

Message #73**I Samuel 31:1-13**

There is an interesting statement in the book of Proverbs that says, “A man who hardens his neck after much reproof will suddenly be broken beyond remedy” (Prov. 29:1). That statement is made in the context of a leader (Prov. 29:2).

It is clearly stated in many texts of Scripture that God is the one who controls the duration of a person’s life. The keys of life and death of every individual is in the hand of God. So no matter how bizarre a person’s death may be or when a person’s death occurs, God is always sovereign in permitting it.

Sometimes we have no idea as to God’s reason of who and why. But sometimes we do have evidence of it. Never is that more evident than the final chapter of I Samuel and the death of Saul.

One of the most dishonorable deaths in all of the Bible is the death of King Saul. This death is completely orchestrated by God and David had nothing to do with it.

We may recall that Samuel predicted that Saul and his sons would be killed the next day after he contacted a Satanic spiritist (I Sam. 28:19). **The ultimate reason why God decided to end Saul’s life and reign was because he would not ever submit to and obey the word and will of God or the promptings of the Holy Spirit (I Samuel 15:22-23).**

What we actually have in this text is the method God used to put an end to Saul’s life and reign. God wants us to have a record of the end of a tragic life. Saul’s life could have accomplished so much for God, but it didn’t.

Saul was a jealous, bitter man who died as he lived, never really getting untracked for God. The real tragedy of this story is not that someone died because, if the Lord tarries, we will all die. The real tragedy of this story is why Saul died and how he died. This is the end of one who never really was right with God.

What we see here is this:

THE WAY SAUL DIED AND THE REASON SAUL DIED WAS BECAUSE OF HIS REBELLION AGAINST GOD AND HIS DISOBEDIENCE TO GOD.

Any death is somewhat sad, but Saul’s death is tragic. He never did get untracked for God. He never did get his life straightened out. His life ended as he lived it—he did not go anywhere for God or accomplish what he could have accomplished. Saul would not obey the word of God or the will of God. It is a sad, sad story.

There are five final observations we want to make from I Samuel:

FINAL OBSERVATION #1 – The Philistines kill Saul’s sons and wound Saul. **31:1-3**

If we remember that the execution of Saul’s sons and Saul are both a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy, then we will immediately recognize the fact that the Philistines, who are enemies of God and of God’s people, are actually being used by God to accomplish His sovereign purposes according to His sovereign time.

Mount Gilboa (31:1) is a hill that ascends about 1,700 feet above the Valley of Jezreel. It was at this hill where many of the Israelites had been killed by the Philistines. Saul and his sons were overtaken at this spot.

Saul’s sons were killed. Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua were all killed (**31:2**).

According to **verse 3**, archers shot at Saul and he was badly wounded. Josephus said the Philistines were filling the air with javelins and arrows.

Now we must ask ourselves this question. Who saw to it that the arrows hit Saul? Who sovereignly directed this arrow into the body of Saul? It was God (I Sam. 28:19). Time was up for Saul and God used arrows shot by Philistine archers to hit Saul.

When the archers let those arrows fly, God sovereignly directed it right into Saul. I am convinced that God is sovereign over every death. A stray bullet or arrow, a car or truck accident or a heart attack are all things controlled by God.

FINAL OBSERVATION #2 – Saul asks his armor bearer to kill him and when he refused Saul committed suicide. **31:4-6**

The final thought going through the mind of Saul was not that I need to get right with God and prepare to face Him, but it was that he needed to die before the Philistines could get their hands on him and make fun of him (**31:4**).

One may think that when I get older, I’ll get serious about God and His word. Now that does happen at times, but it is rare. If you get older and are not right with God and don’t have a passion to understand the word of God, you may not ever get right with God.

Saul wanted his armor bearer to kill him, but he would not do it so Saul fell on his own sword. David had refused to take the life of Saul, but Saul took his own life. I Chronicles 10:14 makes it very clear that even though Saul killed himself, God was actually sovereign in permitting him to do it. God allowed him to kill himself so He could turn the kingdom over to David.

There are seven suicides in the Bible:

- 1) Abimelech - Judges 9:52-54 - committed suicide by having his armor bearer kill him.
- 2) Zimri - I Kings 16:18 - committed suicide by setting the king’s house on fire and staying inside.
- 3) Ahithophel - II Samuel 17:23 - committed suicide by strangling himself, hanging himself.
- 4) Saul - I Samuel 31:4-6 - committed suicide by falling on his own sword.
- 5) Saul’s armor bearer - I Samuel 31:5 - committed suicide by falling on his own sword.

- 6) Samson - Judges 16:28 - committed suicide by causing a house to fall on himself.
- 7) Judas - Matt. 27:3-5 - committed suicide by hanging.

Based on what Samuel told Saul in I Sam. 28:19—that “tomorrow you and your sons will be with me”—we would conclude that the moment Saul died he did go to Abraham’s bosom, which was where Samuel was.

Just because a person commits suicide does not mean they automatically go to hell. In fact, many who have committed suicide will be in heaven. Samson, for example, is listed in the faith hero chapter of Hebrews 11:32. He is listed in the same verse with David and Samuel.

Generally speaking, there is nothing honorable about this kind of death. Suicide is not a means of death that will bring rewards from God, but Saul, even in suicide, did go to where Samuel went.

According to **verse 5**, when the armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and killed himself. Saul’s motive for killing himself was that he knew he would lose the war and felt the Philistines would abuse him before they would kill him (I Chron.10:4). His armor bearer was loyal to Saul and he apparently took the same course of action.

But carefully observe **verse 6** that says Saul died with his three sons and his armor bearer and all his men on that day. The reason this is significant is because when we get to II Samuel 1:6-10, an Amalekite liar surfaces who wants to get some remuneration from David for killing Saul.

He apparently came upon the dead body of Saul and took his crown and bracelet off him. He did not bring the body to David, but the spoils that he took and he tried to get some reward for it. Well he did get a reward in that David had him executed (II Sam. 1:15-16).

People who stretch the truth may think there is nothing wrong with it. This time it cost a man his life. However, there is sad irony here because Saul eventually lost his kingdom because he would not obey God and destroy the Amalekites. David began his reign by executing one.

FINAL OBSERVATION #3 – The men of Israel fled and abandoned their cities. **31:7**

Saul’s disobedience affected everyone. The men “beyond the Jordan” were men on the eastern side of the Jordan out of the Promised Land.

When the men of Israel saw that the Philistines were winning, they abandoned the fight and abandoned their cities, most of which were Promised Land cities. This will all set the stage for a great Davidic victory.

Think of what actually could have been here. Saul and Jonathan and David could have been fighting side by side for a great victory. Saul was so jealous of David that his insane jealousy ruined everything.

FINAL OBSERVATION #4 – The Philistines live in the cities and loot the dead Israelites.
31:8-10

The Philistines went back to the battlefield to collect their spoils and they found Saul and his three sons (31:8). They cut off Saul's head and fastened his head to their Temple (I Chron. 10:10). They fastened his body on a wall in Beth-shan, in an open square, for all to see (II Sam. 21:12). They put Saul's weapons in the godless Temple of Ashtaroth.

They spread Saul out so that all of the Philistines could have a good laugh at part of his body. This was the King of Israel who was the laughing stock of the world.

God permitted all of this to happen to Saul because of his disobedience. There is nothing honorable about any of this, but God was sovereign in every bit of this.

FINAL OBSERVATION #5 – The people of Jabesh-gilead take the bodies of Saul and his sons and honorably bury them. **31:11-13**

When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all of the valiant men got up and walked all night many miles and risked their own lives to get the remains of Saul and his sons and take them to Jabesh for burial.

According to **verse 12**, some form of partial cremation was used for the burial.

According to **verse 13**, they actually took the bones that remained and buried them.

Now when David came to power, he never forgot the wonderful kindness of what these people did (II Sam. 2:4-7). He blessed these people for what they did.

Later, David would exhume the remains and rebury them in the country of Benjamin (II Sam. 21:11-14).

FINAL THOUGHTS:

- 1) Those who persist in disobedience will discover time will run out for repentance.**
- 2) Any type of death is under the sovereign control of God.**
- 3) Those who honor God will be honored even at death and those who don't won't.**
- 4) God reciprocates people for the way they treat His servants. He does reward good for good and bad for bad.**
- 5) Saul's life could have done so much if he would have only submitted himself to God's word and will.**