

LIFE OF DAVID STUDY

STUDY NO 35 - THE END OF SAUL

1 SAMUEL 31

V5 SAW THAT SAUL WAS DEAD

On an earlier occasion Israel had made an idol of the Ark of God which they took into the field of battle. Their reasoning was that with the Ark present, Yahweh would have to give them victory in the battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 4:3). However, this resulted in one of the greatest military defeats in the history of the nation, with the Ark being captured by the hated Philistines (1 Sam 4:17). Having captured the Ark, the Philistines in an act of defiance, then set it up in the house of their idol Dagon, with disastrous consequences for Dagon, whom the Philistines found fallen down broken (1 Sam 5:4). When Saul was made king it was because the Israelites no longer wanted an INVISIBLE King (i.e. Yahweh). **They wanted an idol they could see and bow down before.** But now like Dagon, Saul lay dead in battle - broken on the ground. In the Days of Hosea, Yahweh looks back in retrospect and says "I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath" (Hos 13:11). Saul took the nation to the brink of destruction. Israel had confidence in a human king they could see. The exhortation is found in such passages as Isaiah 2:22 "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of?" The Jer. B. translation of that passage is "trust no more in man, he has but a breath in his nostrils. How much is he worth?" In Philippians 3:3 Paul exhorts us to "have no confidence in the flesh" (i.e. either our own or that of others). The reason Saul dies on the field of battle was because he had confidence in the flesh.

AND (HIS ARMOUR BEARER) DIED WITH HIM

Right to the very end, Saul set a bad example. Saul's own suicide is recorded in the previous verse. And now his armourbearer follows his example. If need be, we must fight to the death, but we must never take our own life. The lesson is that we must be careful in the example we set for others.

V6 SO SAUL DIED

A simple expression. But why did he die? The answer is found in such passages as Proverbs 29:1 which seems to have an incredible application to Saul. The Jer B translates it as "the man often rebuked but stubborn still: suddenly, irretrievably his fall will come." Psalm 31:23-24 says "O love Yahweh, all ye his saints: for **Yahweh preserveth the faithful**, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in Yahweh." Who are "the faithful" mentioned here? To be faithful requires more than just being in the Truth. It requires more than just reading our Bible. It requires more than being able to debate on certain aspects of the Truth. **We must love Yahweh.** Those that hope in Yahweh are those who love him. 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 tells us "So Saul died for his **transgression which he committed against Yahweh, even against the word of Yahweh, which he kept not**, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it; and inquired not of Yahweh: **therefore he slew him**, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse." This tells us that a failure to consider the Word reverentially is not just a neglect of the Word, but is an act of transgression against Yahweh himself. "Therefore Yahweh slew

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him". And while Saul fell of the sword (1 Sam 31:4) nevertheless Yahweh brought about the circumstances which resulted in Saul committing suicide. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: **for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap**" (Gal 6:7).

V7 THEY FORSOOK THE CITIES, AND FLED; AND THE PHILISTINES CAME AND DWELT IN THEM

The Philistines took possession of all the northern part of the Land. So more and more of Saul's Kingdom became demoralised and fell to the Philistines. The only Tribes to escape territorially at this time were Ephraim, Benjamin, Gilead, and Judah (2 Sam 2:8-11).

V8 ON THE MORROW.....THEY FOUND SAUL AND HIS THREE SONS

To find the body of Saul would have been one of the greatest spoils of the battle so far as the Philistines were concerned. It happened "on the morrow" because it appears that the Philistines spent the previous day chasing the fleeing Israelites.

V9 CUT OFF HIS HEAD

This was the same fate that had been inflicted on their champion Goliath. The power of Goliath was overcome **through faith**. Saul lost his last battle with the Philistines **through lack of faith**. The lesson is that we cannot do without our head. This is true individually, in families, and in the ecclesia. No matter what the trials, difficulties and emotions of the moment may be, we must always listen to the head. It is Christ who is the head of the body (Eph 5:23). Goliath's head was taken to Jerusalem and almost certainly buried at Golgotha where the Lord Jesus Christ was later to destroy the thinking of the flesh in his crucifixion. Saul's head was fastened in the temple of Dagon (1 Chron 10:10). This was where Saul's head rightly belonged - in a house dedicated to the flesh.

V10 PUT HIS ARMOUR IN THE HOUSE OF ASTAROTH

Astaroth was one of the vile goddesses worshipped by the Philistines - a goddess worshipped with the most obscene, despicable, and unspeakable rights. What greater humiliation could there be for a king in Israel than to have his armour hung up in such a place, the Philistines indicating thereby, that his defeat was attributable to her.

FASTENED HIS BODY TO THE WALL

So the flesh of Saul was crucified. But it was too late! It was not a voluntary crucifixion, but rather the crucifixion of his body about which he knew absolutely nothing.

OF BETH-SHAN

Beth-shan lay in the Valley of Jezreel, and the Philistines must have been confident of holding this town which lay right in the heart of Israel.

V11 THE INHABITANTS OF JABESH-GILEAD

Earlier Saul had done something worthwhile for the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead. He had delivered them out of the hands of the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:1-11). It was one of the few worthwhile things that Saul did in his life. If Saul had displayed the same characteristics to all the nation that he showed to the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead, all would have united themselves behind him. But now only the men of Jabesh-gilead feel moved to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons.

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V12 AND BURNT THEM THERE

Why do this, when such action is more in keeping with gentile ways? Possibly to prevent the Philistines from recovering the bodies and committing even greater atrocities with them. David never forgot Saul and his sons, and he later recovered their bones and buried them where they belonged in the sepulchre of Kish in the territory of Benjamin (2 Sam 21:12-14).

V13 AND FASTED SEVEN DAYS

Had Saul been a man of faith and integrity - had he lead the Nation in the ways of Yahweh, then instead of seven days of mourning in fasting, there would have been seven days of rejoicing in feasting. Although the Nation was in mourning, they were not to know that in this hour of deep darkness, the Nation stood on the threshold of greatness under the guiding hand of Yahweh during the reign of David. Sometimes we can get depressed under trial. But we never know what lies ahead - it may be more trial and suffering, but if we continue to serve Yahweh in faith, He will eventually bring us to the light. Perhaps Saul best expresses his own epitaph in 1 Samuel 26:21 "I have played the fool and have erred exceedingly".

A FINAL WORD

"Before closing this chapter on the life of Saul, let us briefly consider the man again in comparison with that other great character of the Bible whose name was Saul, but who changed it to Paul. Both were of the Tribe of Benjamin; both were moved with a zeal that was not according to knowledge; both were men of strong passions; both were leaders. But Saul of Gibeah was a failure, whereas Saul of Tarsus was a success. And the reason that one was a failure and the other a success, was because the former refused to allow the word of Yahweh to mould him, whereas the latter permitted it to discipline and guide his every action. Paul allowed the Word of God to work through him, and it changed his life. It caused him to expend his zeal in profitable ways, it modified his passion, and guided his leadership. Saul the king, on the other hand, had as great an opportunity for good as Saul the disciple, but he wasted his opportunities, and proved a failure. The words of Samuel spell the failure of Saul: "Hath Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Yahweh? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word Of Yahweh, He hath also rejected thee from being king" (1 sam 15:22-23). Saul the king was rejected from his high position, but Saul the disciple will yet be elevated to kingship (2 Tim 4:6-8; 2:12)." Bro H.P. Mansfield - Story of the Bible - (Old) Volume 3 page 173

THE DEATH OF JONATHAN

Some think that it seems unfair that Jonathan should die like this at this time. The answer is that Yahweh is never unjust, and He knows best. Sometimes the innocent suffer with, or because of, the guilty. But does that really matter seeing that they will be rewarded after resurrection? What does it matter when they die?

Yahweh knew that Jonathan's life would best be ended at this point. He dies totally faithful to Yahweh and David without dishonouring his father. Yahweh delivered Jonathan into death to deliver him out of a totally hopeless situation.

COMPARISON BETWEEN KING SAUL and SAUL OF TARSUS

1. Both of the Tribe of Benjamin
2. Both came from privileged families
3. Both circumcised the eighth day
4. Both born under the Law of Moses
5. Both came from obscurity to prominence
 - (a) One as King of Israel
 - (b) The other as chosen vessel of the Lord
6. Both died violent deaths
7. Both were similar in nature - had similar characteristics
8. Both were brought face to face with the Truth
 - (a) The first Saul met a company of prophets (1 Sam 10:10).
 - (b) The second Saul met the Lord on the Road to Damascus
9. Doubts were expressed by brethren in regard to them both
 - (a) Is Saul among the prophets? - 1 Samuel 10:12
 - (b) All were afraid of him and believed not that he was a disciple - Acts 9:26

CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE TWO SAULS

1.
 - (a) The conversion to the Truth by the first Saul very superficial.
 - (b) The second Saul became totally converted which lasted to the hour of his death.
2.
 - (a) The first Saul dominated by self-will.
 - (b) The second Saul became selfless in his service for Christ
3.
 - (a) After showing some degree of early promise the first Saul began to descend spiritually.
 - (b) The second Saul, once converted gave his life to Christ, and developed more and more, and was able to say that he had kept the faith, and that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8).
4.
 - (a) Saul of Gibeah continued to persecute the righteous in his relentless pursuit of David.
 - (b) The second Saul although initially of the disposition of the first Saul, later upheld the righteous and those that loved the Truth.
5.
 - (a) The first Saul persecuted the righteous.
 - (b) The second Saul was persecuted for righteousness.
6.
 - (a) The first Saul's life ended in despair.
 - (b) The second Saul's life ended in hope of eternal life.
7.
 - (a) The life of the first Saul is set forth in Scripture as a warning.
 - (b) The life of the second Saul is set forth as an example to emulate.