made by the 200 men who were left in the base camp.

In any organization, there are people who work hard behind the scene. Their supporting role is just as important as that of those who are in the front lines. For example, for our Bible conferences, we have some coworkers who arrange logistics behind the scene, prepare snacks, give rides to students, type and copy study questions and programs, and so on. Their jobs are not as glamorous as those of messengers and presiders but without their hard work, our conferences would not run smoothly. So let us not underestimate our roles as supporters of our ministry. Let us do even small things faithfully before the eyes of God.

David shared the plunders with not only the 200 men, but also the people of various towns. When he arrived at Ziklag, David sent part of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends. “Here is a present for you, taken from the Lord’s enemies,” he said. The gifts were also sent to the people of all the places David and his men had visited and received support. [*He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa and Racal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed (27-31).*]

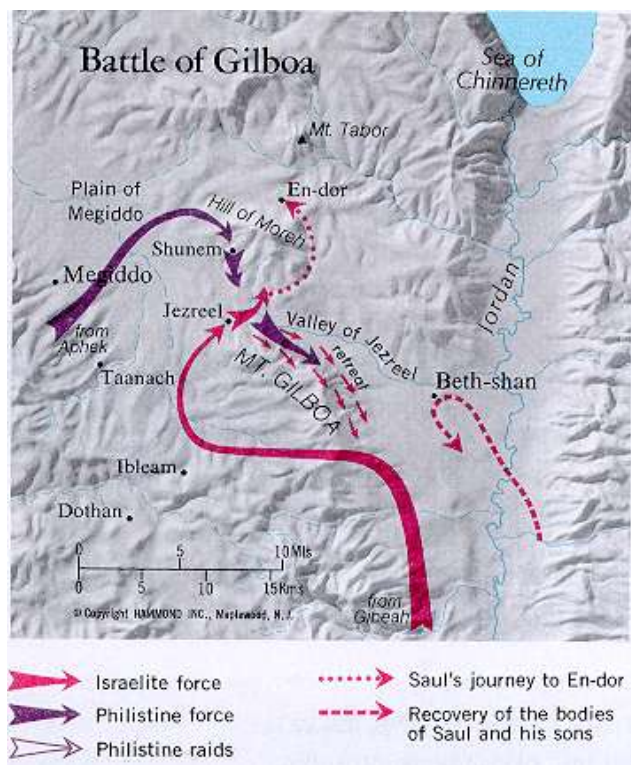
II. THE TRAGIC END OF SAUL'S LIFE (31:1-13)

Chapter 31 describes the end of King Saul. Look at verse 1. *Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell slain on Mount Gilboa.* The battle in the Valley of Jezreel was fierce. King Saul and his force could not hold the line and began to retreat eastward along Mount Gilboa. The Philistines pressed hard after Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua (2). The fighting still grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. With an arrow stuck in his body, Saul knew his end was near. What did Saul say to his armor-bearer? He told him to kill him before he was captured by the Philistines. Saul was well aware of the tortures he would have to go through if he were caught alive by the cruel enemy.



His armor-bearer had a moral dilemma. He was terrified and would not do what the king asked of him. What did Saul do? He took his own sword and fell on it. So King Saul took his own life on Mount Gilboa. Saul died the same way he lived his life—he took matters into his own hands without regard to God or others around him. He had been consumed with capturing David and killing him out of his jealousy. He wanted to hold on to his throne by eliminating David. But now, he died lonely on a mountain without his family surrounding him.

We remember how promising Saul's life was when he was anointed king by Samuel. He was tall and handsome. He was humble and brave. God used him to defend his people from their enemies. But his feeling of jealousy got the best of him. He allowed his feelings to dominate his life. He did not listen to God or God's servants, which is the trademark of a proud man. He became proud. He disobeyed God. He pretended to repent but he did things on his own. He brought his own downfall. It was a tragedy.



Some people might say that King Saul's death was honorable because he died fighting the enemy. But 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 says the following: "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse." In human eyes, Saul committed suicide. But the Bible says that it was the Lord who put him to death. Again we learn we should look at things with spiritual eyes. Saul died on that mountain because he was unfaithful to the Lord. God allowed it to happen. God did not come to rescue him as he had done for David.

The next day, when the Philistines went out to strip the dead, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off Saul's head and stripped off his armor. Then they proclaimed the good news of Saul's death in their pagan temple and to the people throughout the land of Philistia. They placed his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of the city of Beth Shan (8-10).

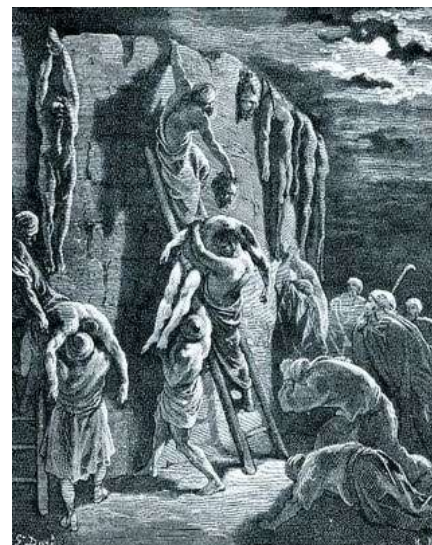


During our pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we had an opportunity to visit the ruins of Beth Shan. Walking through the streets of the once-glorious city, I imagined the headless body of King Saul fastened to the wall of the city. It was not a pretty picture in my mind.

Look at verses 11-13. When the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their mighty warriors traveled through the night to Beth Shan and took the bodies of Saul and his sons down from the wall. They brought them to Jabesh, where they burned the bodies. Then they took their bones and buried them beneath the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

Jabesh Gilead was not very close to Beth Shan in distance. It was about 12 miles and there was the Jordan River between them. But the men of Jabesh Gilead came and took care of Saul's body. Clearly they wanted to honor the king who had saved them from their cruel enemy, Nahash "I gouge out your right eye" the king of Ammonite (1Sa 11:1-11). These men remind us of the heyday of King Saul's life. It is a reminder that we should not only begin our life of faith well but more importantly end it well in God.

In today's passage, we learned that we should credit God with things we accomplish, knowing that we cannot do anything good without his help. From the tragic ending of Saul's life, we learn that we should



finish our lives well by listening to God and his words rather than giving in to our emotions.

Through the study of 1 Samuel, we learned that there are basically two different ways of living a life of faith in God. Eli's sons had no fear of the Lord and blatantly pursued their carnal desires for money and women. On the other hand, Samuel listened to God carefully and obeyed him faithfully. God used him to bring a spiritual revival to his people. Do we want to be like Eli's sons or Samuel?

We also learned from the contrast between Saul and David. King Saul had a good beginning but gave in to his feelings of jealousy. He would not listen to God or God's servant. His life ended tragically because of his pride. David was a shepherd boy who fought and defeated the Philistine champion Goliath with only a sling. The courage came from his faith in the Lord. God anointed him as a future leader of Israel and raised him to be a good shepherd through the wilderness training. We will continue to learn about the life of David in our 2 Samuel study. May God help each of us to listen to the word of God with a humble and learning mind!