

I Samuel 31 Handout

Verses 1-2

We are told the Philistines were fighting against Israel.

Saul's battle with the Philistines in this chapter may have been simultaneous with David's battle against the Amalekites in the previous one.

What are we told about the men of Israel? _____

What happens to Saul's sons? _____

Three of Saul's sons died with him, fulfilling Samuel's prophecy of their imminent deaths (28:19).

Jonathan, a faithful son and subject of the king, followed his father into battle. The death of this godly man, because of his father's sins, seems unfair as well as tragic, but God permitted it.

Verses 3-4

What are we told happens to Saul? _____

What does Saul want his armor bearer to do? _____

Why would Saul want his armor-bearer to kill him?

Isn't it interesting that Saul is more concerned about the Philistines and what they might do to him rather than his relationship with God whom he is about to meet?

His armor bearer is unwilling to do it. **Why?** _____

We are told that Saul took his sword and fell on it.

Verses 5-6

What happens to Saul's armor bearer? _____

We are told that Saul, his sons, his armor bearer and all his men died together that day.

That's a sad ending to Saul's story.

Verse 7 READ

What do the people do when they see what has happened?

The Philistines came and settled in the cities that they abandoned.

Verse 8-10

What do the Philistines find when they come to loot the fallen men?

What do they do to Saul? _____

They do this to bring good news to the house of their idols and the people.
We are told they put Saul's weapons in the temple of Ashtaroth.

What do they do with his body? _____

In the ancient Near East, how a corpse was treated was very significant. Even enemies, if respected, their corpse would be treated with care and given a proper burial. However, if they were not respected, they treated the body with contempt.

After hearing this, what do you think the Philistines thought about Saul?

Verse 11-13

What do the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead do when they hear what had been done to Saul?

What did they do with their bones? _____

Saul's body is rescued from further humiliation. Jabesh-gilead was about 13 miles southeast of Beth-shan. Earlier, Saul had rescued Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites (chapter 11). Some of the people who lived there may have been blood relatives to Saul. The seven day fast also honored Saul, but it was much less than the honors granted other great leaders of Israel.

So we see the book of I Samuel ends in a cemetery in Jebesh, with people mourning the death of their king. Saul was full of promise when he was first anointed, having a lot of natural qualities that you would think to be found in a king. He also possessed the Holy Spirit's power after his anointing, but unfortunately, Saul did not become a source of blessing to Israel and the world, nor did God bless him personally. He failed to view himself as God's servant, and did not obey God the way he should have.

Some people think that God wasn't fair to Saul, and that Saul never really had a chance. The truth is though that Saul was a well-qualified man who could have become a great king. He didn't fail because God set him up for failure. He failed because he was unfaithful to God.

In 1 Sam 8:7-8 Israel's desire for a king was declared to be idolatry.

"And the Lord told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.'"

How does chapter 31 show us what will be the end result of trusting in idols?

Even though this book ends in such a sad manner, we are not left without hope. We now have the expectation of the fulfillment of the next anointed king of Israel: David.

The book of I Samuel opened with the birth of Samuel and now ends with the death of Saul. It has been a book of transition, contrasting rule by God with rule by man. This book also illustrates how commitment to God can overcome terrible circumstances.

What emotions does this chapter bring out in you?

Lessons from I Samuel:

- We should not put our trust in any king or kingdom except for God and His kingdom. (I Samuel 8:10-18)
- Always obey God, even in the details. (I Samuel 15:1-11)
- God doesn't focus on the outward appearance of things, but on what is in our hearts. (I Samuel 16:7)
- No matter how big the obstacle, God's strength can help us overcome it. (I Samuel 17)
- Disobedience will lead to the loss of blessing. (I Samuel 28:14-19)