

# 1 Samuel 31 Commentary

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Chart from recommended resource [Jensen's Survey of the OT](#) - used by permission  
1 Samuel Chart from Charles Swindoll

TIMELINE OF THE BOOKS OF SAMUEL, KINGS & CHRONICLES									
1107	1011				971	931	853	722	586
1 Samuel		2 Samuel			1 Kings	1 Kings	2 Kings		
31	1-4	5-10	11-20	21-24	1-11	12-22	1-17	18-25	
1 Chronicles 10		1 Chr 11-19		1 Chr 20-29	2 Chronicles 1-9	2 Chronicles 10-20	2 Chronicles 21-36		

**Legend:** B.C. dates at top of timeline are approximate. Note that 931BC marks the division of the Kingdom into Southern Tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and Ten Northern Tribes. To avoid confusion be aware that **after the division** of the Kingdom in 931BC, the Southern Kingdom is most often designated in Scripture as "**Judah**" and the Northern Kingdom as "**Israel**." Finally, note that 1 Chronicles 1-9 is not identified on the timeline because these chapters are records of genealogy.

[The Ryrie Study Bible](#)

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Map on Left [ESV Global Study Bible](#), on right [Jensen's Survey of the OT](#)  
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**1 Samuel 31:1 Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.**

- **the Philistines:** 1Sa 28:1,15 29:1
- **fell:** 1Sa 12:25 1Ch 10:1-12
- **Gilboa:** Eusebius and Jerome place this mountain six miles west from Bethshan. 1Sa 28:4 2Sa 1:21
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Related Passages:**

1 Chronicles 10:1-14 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. 2 The Philistines closely pursued Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. 3 The battle became heavy against Saul, and the archers overtook him; and he was wounded by the archers. 4 Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and abuse me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took his sword and fell on it. 5 When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell on his sword and died. 6 Thus Saul died with his three sons, and all those of his house died together. 7 When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that they had fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and lived in them. 8 It came about the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. 9 So they stripped him and took his head and his armor and sent messengers around the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. 10 They put his armor in the house of their gods and fastened his head in the house of Dagon. 11 When all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons and brought them to Jabesh, and they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days. 13 So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, 14 and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.

**Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa** - In 1Sa 28:4 Israel camped at Mount Gilboa but in 1Sa 31 they are massacred at Mount Gilboa!

[John Barnett](#) - When I read a letter or card I usually start by looking at the end to see who it is from. When I read a book I often look at the end to see whether the hero makes it alive to the end. When I start a biographical study of a person God chose to be included in His Word I always look at the END of their life first. Why is that? Because God said that the way we finish is what counts. It is not how we start the race, but how we finish the race that really matters. That's why Paul triumphantly said, "I have finished the course" (2 Timothy 4:7)!

**1 Samuel 31:2 The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul.**

- **overtook:** 1Sa 14:22 2Sa 1:6
- **Jonathan:** 1Sa 13:2,16 14:1-14,49 18:1-4 23:17 1Ch 8:33 9:39
- **sons of Saul:** Ex 20:5 2Ki 25:7
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**SAUL'S THREE SONS  
SUCCUMB TO SLAUGHTER**

**The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua the sons of Saul** - Note the phrase indicating they were in close proximity. The point is that Saul undoubtedly witnessed the slaying of his three sons (1Ch 8:33). Only Eshbaal ("man of Baal" - what a godless name for a son!), later named Ish-bosheth ("man of shame"), remained alive and would assume the role of king after his father's death. One is reminded of the parallel with the priest Eli who while not witnessing his son's slaying by the same Philistines, did get word and that along with the loss of the ark caused him to fall and to die (1Sa 4:18), even as Saul would soon fall and die! The wages of sin are death!

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**Ish-bosheth** - One of the sons of Saul (1Ch 8:33; 9:39; 1Sa 14:49) who, when his father and brothers were slain in the battle of Gilboa (1Sa 31:1 ff), was proclaimed king over Israel by Abner, the captain of Saul's host, at Mahanaim (2Sa 2:8ff). Ishbosheth was 40 years old at this time and reigned over Israel 2 years (2Sa 2:10). Judah, however, proclaimed David its king. The consequence was war (2Sa 2:12ff). The house of David prevailed against the house of Saul (2Sa 3:1), but the war did not come to a close until Abner, angry on account of the rebuke he suffered from Ish-Bosheth for his unlawful intimacy with Rizpah, Saul's concubine, joined David (2Sa 3:6 ff). David's condition to return to him Michal, his wife before peace could be made, was fulfilled by Ish-Bosheth (2Sa 3:14 f), but it was not until after Abner's death that Ish-Bosheth seems to have given up hopes of retaining his power (2Sa 4:1ff). The shameful murder of Ish-Bosheth by his own captains is recorded in 2Sa 4:5ff. David punished the murderers who had expected reward and buried Ish-Bosheth in the grave of Abner at Hebron (2Sa 4:12 f).

**1 Samuel 31:3 The battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers.**

- **went heavily against Saul:** 2Sa 1:4 Am 2:14
- archers hit him: Heb. shooters, men with bows, found him, Ge 49:23 1Ki 22:34
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### PHILISTINE ARCHERS MAKE A POINT WITH SAUL

**The battle went heavily against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was badly wounded by the archers**Saul surely had armor on but the armor does not protect every square inch of the body. The Philistine shot the arrow, but the LORD directed its course. This strike of Saul was not an accidental or chance hit. In God's mind, it was Saul's time to step down from the monarchy "Therefore He (YAHWEH) killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse." (1Ch 10:14+)

**1 Samuel 31:4 Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it.**

- Draw: Jdg 9:54 1Ch 10:4
- **uncircumcised:** 1Sa 14:6 17:26,36 2Sa 1:20 Jer 9:25,26 Eze 44:7-9
- **for he was greatly afraid:** 2Sa 1:14
- Saul: 2Sa 1:9-10 2Sa 17:23 1Ki 16:27
- a sword: {Eth hacherve,} rather, "the sword," i.e., his armour- bearer's, who, according to the Jews, was Doeg; and if so, then Saul and his executioner fell by the same sword with which they massacred the priests of God.
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### Related Passage:

1 Chronicles 10:4 Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and abuse me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took his sword and fell on it.

2 Samuel 1:14-16+ Then David said to him (THE AMALEKITE WHO CLAIMED TO HAVE KILLED SAUL) , "How is it you were not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the **LORD'S anointed?**" 15 And David called one of the young men and said, "Go, cut him down." So he struck him and he died. 16 David said to him, "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD'S anointed (2Sa 1:10).'"

### SAUL SEEKS EUTHANASIA

**Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised** (Ge 17:14; Ex 12:48; Jdg 14:3,15:18).) **will come and pierce me through and make sport of me."** - Notice he says that the Philistines

will first kill him and then mock him, and in fact as the story concludes they did mock him! He could do nothing to prevent this from happening for he was in Sheol (whether on the hot or cool side is the question). First Chronicles says the Philistines **will come and abuse me**, and the Septuagint translates "abuse" with [empaizo](#) meaning to ridicule, make fun of, subject to derision or mock. Even to the end, Saul was focused on self. He was concerned with self-image. It is so sad that we see him cry out to his armor bearer but now cry out to Yahweh, Who Alone could save his soul from eternal punishment (so yes, I think there is very little Scriptural evidence that he was truly repentant and regenerate)!

**Pritchard** makes a good point to help understand Saul's request - In order to fully understand this, one point needs to be made. The Philistines were a bloodthirsty bunch. If they do find Saul alive, they will subject him to unspeakable torture before he dies. Saul's fears are fully justified. ([The End of the Beginning](#))

**But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid**- Why was he afraid? We can only surmise but perhaps he had the attitude of David that one should not touch the LORD'S anointed. Compare the fate of the Amalekite who brought news of Saul's death to King David (2Sa 1:14-16)

**So** (term of conclusion) **Saul took his sword and fell on it** - In other words, Saul attempted and/or committed suicide.

Given the additional information in 2Sa 1:14-16 ([see above](#)), the question arises as to who killed Saul? Did Saul kill himself or did the Amalekite kill him? Personally I think Saul committed suicide because of the armor bearer's response, which would be something like "I am the one who was supposed to protect his life and I have failed, so I will pay the penalty by taking my life." On the other hand the text says **fell on it** but does not add "and he died," which might leave open the possibility of Saul even botched his suicide attempt. However the parallel text in First Chronicles seems very clear recording "**he likewise fell on his sword and died.**" Therefore I think the Amalekite in 2Sa 1:14-16+ is lying to David and did not kill Saul. If that is the case, he paid for his lie with his life! There are no "little" sins beloved!

**J D Greear** (Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel) writes "Lessons from Saul, a Religious (and Lost) Man Saul's problem was not the Philistines. Saul's problem was not Goliath. Saul's problem was Saul. God could have conquered all his enemies—He had promised it—but Saul refused to trust God. At every turn he trusted in himself (**ED: SAUL WOULD NOT LET HIMSELF BE CONQUERED BY GOD!!!**)....(1) Saul Kept Up Religious Practices without Ever Knowing God....(2) Saul Never Learned How to Repent....(3) Saul Died the Sinner's Death (For Greear's discussion of each of these three points see his sermon notes [The Tragedy of Dying Without God//1 Samuel 28:13-20; 31:1-13//The Search for a King](#))

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### **Walter Kaiser - How Did Saul Die? - [goto page 191 in Hard Sayings of the Bible](#)**

Who is telling the truth? The narrator of 1 Samuel 31 or the Amalekite of 2 Samuel 1:6–10? Or to put the question in another way: Did Saul commit suicide, or was he killed by this Amalekite, as he claimed, at Saul's own request?

Although there have been attempts at harmonizing the two accounts, the effort always seems to fall short of being convincing. For example, as early as the first Christian century, Josephus tried to make the accounts fit each other. Josephus claimed (Antiquities 6, 370–72 [xiv.7]) that after Saul's armor-bearer refused to kill Saul, Saul tried to fall on his own sword, but he was too weak to do so. Saul turned and saw this Amalekite, who, upon the king's request, complied and killed him, having found the king leaning on his sword. Afterward the Amalekite took the king's crown and armband and fled, whereupon Saul's armor-bearer killed himself.

While everything seems to fit in this harmonization, there is one fact that is out of line: the armor-bearer. The armor-bearer was sufficiently convinced of Saul's death to follow his example (1 Sam 31:5). Thus, Josephus's greatest mistake was in trusting the Amalekite. Also, it is most improbable that the Amalekite found Saul leaning on his sword, an unlikely sequel of a botched attempt at suicide.

It is my conclusion that Saul did commit suicide, a violation of the law of God, and that the Amalekite was lying in order to obtain favor with the new administration.

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### **Norman Geisler - [goto page 153 in When Critics Ask](#) -**

#### **1 SAMUEL 31:4 —Was Saul's suicide justifiable?**

**PROBLEM:** King Saul was mortally wounded, and he asked his armor bearer to assist him in committing suicide. Was this justified?

**SOLUTION:** Suicide is murder, and the Bible says, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). It makes no difference that the life taken is one's own. **All life belongs to God, and He alone has the right to take it** (Deut. 32:39 ; Job 1:21). Even the most desperate believers in the Bible who desired death never considered suicide a morally viable alternative. Rather, recognizing the sovereign hand of God over human life, they prayed like Jonah: "Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live"

(Jonah 4:3). Though they wanted God to take it, they never considered it right to take it themselves. Furthermore, with the exception of Samson ([see comments on page 130](#) on Jdg 16:26–27), there are at least five cases of suicide recorded in Scripture, and none of them is approved by God—Abimelech (Jdg 9:50–56 ); Saul (1Sa 31:1–6 ); Zimri ( 1Ki 16:18–19 ); Ahithophel (2Sa 17:23 ); and Judas who betrayed Christ (Mt 27:3–10 ). Each met a tragic death, and none met with divine approval. Suicide is an attack on the image of God in man ( Gen. 1:27 ) and an attempt to usurp God’s sovereignty over human life.

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**Norman Geisler - [goto page 153 in When Critics Ask](#) -**

### **1 SAMUEL 31 —The report of Saul’s death in this passage contradicts that given in the next chapter (2Sa 1 )**

**PROBLEM:** First Samuel 31 says that King Saul committed suicide by falling on his sword, but 2 Samuel 1 records that he was killed by an Amalekite as he was about to lean on his sword.

**SOLUTION:** Some claim that both stories are true, taking the Amalekite’s story as supplementary. They claim that Saul attempted suicide, but was not dead when the Amalekite arrived and finished the job. They point to the fact that the Amalekite had Saul’s sword and bracelet as evidence that his account was true, as well as the fact that David punished him by death for killing the king. The objections to this view are that it contradicts the statements of 1 Samuel 31 , that “Saul took a sword and fell on it” and that his armorbearer “saw that Saul was dead” (vv. 4–5 ), as well as the inspired record that says “so Saul ... died” (v. 6 ).

Others see the 1 Samuel story as the correct version and the one in 2 Samuel 1 as a true record of the fabrication of the Amalekite who came upon Saul after he died and thought he could gain favor with David by taking credit for the feat. They point to the fact that the story contradicts the record in 1 Samuel 31 , that the Amalekite did not seem to know that Saul died by a sword, not a spear, and that 1 Chronicles 10 repeats the story as recorded in 1 Samuel, but not the fabrication of the Amalekite. The main objections to this view are that 2 Samuel does not say his story is a lie, and that David killed him for his act. In response, he may have been killed on the basis of his self-confession ( 2 Sam. 1:16 ). And the fact that his story was in contradiction to that in 1 Samuel may have been taken as sufficient evidence that his story was a fabrication.

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**[Apologetics Study Bible \(see note\)](#)** - The Bible provides three complementary accounts of Saul’s receiving mortal wounds leading to his death. According to verse 3, Saul was severely wounded by a Philistine arrow. Then, to avoid being sadistically executed by the vengeance-seeking Philistines (1Sa 17:51; 18:27), Saul fell on his own sword (1Sa 31:4), receiving a second grave wound that in time would have killed him (2Sa 1:9). His armor-bearer, seeing that the king was now dead, then fell upon his sword and perished, as well (1Sa 31:5). Later, an Amalekite—probably on the battlefield to steal personal possessions from the corpses—tried to take credit for dealing Saul’s final death blow (2Sa 1:6–10); whether or not he was telling the truth, it was a foolish move on his part. Though this sequence of events as the Bible relates it is complicated, it is certainly plausible.

**1 Samuel 31:5 When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him.**

- 1Ch 10:5
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Related Passage:**

1 Chronicles 10:5 When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell on his sword and died.

### **ARMOR BEARER KILLS HIMSELF**

**When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him** - While the armor bearer did not check Saul’s pulse, the text does say Saul was dead. It does not say Saul appeared to be dead. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that Saul was dead and the Amalekite who came to David in 2Sa 1:10-16 was lying, apparently in an attempt to curry favor with David, since the Amalekite would have reasoned Saul was David’s enemy. As we have note before, not once does David refer to Saul as his enemy in First Samuel (one might make a case for David’s use of “enemy” in some of the Psalms [Ps 3:7, 6:10, 9:3, 6, etc] but he had other enemies so that term need not refer to Saul). The writer concludes that the armor bearer **died with him**. That statement alone would support that Saul was medically dead (in my opinion)!

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**J D Greear offers three main lessons from "Saul, A Religious (and lost) Man."**

- A. Saul kept up religious practices without ever knowing God.
- B. Saul never learned how to repent.
- C. Saul died the sinner's death.

Greear has a solemn introduction asking "Is it possible to be extremely active in God's church and not really know God at all? For some people this kind of question makes no sense at all. It may not even seem worth asking. How could a person not know God if they are active in God's church? But consider: Is it possible to be married to someone for 40 years and not really love them? Absolutely. Or does walking through a maternity ward automatically make you pregnant? Of course not. Simply being in the vicinity when God is at work is no guarantee of intimacy with Him. In fact, as the Bible demonstrates repeatedly, it is often the religiously active who find it most difficult to know the true God. Some of the most self-deceived people in our society are those who are active in our churches.

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**1 Samuel 31:6 Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together.**

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- 1Sa 4:10,11 11:15 12:17,25 28:19 1Ch 10:6 Ec 9:1,2 Ho 13:10,11
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Thus Saul died with his three sons, his armor bearer, and all his men on that day together** The "all" refers to all the men who fought with him, because we know that some his sons and troops did survive (see 2Sa. 2:8; 2Sa 21:8).

**TSK Note** - all those of his house: "All his men," in Samuel; that is, all who were present with him in the battle; and his family received such a blow, that it never recovered itself again. For though Ishbosheth reigned over a part of the country, yet it was not in any splendour. This history seems to be repeated here as an introduction to that of the kingdom of David.

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**G C Morgan - So Saul died.—1 Sam. 31.6**

This closing chapter of the Book is draped in sackcloth, and covered with ashes. It tells the tragic story of the last act in the career of a man who was a ghastly failure. Defeat at the hands of the Philistines drove Saul to uttermost desperation. Wounded in the final fight, and fearing that the last blow might be struck by an enemy, he called upon his armour-bearer to slay him. Upon his refusing to do so, Saul died by his own hand physically, as he had already perished as to purpose and possibility by his own sin and his own folly. Suicide is always the ultimate action of cowardice. In the case of Saul, and in many similar cases, it is perfectly natural; but let it never be glorified as heroic. It is the last resort of the man who dare not stand up to life. Schopenhauer once said that suicide is not the result of hatred of life, but rather of love of it. A man loves life and because he cannot live, as he considers, full life, he will not live at all. There is a great element of truth in that; but still it leaves the brand of the coward upon the suicide. It ever seems to me that the chief spiritual value of this first Book of Samuel lies in the solemn lessons taught by the story of the life and failure of this man Saul. It proclaims in clarion tones the arresting and searching truth, that great advantages and remarkable opportunities are in themselves no guarantees of success. Unless the heart be firm and steady in its allegiance to principle and its loyalty to God, these things will only be weights and burdens, crushing the soul, and assuring the uttermost ruin of the man to whom they come. (Borrow [Life applications from every chapter of the Bible](#))

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**Gleason Archer** - [page 185 of New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties](#) - First Samuel 31 gives account of Saul's death that conflicts with another given in 2 Samuel 1. How can both be correct?

1 Samuel 31:3-4 informs us that Saul was fatally wounded by a Philistine arrow at the disastrous battle of Mount Gilboa. Realizing that he was about to die, Saul himself appealed to his own armorbearer to thrust his sword through his heart and kill him immediately—"lest these uncircumcised [Philistines] come and pierce me through and make sport of me" (NASB). But since the armor bearer could not bring himself to take the life of his king, Saul took his own sword, fastened its hilt firmly in the ground, and then fell on it in such a way as to end his misery right then and there.

In 2 Samuel 1 we read that a certain Amalekite who had served in Saul's bodyguard fled from the battlefield and made his way to David's camp, in order to bring him news of Saul's death. According to the account he gave to David (vv. 6-10), he was summoned by King Saul to his side while he was hopelessly surrounded by the triumphant Philistines; and he was ordered by the king to take his life immediately, in order to end his misery from his fatal wounds. The Amalekite then complied with his request (v.10): "So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown which was on his head and the bracelet which was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord" (NASB).

This presents obvious discrepancies with the account in 1 Samuel 31, but it is not presented as being an actual record of what



happened during Saul's dying moments; it is only a record of what the Amalekite mercenary said had taken place. Coming with Saul's crown and bracelet in hand and presenting them before the new king of Israel, the Amalekite obviously expected a handsome reward and high preferment in the service of Saul's successor. In the light of the straightforward account in the previous chapter, we must conclude that the Amalekite was lying in order to gain a cordial welcome from David. But what had actually happened was that after Saul had killed himself, and the armorbearer had followed his lord's example by taking his own life (1 Sam. 31:5), the Amalekite happened by at that moment, recognized the king's corpse, and quickly stripped off the bracelet and crown before the Philistine troops discovered it. Capitalizing on his good fortune, the Amalekite then escaped from the bloody field and made his way down to David's headquarters in Ziklag. But his hoped-for reward turned out to be a warrant for his death; David had him killed on the spot, saying: "Your blood is on your head, for your mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the LORD's anointed' " (2 Sam. 1:16; NASB). His glib falsehood had brought him the very opposite of what he had expected, for he failed to foresee that David's high code of honor would lead him to make just the response he did.

It should be added that this particular Amalekite came from a different Amalekite tribe from that which Saul had earlier destroyed at God's command—the tribe over which Agag had ruled (1 Sam. 15:7–8). Those Amalekite lived between Havilah and Shur. But there were other Amalekites not involved in this campaign, some of whom raided David's settlement at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30).

**1 Samuel 31:7 When the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled; then the Philistines came and lived in them.**

- **cities:** 1Sa 13:6 Lev 26:32,36 De 28:33 Jdg 6:2
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

#### **Related Passages:**

1 Samuel 13:6+ When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were hard-pressed), then the people hid themselves in caves, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.

Leviticus 26:32; 36 'I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. ....36 'As for those of you who may be left, I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them, and even when no one is pursuing they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall.

Deuteronomy 28:33 "A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually.

## **ISRAELITES FLEE THEIR CITIES**

**When the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, with those who were beyond the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned the cities and fled** - The battle had taken place on Mount Gilboa and Israelites would have been watching from across the valley. To their horror they witnessed the total defeat of Saul's forces, so that surviving soldiers fled, then the citizens fled for fear of further Philistine reprisals! That was a wise move for them to run for their lives, because the Philistines clearly had a take no prisoner's policy!

**Then** - When? When the Israelites fled. Presumably the soldiers sent word back to their home bases and Philistine pilgrims came into the land of milk and honey and possessed God's Land.

**the Philistines came and lived in them** - The promised land was now occupied by uncircumcised Philistines. This was a consequence of the sins and poor leadership of King Saul, who became more obsessed with killing David he thought was his enemy then will killing the true enemy, the Philistines.

**1 Samuel 31:8 It came about on the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.**

- **to strip:** 1Ch 10:8 2Ch 20:25

- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## PHILISTINES SEEKING SPOIL FIND SAUL'S CORPSE

It came about on the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa - Saul and sons would have been recognized by their more royal apparel. The Philistines realized they had cut the nation off at its head so to speak, by killing their king. Little did that know that God was behind the scenes in full control of the scenes He was behind, and He was in the process of raising up a man after his own heart to fill the void left by Saul a man after man's heart.

**Mount Gilboa** - (boiling spring or bubbling spring), is a peak in the mountain range on the eastern side of the plain or valley of Esdraelon (Jezreel), rising over the city of Jezreel. Mt Gilboa is mentioned in Scripture only in connection with memorable as the scene of Saul's disastrous defeat by the Philistines, where he and his three sons were slain (1Sa 28:4; 31:1-8; 2Sa 1:6-21; 21:12; 1 Chr. 10:1, 8). When the tidings of this defeat were conveyed to David, he gave utterance to those pathetic words in the "Song of the Bow" (2 Sam. 1:19-27).

**1 Samuel 31:9** They cut off his head and stripped off his weapons, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people.

- **cut off:** 1Sa 31:4 17:51,54 1Ch 10:9,10
- **to carry the good news:** Jdg 16:23,24 2Sa 1:20
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## SAUL DECAPITATED AND DE-ROBED

**They cut off his head and stripped off his weapons, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people** - The very thing Saul had feared was taking place. They ridiculed Saul by sending his head and armor throughout Philistia. Note the phrase **to carry the good news to the house of their idols** which is based on their pagan belief that their gods (Dagon, etc) had given them the victory over Israel. Thus Saul's head and armor would sever almost as thank offerings to their gods. **Carry the good news** in the Septuagint is ironically the great NT word [euaggelizo/evangelizo](#) for proclaiming the good news of the Gospel!

**1 Samuel 31:10** They put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan.

- they put: The Philistines placed the armour of Saul in the temple of Ashtaroath as a trophy of victory, and a testimony of their gratitude, in the same manner as David placed the sword of Goliath in the tabernacle. 1Sa 21:9
- Ashtaroath: Jdg 2:13
- Bethshan: Jos 17:11 Jdg 1:27 2Sa 21:12-14
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### Related Passage:

1 Samuel 21:9 Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

Location of Beth-shan W of Jabesh-gilead

Dore Woodcut of Saul & son's Bodies on Wall

## TROPHIES OF PHILISTINE VICTORY

**They put his weapons in the temple of Ashtaroath** ([ashtaroath/astarot](#) - fertility goddess) - Even as David had placed Goliath's



sword in the Tabernacle, the Philistine do so as a testimony to the superior (they thought) power of their god Ashtaroth compared to the Living God of the Hebrews. The omnipotent God is allowing all of these blasphemous activities to take place.

**and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan** - Note location of Beth-shan [on map above](#), in Jordan Valley, 16 miles S of Sea of Galilee, in the Jordan valley and just W of Jabesh-gilead. Beth-shan is listed in Josh 17:11, 16; Jdg 1:27 among those cities that resisted Israelite occupation and remained Canaanite and Philistine strongholds. This would be a public disgrace for the king of Israel. Even worse before the pagan nations this would result in profaning the Name of the God in Whose place the king ruled. (cf Ezek 36:20-22, 39:7)

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[Reformation Study Bible](#) summarizes **Saul's Decline and Fall** -

CAUSE	RESULT
A presumptuous sacrifice (1Sa 13:7–14)	Loss of kingdom foretold (1Sa 13:14)
A foolish curse (1Sa 14:24–28)	Curse falls on Jonathan (1Sa 14:43–45)
Spared Agag and flocks (1Sa 15:7–9)	Loss of kingdom (1Sa 15:27, 28)
Lost fellowship with God (1Sa 28:16, 17)	Unanswered prayer (1Sa 28:6)
Visits a medium (1Sa 28:7, 8)	Doom predicted (1Sa 28:19)
Takes his own life (1Sa 31:4)	End of dynasty (1Sa 31:4–6)

**1 Samuel 31:11** Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,

- **Jabesh-gilead:** 1Sa 11:1 2Sa 2:4
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

Jabesh-Gilead just east of  
Beth-shan in Manasseh

## MEN OF JABESH-GILEAD HEAR OF OF SAUL'S IGNOMINIOUS TREATMENT

**Ignominious** means deserving or causing public disgrace or shame.

**Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul** - The mention of inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead is significant as (1) Beth-shan was visible from their town and (2) many years prior Saul had delivered these residents from oppression by the Ammonite Nahash.

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**Jabesh-Gilead** - was a town to the east of Jordan River, on the top of one of the green hills of Gilead, within the limits of the half tribe of Manasseh, and in full view of Beth-shan. It is first mentioned in connection with the vengeance taken on its inhabitants because they had refused to come up to Mizpeh to take part with Israel against the tribe of Benjamin (Jdg. 21:8-14). After the battles at Gibeah, that tribe was almost extinguished, only six hundred men remaining. An expedition went against Jabesh-Gilead, the whole of whose inhabitants were put to the sword, except four hundred maidens, whom they brought as prisoners and sent to "proclaim peace" to the Benjamites who had fled to the crag Rimmon. These captives were given to them as wives, that the tribe might be saved from extinction (Jdg. 21). This city was afterwards taken by Nahash, king of the Ammonites, but was delivered by Saul, the newly-elected king of Israel. In gratitude for this deliverance, forty years after this, the men of Jabesh-Gilead took down the bodies of Saul and of his three sons from the walls of Beth-shan, and after burning them, buried the bones under a tree near the city (1 Sam. 31:11-13). David thanked them for this act of piety (2 Sam. 2:4-6), and afterwards transferred the remains to the royal sepulchre (21:14).

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**F B Meyer - 1 Samuel 31:11–12 All the valiant men...**

This was a noble and generous act. At the beginning of his reign, in the early dawn of youthful promise and prowess, when he was the darling of the nation, Saul had interposed to deliver their beleaguered city. And now, as the awful tidings of his defeat and suicide

spread like fire through the country, the men whom he had succored remembered his first kingly act, and showed their appreciation for his kindness by doing a strong and chivalrous deed in rescuing his remains from dishonor. They could not help him, but they could save his honor. When David heard of this act, he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, thanking them for their chivalrous devotion to the memory of the fallen king, and promising to requite the kindness as one done to the entire nation, and to himself.

Are we careful enough of the honor and name of our dear Lord? He has done for us spiritually all that Saul did for Jabesh-Gilead, and more. He has delivered our soul from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling. Let us be swift to maintain the honor of His name among those who are so apt at making it their scorn.

It was well that these men did not wait for others to act. Had they done so, the body of Saul might have rotted piecemeal on the walls of the temple at Bethshan. If they had left this act of reparation for Abner, or Ish-bosheth, it would never have been done. There is no order of precedence, when a wrong has to be righted, or a friend vindicated. The man who is next must act. Let us strike into the fray, and count that our opportunity is warrant enough. He who can, may.

**1 Samuel 31:12 all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there.**

- **burned:** 2Ch 16:14 Jer 34:5 Am 6:10
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### **NIGHT RAID RETRIEVES BODIES OF SAUL & SONS**

**all the valiant men rose and walked all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan** - Here we see the added detail that not only had the Philistines fastened Saul's body, but also the body of his 3 slain sons. While the text does not state explicitly, undoubtedly the sons were also beheaded as [depicted above](#) in Dore's gory woodcut.

**and they came to Jabesh and burned them there** - In other words, the men of Jabesh-Gilead cremated the remains of their bodies.

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**QUESTION - [What does the Bible say about cremation? Should Christians be cremated?](#) [SEE ACCOMPANYING VIDEO](#)**

**ANSWER** - The Bible does not give any specific teaching about cremation. There are occurrences in the Old Testament of people being burned to death (1 Kings 16:18; 2 Kings 21:6) and of human bones being burned (2 Kings 23:16-20), but these are not examples of cremation. It is interesting to note that in 2 Kings 23:16-20, burning human bones on an altar desecrated the altar. At the same time, the Old Testament law nowhere commands that a deceased human body not be burned, nor does it attach any curse or judgment on someone who is cremated.

Cremation was practiced in biblical times, but it was not commonly practiced by the Israelites or by New Testament believers. In the cultures of Bible times, burial in a tomb, cave, or in the ground was the common way to dispose of a human body (Genesis 23:19; 35:19; 2 Chronicles 16:14; Matthew 27:60-66). While burial was the common practice, the Bible nowhere commands burial as the only allowed method of disposing of a body.

Is cremation something a Christian can consider? Again, there is no explicit scriptural command against cremation. Some believers object to the practice of cremation on the basis it does not recognize that one day God will resurrect our bodies and re-unite them with our soul/spirit (1 Corinthians 15:35-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). However, the fact that a body has been cremated does not make it any more difficult for God to resurrect that body. The bodies of Christians who died a thousand years ago have, by now, completely turned into dust. This will in no way prevent God from being able to resurrect their bodies. He created them in the first place; He will have no difficulty re-creating them. Cremation does nothing but "expedite" the process of turning a body into dust. God is equally able to raise a person's remains that have been cremated as He is the remains of a person who was not cremated. The question of burial or cremation is within the realm of Christian freedom. A person or a family considering this issue should pray for wisdom (James 1:5) and follow the conviction that results. [GotQuestions.org](#)

**1 Samuel 31:13 They took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.**

- **bones:** Ge 35:8 2Sa 2:4,5 21:12-14
- **fasted seven:** Ge 50:10
- [1 Samuel 31 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

## **BONES BURIED UNDER A TAMARISK TREE**

**They took their bones and buried them under the [tamarisk tree](#) at Jabesh, and fasted seven days** - The efficient high temperatures of a crematorium (up to 1,800F) can reduce the bones to bone fragments/ashes but does not destroy the bone material per se. Presumably there were more intact bones after burning Saul's and his son's headless bodies (temperatures would be in range of 500-800F, not as efficient as a crematorium) and thus the men of Jabesh-Gilead gave them a proper burial in their hometown of **Jabesh**. Is the fact that the men of Jabesh-Gilead put Saul to "rest" **under the tamarisk tree** not a slight touch of irony, as 1Sa 22:6+ records that is where he was sitting when the Philistines had raided years before! **Fasted seven days** indicates a time of mourning. It is interesting that in both records of Samuel's death, while it says they lamented and mourned (1Sa 25:1, 1Sa 28:3), it does not specifically say they fasted (although presumably that was part of their mourning and lamenting for their beloved prophet).

The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 gives us information for why Saul died and Who put him to death...

So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, (1) **because** of the word of the LORD which he did not keep (1Sa 13:13+, 1Sa 15:3, 8, 9, 19-23, 24, 26+, 1Sa 28:18); and also (2) **because** he asked counsel of a medium (1Sa 28:7-14, cf Dt 18:9-14+), making inquiry of it, 14 and (3) **did not inquire of the LORD** (cf 1Sa 28:6). Therefore He killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse.

**John Barnett** - The ominous warning of Saul's life is that he had everything going for him possible. He was big, strong, blessed, gifted, chosen, empowered, and given every opportunity to serve God. But he didn't. Saul failed because there were severe deficiencies in his character. **God doesn't need brains—He wants character.** God doesn't need brawn (huge strong muscles)—He wants **integrity**. God doesn't need anyone's wisdom, power, or wealth—He wants **obedience**. God doesn't need **ambitious confidence**—He wants **humble dependence**.