



Saul's Last Stand: O Sinnerman, Where you gonna run to? (1 Sam 31)

Notes: Week Eighteen

1 Samuel 31 (HCSB)

The Death of Saul and His Sons

31 The Philistines fought against Israel, and Israel's men fled from them. Many were killed on Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons and killed his sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. ³When the battle intensified against Saul, the archers caught up with him and severely wounded him.^[a] ⁴Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through with it, or these uncircumcised men will come and run me through and torture me." But his armor-bearer would not do it because he was terrified. Then Saul took his sword and fell on it. ⁵When his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his own sword and died with him. ⁶So on that day, Saul died together with his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all his men.

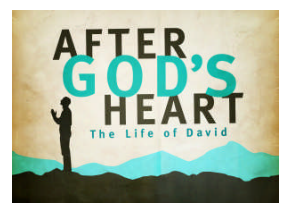
⁷When the men of Israel on the other side of the valley and on the other side of the Jordan saw that Israel's men had run away and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled. So the Philistines came and settled in them.

⁸The next day when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons dead on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off Saul's head, stripped off his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to spread the good news in the temples of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and hung his body on the wall of Beth-shan.

¹¹When the residents of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all their brave men set out, journeyed all night, and retrieved the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan. When they arrived at Jabesh, they burned the bodies there. ¹³Afterward, they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 31:3](#) LXX reads *and he was wounded under the ribs*



Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

1 Samuel 31

31:1 The account now shifts to the Jezreel Valley. Israel's men fled from them; that is, Israel lost the battle ([4:17](#)). On Mount Gilboa, see note at [28:4](#).

31:2 Kings and princes normally shielded themselves from the risks associated with the battlefield ([2Sam 18:2-4](#); [21:15-17](#)), but in this battle, the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons.

31:3 Archers provided the advantage of inflicting potentially fatal injuries from a distance; raining arrows on Saul's position proved effective.

31:4 Saul feared the Philistines would capture him alive and perhaps treat him as they had treated Samson in the judges period ([Jdg 16:21](#)). Saul's armor-bearer, however, was paralyzed with fear and could not bring himself to obey the king's request (run me through). So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. On the discrepancy between these words and [2Sam 1:6-10](#), see the notes at those verses.

31:7 News of the Philistine victory spread quickly throughout the region. Israelites living on the other side of the valley... abandoned the cities, as did those directly down the Harod Valley (also called the Beth-shan Valley) and beyond the Jordan River. The Philistine settlements in this region marked the enemy's deepest penetration into Israel's heartland, but after David became king, he subdued them and restricted them to the Judean coastal region.

31:8 Part of plundering the enemy involved returning to strip the dead of their valuables. The Philistine victory had been so complete that no Israelites had dared try to rescue the bodies of Saul and his three sons.



Mount Gilboa ([31:8](#))

31:9 [First Chronicles 10:10](#) notes that Saul's head was placed in the temple of Dagon, perhaps at Ashdod ([1Sam 5:1-2](#)), symbolizing Dagon's victory over Israel's king.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 31".

English Standard Version - *Study Bible*²

1 Samuel 31

31:1-13 Deaths of Saul and Jonathan. The army of Israel is completely defeated, Saul's sons are killed, Saul kills himself to avoid capture, and the Philistines take over the region. But the men of Jabesh-gilead, the city that Saul saved at the beginning of his reign, bravely rescue the bodies of Saul and his sons from dishonor.

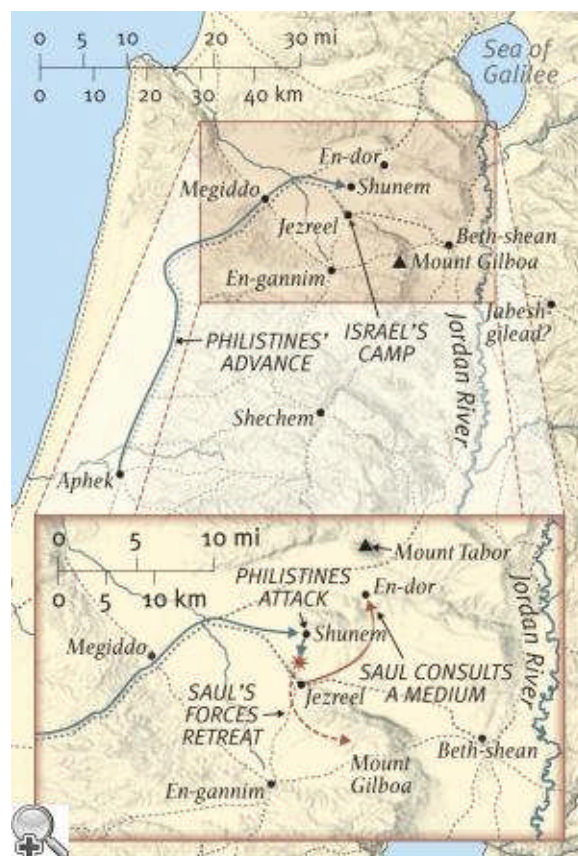
31:1 The events of this chapter directly follow those of chs. 28 and 29. The Philistines have left their camp at Shunem and are attacking the Israelite army on Mount Gilboa (cf. [28:4](#); see [map](#)).

31:4 **Saul took his own sword and fell upon it.** See note on [2 Sam. 1:6-10](#) for the claim that Saul did not commit suicide but rather was killed by an Amalekite.

The Battle at Mount Gilboa

c. 1010 B.C.

Philistine forces advanced to Shunem from Aphek and prepared to attack the Israelites near their camp in Jezreel. Saul, fearing the great army that faced him, slipped away during the night to consult a medium at En-dor in order to seek the counsel of the deceased Samuel. When the Philistines attacked the next morning, the Israelites retreated up the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Saul and three of his sons were killed, and the Philistines mocked Israel by hanging their bodies on the wall of Beth-shean. Later, men from Jabesh-gilead traveled through the night and recovered the bodies.



2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 31".

31:6 As Samuel's spirit had said (cf. [28:19](#)), the Lord gave Israel into the hands of the Philistines, and Saul and his sons joined the dead. Truly, "Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!" ([2 Sam. 1:19](#)).

31:7 The **other side of the valley** is the north side of the Jezreel Valley.

31:10 **Beth-shan** is at the junction of the north-south road along the Jordan Valley and the road from Gilead to the Jezreel Valley. It was occupied almost continuously until the early Arab period. A temple of the eleventh century B.C. to the fertility goddess Anit has been discovered there. This may have been the **temple** referred to here, because **Ashtaroth** can refer to goddesses in general (see note on [7:3-4](#)). During the Iron Age, Beth-shan was occupied by the Philistines. Excavations at the site have confirmed this settlement by the recovery of vast amounts of Philistine pottery, weapons, tools, and jewelry dating to the Iron I and II periods (1200-586 B.C.).

31:11-13 Saul had saved **Jabesh-gilead** at the beginning of his reign ([ch. 11](#)), a fact that the men of the city remembered. They cross the Jordan and go about 10 miles (16 km) to Beth-shan. The burning of bodies was usually considered desecration, but here the purpose may have been to keep them from further dishonor. **bones**. Even after lengthy burning, large bones would remain. David later reburied the bones ([2 Sam. 21:12-14](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

1 Samuel 31

31:3, 4 The Philistines had a well-earned reputation for torturing their captives. Saul no doubt knew about Samson's fate ([Judges 16:18-31](#)) and did not want to risk physical mutilation or other abuse. When his armor bearer refused to kill him, he took his own life.

31:3, 4 Saul was tall, handsome, strong, rich, and powerful, but all of this was not enough to make him someone we should emulate. He was tall physically, but he was small in God's eyes. He was handsome, but his sin made him ugly. He was strong, but his lack of faith made him weak. He was rich, but he was spiritually bankrupt. He could give orders to many, but he couldn't command their respect or allegiance. Saul looked good on the outside, but he was decaying on the inside. A right relationship with God and a strong character are much more valuable than a good-looking exterior.

31:3, 4 Saul's armor bearer faced amoral dilemma—should he carry out a sinful order from a man he was supposed to obey? He knew he should obey his master, the king, but he also knew murder was wrong. He decided not to kill Saul.

There is a difference between following an order with which you don't agree and following one you know is wrong. It is never right or ethical to carry out a wrong act, no matter who gives the order or what the consequences for disobedience may be. What shapes your choice when you face a moral dilemma? Have the courage to follow God's law above human commands.

31:4 Saul faced death the same way he faced life. He took matters into his own hands without thinking of God or asking for his guidance. If our lives aren't the way we would like them to be now, we can't assume that change will come more easily later. When nearing death, we will respond to God the same way we have been responding all along. Coming face to face with death only shows us what we are *really* like. How do you want to face death? Start facing life that way right now.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under "Chapter 31".

31:10 To put Saul's armor in the Philistine temple gave credit to a pagan goddess for victory over Saul. Ashtoreth was a goddess of fertility and sex. Beth-shan was a town on the eastern slopes of Mount Gilboa, overlooking the Jordan Valley.

31:13 Consider the difference between the last judge of Israel and its first king. Saul, the king, was characterized by inconsistency, disobedience, and self-will. He did not have a heart for God. Samuel, the judge, was characterized by consistency, obedience, and a deep desire for God's will. He had a genuine desire for God.

When God called, Samuel said, "LORD, your servant is listening" ([3:9](#)). But when God, through Samuel, called Saul, Saul replied, "Why are you talking like this to me?" ([9:21](#)). Saul was dedicated to himself; Samuel was dedicated to God.

31:13 Saul's death was also the death of an ideal—Israel could no longer believe that having a king like the other nations would solve all their troubles. The real problem was not the form of government but the sinful king. Saul tried to please God by spurts of religiosity, but real spirituality takes a lifetime of consistent obedience.

Heroic spiritual lives are built by stacking days of obedience one on top of the other. Like a brick, each obedient act is small in itself, but in time the acts will pile up, and a huge wall of strong character will be built—a great defense against temptation. We should strive for consistent obedience each day.