

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 20B

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 31

INTRODUCTION

The first book of Samuel ended on sad note. Saul and his sons died in battle against the Philistines. Saul was a man who was given every opportunity to succeed but failed miserably. He was anointed as the first king of Israel via three miracles. No other king, not even David, had the privilege of being called in this manner. These miracles were meant to remind Saul of his calling. They were ordinary events that he would see every day. They included: (1) finding *“two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto thee, The asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?”*; (2) *“thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine: And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands”*; and (3) *“thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art*

come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy: And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.” The concluding remarks to confirm his calling were: *“And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.”* What more could a man ask from God as confirmation of his calling?

Samuel, the prophet, was present to help him rule as king if only he would obey the word of God. He had no enemies within the nation who wished to topple him or usurp his kingdom. His enemies outside the kingdom could have been easily dealt with if only he would pray and trust God to help him. Saul jettisoned all these benefits and graces from the LORD because of an unrepentant heart that cared only for self and an obsession with a personal glory that ultimately destroyed his soul. In short he lost it all and he could blame no one but himself.

The focus shifted back to the death of Saul and Jonathan in their battle against the Philistines. Apart from the main lesson that God's people must not only begin well but they must also end well in the LORD, there are other practical lessons concerning our relationship with others.

COMMENTARY

The Death of Saul and His Sons — 31:1-7

The scenario shifted back to king Saul and his last stand against his mortal enemies, the mighty Philistine armies that numbered in the hundreds and thousands. The Philistines defeated the men of Israel at the foot of Mount Gilboa very soundly. They pursued Saul and his sons relentlessly. Saul witnessed the slaying of his sons, Jonathan (Jehovah has given), Abinadab (my father is noble), and Melchi-shua (my king is wealth).¹ Were the deaths of Saul's sons necessary when it was the king who had erred?

When he was wounded by the Philistine archers (not fatally) and sensed that his position was hopeless, Saul instructed his armour-bearer to kill him with his sword. The armour-bearer refused because Saul was the LORD's anointed. Saul then took a sword, fell on it and died (31:4). His armour-bearer did likewise and killed himself.

His armour bearer was acute enough to see that his master was the LORD's anointed. The manner in which he rejected the king's order to kill him suggested a man who feared God more than he feared the king. Do you agree with this observation?

Saul committed suicide. He was ashamed of falling into the hands of his enemies and feared the possibility of being paraded down the main street of the fortified cities of the Philistines. He could not take the humiliation of being mocked. Saul's pride killed him, not the arrow of the

Philistines. His refusal to repent and his constant finger-pointing resulted in his downfall. If only he had sincerely repented, God's judgment against him would not have happened. Saul fell into the punitive will of God because he did not take responsibility for his own failures and sins. He blamed others and in the end he died miserably.

His death discouraged the rest of Israel in the battle field. They fled for their lives and deserted their cities. The Philistines came into these cities and occupied them at will. What a fall. His evil deeds as king impacted the nation of Israel. The nation was ruined because the king was evil and did much wickedness.

Humiliation after Death — 31:8-13

Most likely the battle lasted the whole night and the Philistines did not check on the dead bodies until the next morning. They found the bodies of Saul and his sons. The Philistines decapitated him, took his armour and sent them to the temples of their gods, Dagon and Ashtaroth.² Decapitation was a common practice (David also cut off the head of Goliath) but they hanged the body of Saul to a wall in Beth-shan.

To take the armour of Saul and his head and place them in the Philistine temple was an act of humiliation to the defeated nation and a herald to the Philistines that their gods were more powerful than that of Israel's. This was similar to what the Philistines did in the days of

¹ Saul had two other sons by his concubine Rizpah whose names were Armoni and Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 21:8).

² Chronicles 10:10 And they put his armour in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

Eli when they took the ark of God and placed it in the temple of Dagon, the Philistines' chief god.

The hanging of the headless body of Saul was a reminder to Israel that they had been soundly defeated. They had better fear the Philistines. Their king was without a head and so was Israel without a head! The message was loud and clear. It was meant to destroy any further resistance and kill any residual desire to fight against the Philistines. Israel had fought and fled. Would they come back and continue the fight or would they cease fighting? The bodies of Saul's sons were also hung up next to Saul's.

Now when the people of Jabesh-Gilead heard that Saul had been slain by the Philistines, they risked their lives to retrieve his body and the bodies of his three sons. They took the bodies to Jabesh and burned them. Cremation was not a normal practice for the Israelites, except for criminals.³ In this case, they probably burned the bodies because they were mutilated and badly decomposed. This was an "act of kindness" on the part of the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead. They had not forgotten how Saul had saved them from Nahash the Ammonite (11:1-11). They expressed their gratitude by risking their lives to

prevent further abuse to his body and those of his three sons.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The book ended on a sad note. In fact throughout the book, we see one disappointment after another in the life of a king who could have had it all. Saul's rejection of the prophetic leadership of Samuel was sad (chs. 8, 12), and so was the stripping of Saul's rulership (chs. 13-31). Saul had no one to blame but himself. His obsession with self glory resulted in his obsession to kill David, the LORD's anointed. He could not accept the will of God in his life after he was rejected by God for his unrepentant sins.

He took it out on David. Actually when he tried to kill David he was fighting against God Himself as he was trying to stop God's will from coming to pass. In the end he lost. He could not outwit or outmaneuver God. He died a most humiliating death!

However, it was not totally lost as we see God preparing His chosen royal successor in the person of David. What was man's failure became God's opportunity to train David to receive his kingship. By the end of Saul's life, David was ready to rule Israel with godly fear and justice.

Man can never outwit the revealed will of God. If anyone, including Satan, could outwit God, then God would cease to be God! That is impossible. God will always be God for all eternity!

AMEN

³ Leviticus 20:14 And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you.

Joshua 7:25 And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 31:1-13; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13-17.

Friday: 1 Samuel 31:1-13; Leviticus 20:14; Genesis 40:14; Luke 17:12-17.

2. Can you name some of the hindrances that made it so difficult for king Saul to see that he was the Lord's anointed?

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 31:1-6	
1 Samuel 31:7-13	

3. Are you the Lord's anointed? Do you know of a Lord's anointed that you respect and another that you do not? Give reasons for your answers.

4. Would you say that Saul committed suicide? Is suicide a sin that reveals an unregenerate heart?

Discussion Questions

1. Was it "fair" for God to kill Saul's sons, especially Jonathan, because of the incompetence and rebellious heart of the king?

5. Why does our church reject cremation and opt for burial?

6. Saul's sin resulted in a nation's defeat. Can you see any similarity when the pastor is sinful or derelict in his duties and the whole church suffers? If the pastor does not defend the Word of God, how will it impact the congregation as a whole?
