

## 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Ch 31

Ch 31 concludes the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, and it also concludes the life of Saul. Now contextually it picks up where Ch 29 left off. You recall that Ch 29 finds the Philistine army preparing for this great battle against Israel. And we find David there through a course of events actually trying to join (along with his 600 men) the forces of Philistine army to fight against the forces of Israel. Now the night before, Saul had visited a medium (the witch of En Dor) and by an interesting appearance of Samuel had learned that within 24hrs both he and his sons would be dead. So Ch 28,29, and 31 all take place within a 24hr period. In Ch 30 we find a cut scene from this Epic Saga whereby David (by God's sovereign grace) having been rejected by the Philistine army returns to Ziklag only to find his own town to have been ransacked by the Amalekites. The Philistines rejected him, everything he'd ever leaned on or loved had been taken from him, his own men spoke of stoning him, David had hit "rock bottom." and As you know when you're at the bottom there's only one way to look (if we're willing to look at all) and that's up. And I love that God loves us so much that though we kick and scream and resist His draw, and kick against the goads, yet He doesn't give up on us. And He's so concerned for our eternal well being that He'll allow our temporal world to come crashing down around us and upon us, just so that we'll turn to Him. And find ourselves on our faces before Him, leaning upon, and depending upon Him, safeguarding that 1<sup>st</sup> love relationship with Him. Oh, He would that we would just be there always, in communion with Him, depending *upon* Him, crying out *to* Him. But it's so easy to slip just a bit when things are going good, but tragedy has a way of taking us to our knees. David had lived his life for over a year in rebellion against God and seeking to make his refuge in the world, and the things *of* the world. But Ch 30 is the beautiful "cut scene" so to speak whereby we're able to peer into the happenings of David once he found himself at the end of his life, and it's there that he cries out to God and God renews him and restores his soul. And David recovers everything that he'd lost and God takes him further than he'd ever been, as Paul the apostle writes, "*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!*" Rom 11:33 and Again, "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.*" 1 Cor 2:9 David never pretended to be perfect, but he loved God, and God honored David's love for Him, and made him to lie down in green pastures, led him beside the still waters, and restored his soul. And God wants to do that in your life, and in mine as well, He wants to lead you in the paths of righteousness for His names sake, that He might be glorified in your life. But He won't force the issue, if you want to resist Him to the very end; you're free to do that, which brings us back to Saul. God had extended His mercies to Saul, time and time again, given him opportunity after opportunity to repent, and he never took it, and his life ends in tragedy.

Did you know that repentance is a gift from God? No man has within himself the propensity to repent, we all like sheep have gone astray, we've turned aside each to our own way, there are none who do good, and there are none who seek after God. It's God who seeks after us, it's God who offers us the gift of repentance, that's why it's so critical that when God offers us the opportunity to repent that we do it. That's why the bible says, "Today is the day of salvation."

So many people think they're going to live their lives however they want now, and then when they get older they'll repent and settle down, but there's no guarantee you'll have the opportunity when you're older to repent.

If you resist the Lord now, and harden your heart now, then what makes you think that your heart will be softer in 10yrs or 20-30yrs, the longer you resist the harder your heart gets, because God honors the position you take with Him, and He'll strengthen you in that position. Even as He did with the Pharaoh, and as He did with Saul, now God gave them choice after choice, but each time they resisted their hearts got a little bit harder, and a little bit harder, so that eventually, the thought of repentance never even entered their minds, and their death was a tragedy.

Now on the flip side of that if you are quick to repent, and you desire to lead a life that's set apart to Jesus Christ and you avail yourself to be an instrument of His glory, then He'll honor that as well, and strengthen you in that position as well. That's where David and Saul differed, David was concerned about God, and His image, His reputation, Saul was concerned about himself, and his own image, and his own reputation, and the conclusion of each of these men were radically different.

Now in Ch 29 we find the Philistines gathering together all their armies at Aphek. And the Israelites camped in Jezreel near Mt. Gilboa (actually in Ch 28 we find that it was in Mt Gilboa that they're main hub was established) and they're both poised for battle. Now we know by the insight of the scriptures that the Philistines already had the psychological advantage. We read in Ch 28 "*When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.*" 1 Sam 28:5

And that's where instead of repenting before the Lord he sought the counsel of a medium and learned of his fate through Samuel. Now far from being comforted from that meeting, I'm certain that he walked out of there with a higher stress load than when he walked in. He's been told that he's soon to die, and that it'll happen in this very battle, and somewhere between Ch 29 and 31 (but before Ch 30 is over) they engage, and we read in Ch 31.

Vs1-13

The sad saga of Saul, sealed; this is the tragic conclusion of his life. Fewer men have had as much potential, as much promise as Saul had in the beginning only to find themselves fallen in the end. Saul started so well, but his end was so tragic, in the beginning he was in such a position to be used for the glory of God. Physically speaking he was a head taller than all the other Israelites, he was better looking than any other man in the country, and added to his mix was a genuine humility that was even to embarrassed to show his face at his own inauguration. But it's been said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely, and something happened in Saul once he laid hold of that position, or once that position laid hold of him and he began to think that he was above the law.

He began to refuse to seek the counsel of the Lord, and the counsel that he'd received he disobeyed, in short he came to a point where he no longer gave heed to the word of God in his life, he was given over to sin, and the wages of his sin have finally caught up with him, the result; death. We read in Prov 3:1-2, *“My son, do not forget my law, But let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life And peace they will add to you.”*

Saul forgot God's Law, he didn't give the Word of God priority in his life, he didn't obey the instruction of God's Word, his heart drifted from the Lord, and the result was being unprepared for the confrontation of the enemy and his life was taken out of the equation and through it all he had no peace. His final hours were full of dread, full of stress, and full of terror, he was with out God and with out hope in the world. Look at these 1<sup>st</sup> 3 Vs

Vs1-3

Now there are about 5 words in these vs that arrest my attention and you see them there as we go through it. #1 Fought, #2 Fled, #3 Fled, #4 Followed, and #5 Fierce, and I don't have any hugely profound point to make concerning it, but something about the flow of that progression captures me.

And there just maybe a couple of clues in there for you and me upon close observation regarding a warning concerning spiritual warfare. The bible says, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore,”* Eph 6:11-14 We read in 2 Cor 10:4-5 *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”*

The enemy will seek you out, you don't have to take the battle to him, he'll come to you, and we see that here in a practical way in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, and he will fight against you. But the men of Israel weren't prayed up, they weren't seeking the counsel of God, or living in obedience to the Word of God, they were unprepared for confrontation. The enemy came in like a flood, in full force, and they were unprepared, they'd been busy pursuing a direction that God never told them to pursue, they were after one of their own, David. But God never told Saul to pursue David, and so because he was covering a base that was completely irrelevant, and was distracted by an issue that was never really an issue, when the enemy rose up against him, he was unprepared.

How often the enemy wants to get us side tracked and after one of our own, biting and devouring one another, consuming one another, out of focus concerning his wives, and his tactics, so that by the time we realize he's mounting forces against us it's too late and he finds us unprepared and off guard.

The enemy *fought*, and the people of God *fled*, now there is a time to flee, the bible tells us that we're to flee temptation, flee sexual immorality, flee idolatry, flee youthful lusts, but we're not told to flee the enemy. We're to *resist* the enemy and *he* will flee (the bible says). We're to be equipped via the armor of God, we're to have made the necessary preparations in advance to stand, having done all to stand, stand, the weapons of our warfare are mighty in God, for pulling down every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. Now remember I'm speaking about spiritual warfare, I'm not suggesting that you put yourself in physical harms way, God has given us common sense as well and we're to use it. But the progression goes that the enemy *fought*, the people of God *fled*, and because they fled, they *fell* slain on Mt. Gilboa. They turned their backs on the enemy and were taken out, when you read that passage on spiritual warfare in Eph Ch 6, it intrigues to find no mention of any armor that guards any portion of the back half of your body. It's all frontal armor, why? Because we're never to turn our backs on the enemy, now again I realize that this was Saul's sealed fate. But these things were written for our admonition (the bible tells us) so that we might learn from these practical scenarios, the spiritual principals that are to govern our lives. It didn't have to go this way for Saul; he could've obeyed the word of God, and led a life of humble submission before the Lord. But this is where his pride and disobedience got him.

Now the mention of Mt. Gilboa here tells us that the enemy had routed Israel, and they were in full retreat, they'd been routed back to their base camp, seeking to lure the Philistines up into the mountains. Because they were using bows and arrows, they were fighting from chariots; the Israelites were primarily ground troops on more of a hand-to-hand combat type level. But notice the results of their retreat; did the enemy let them go seeing that they were unwilling to stand up to them? No, vs 2, they *followed hard* after Saul and his sons, things were going their way so they picked up the pace.

Don't think that if it just becomes too difficult in your estimation to keep fighting the good fight that you can just turn around and take off and the enemy will leave you alone, he'll pursue you, he wants to finish the job to make sure you don't change your mind. He came to rob, kill and destroy, and he wants to destroy your life, all your retreat does is boost his moral. They saw Saul retreating and it re-energized them to follow hard after him.

And again here we see where Saul's sin impacted the lives of those around him, especially his immediate family. 3 of his 4 sons were on the battlefield and they all died before his very eyes. And of course this also paved the way for David's taking of the throne because the natural progression would put one of Saul's sons on the throne. Now Jonathon would've stepped aside, but we don't read that of the other boys, and so the Lord just eliminated that prospect. But the main thing to see there is how no one's sins affect just themselves.

It's like the man who drilled a hole in the bottom of the ship under his bunk, and everyone came rushing in saying, "What are you doing?" and He said, "What difference does it make to you, I drilled it under my own bunk?" You know, "It's my own personal space, I can do what I want to, it makes no difference to you." But it makes every difference to me, *your* sin impacts *my* life, and we see here how a hole drilled under your own bunk takes everyone on the ship down just the same.

And it just continues to snowball, from following hard, the battle became *fierce* against Saul, give the enemy an inch, he'll take you a mile, the less resistance you show, the more brutal he becomes. The lesson is this, "Stand your ground in J.C." if you can take more for His glory than go for it, but whatever you do don't lose the ground you've been given. Having done all to stand, stand, gird yourself with truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness, shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, above all take up the shield of faith, take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, and don't turn your back on the enemy. Guard your ground, your family, your marriage, the integrity of God's name, the ministry you've been given, no retreat, and no surrender.

Saul fled, and was severely, or more accurately "mortally" wounded, he was gut shot; maybe the arrow pierced his liver, I don't know. But Saul was a man of war, he'd seen wounds that were recoverable, and wounds that there was no coming back from. He didn't want to die, and if he thought he could recover, he'd never have done himself in; he'd have fled for his life. So he no doubt broke the arrow off, went as far as he could, until he thought he was out of harms way for the moment and said in vs 4.

Vs4

To me the climax of this vs is seen in 3 words, "Therefore Saul... fell." He asked his armor bearer to finish him off, but his armor bearer (whom Jewish tradition holds to be Doeg, for those of you who remember him) was too afraid. Why, because the armor bearer was responsible for the life of the one he was guarding, he didn't want to face the consequences of killing his king. And so Saul took a sword and fell on it himself, now some say it wasn't suicide because he was mortally wounded anyway, others say it certainly was because he ended his own life. I'll let you determine that one between you and the Lord, is suicide sin? Yes, is it unforgivable, I couldn't take it that far, it's self-centered, and it's self-murder, and I obviously don't recommend it as a way out because God is to be the giver and taker of life. But unfortunately there are those who give into the lies, and the deceit of the enemy who came to rob, kill and destroy and in a moment of weakness they take their own lives. But God searches the heart, and he'll always do the right thing. But we're to find our escape in Jesus Christ He's the One who gives us rest.

But what I want to draw your attention to in this vs is the tragic culmination of that which we've been seeing for years gone past in Saul, refusing to entrust his life into the hands of God, he took matters into his own hands. And when we refuse to trust God with our lives, and take matters into our own hands the results are always tragic. And as sad as anything in this passage is, sad is the fact that in all this time, even these last moments of life, he refused to repent. God extended opportunity after opportunity to Saul, and all Saul ever did was make excuse after excuse, always blaming someone else for the choices he made, and the life he led. Friends, God's not into the blame game, it doesn't matter what anyone else does we're responsible for our own actions and reactions.

Saul was judged some 20 prior to this, and never once did he seek to repent, maybe he thought time was on his side. That 1<sup>st</sup> week he was probably as paranoid as all get out, wondering who was going to kill him, what was going to take him out, Samuel had told him the kingdom had been torn from him. But a month went by, a year went by, 5yrs-10yrs went by and nothing happened. "Maybe God's forgotten about that whole 'torn kingdom' bit" he may've thought. "Maybe God's decided to overlook that whole 'disobedience' thing." and Time just rolled on, but wasn't on his side, it was working against him, and all that time God extending His mercy to Saul, even telling him the day before that he was going to die. And even as the Pharaoh, Saul's heart only hardened, even in his final moments of life, the arrow in him, but it didn't strike his heart, there was still the breath of life in him, "This is your moment Saul cry out to God!"

But he was too worried about his image, what would happen if the enemy laid hold of him? and Refusing to repent, he took his own life, the Lord's judgment fell, and the kingdom was torn from him just as God said it would be. We read quite plainly in 1 Chron 10:13-14, "*So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the LORD, because he did not keep the word of the LORD, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. But he did not inquire of the LORD; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.*"

Vs5-7

What were the results of this fighting and fleeing, falling, following and fierceness by which Saul and the men of Israel fell? The people "forsook" their cities and fled, the shepherd was struck and the sheep were scattered. And again this is why there's such accountability placed upon those in leadership, the results of a fallen leader can be catastrophic. Right now they want all the Iraqi people to rest assured that Saddam Hussein is dead because they believe that will disperse the moral of the people and they'll just lay down their arms. Once their king is dead, what's the point in fighting anymore?

And so often when a spiritual leader falls, it devastates the body of Christ, people quit fighting all around him, there's a great "giving up" so many times. God would have us look unto him rather than unto men, but so often people won't do that. And so God warns of the accountability in spiritual leadership, to whom much is given, much more will be required, and of the stricter judgment they'll be judged by, and the blamelessness and integrity they're to abide by. Because people look to their spiritual leadership, and rightfully so, but it's important that we understand that even the best of men are only men. And we all stumble in many things (the bible says) follow me around for about a day, and you'll no doubt be thoroughly disillusioned by the end of the day and marveling at what an instrument of God's grace I truly am. And God would have it that when our shepherds are struck that we remain fixated on Him, our Chief Shepherd, but more often than not, the sheep are scattered when the under shepherds are struck. And that's what we're seeing here, pray for the under shepherds of the flock, that we might lead lives worthy of our calling and keep under the hedge of the shadow of God's wing that we might finish our course with Joy lest the enemy be glorified rather than the Lord, notice with me here.

#### Vs8-10

And the text doesn't say it, but it would probably follow suit that they cut off the heads of his sons as well. So they mutilated, and humiliated his body, cut off his head, sent it throughout the land and we read in another place in scripture that it ultimately wound up in the temple of Dagon as a trophy (much like the ark in a past experience) and his armor went into another pagan temple. Then they fastened their naked, humiliated, and desecrated bodies to the city wall. In other words they spread his personal belongings throughout the temples to honor their gods, and through Saul's fall it gave occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. And such is always the case, when you and I fall, it brings glory to the enemy, and causes the ungodly to mock, and blaspheme God's ability to keep us. Now in reality it has nothing to do with God's faithfulness, and everything to do with our *unfaithfulness*, but they don't understand that, and so they mock God because of our failures, and that's what they're doing here. God help us not to give his enemies occasion to glory in our failures, and our falling, but that we would stand. But even when people fall God always has his remnant.

#### Vs11-13

God always has His "valiant men" who are willing to stand up for His integrity, and vindicate His name. Their bodies were obviously too desecrated, and decayed for the proper Jewish rituals and so they cremated their bodies, and then gave proper burial to their bones.

Now time obviously forbids us to follow this whole story, but we find the reason these men of Jabesh Gilead were willing to risk their own necks for Saul's honor way back in the beginning of his reign. When no one else would stand up for these men because of how they'd blown it in the past, and they were about to be taken by the enemy, Saul rallied around them, called together an army of over 300,000 troops and came to their rescue. And these guys never forgot that, and so when no one else will stand up for Saul's honor, they will. They remembered their king.

So King Saul is dead, David's worries are over, the pathway for him to be made King has been paved. And as we close I wonder how you and I would respond to this situation, here's a man who's been making your life for all intents and purposes an absolute nightmare from your waking moment, till the time you lay your head down at night, everyday for somewhere to the tune of 15 yrs. And now you hear he's dead, now you've had the opportunity to take him out a time or 2 but you didn't do it because that's the Lord's job. You're not going to take the life of the Lord's anointed, so God you're going to have to do it. And now the news reaches you that the Lord has done it, how do you respond. I've been known to make a total fool of myself for simply winning a video game or something, or a tennis match maybe. But when the thorn of 15yrs is finally gone, the one who's sought my very life is taken from the scene, man.. Eee haw the victory dance is coming on, "Ding, Dong, the witch is dead!" Thank you Lord! Is that how David responded? We'll see in our next study as we open up the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel.