

The Jewish Kingdom - Lesson 31

The Death of Saul

The great battle that we have been building up to for the past few weeks is now at hand. Saul will lose his life and his kingdom as the Philistines plunge into the Jezreel valley.

74. The Death of Saul - I Samuel 31:1-10, I Chronicles 10:1-10,13-14

- Israel is driven from the field of battle by the Philistines. This battle began in the valley of Jezreel and its final skirmishes near Mt. Gilboa.
- vs. 2 - Note that in this rout that the Philistines are making it a priority to attack Saul and the other leaders. As we saw way back in Lesson #15, Saul had four sons by his wife Ahinoam. Three of these four sons fall in this battle. The fourth, Ishbosheth, either escapes or is not present.
- vs. 3 - Archers - in ancient warfare the archers would stay behind their lines and fire volleys of arrows into the enemy's forces. They would not be usually be firing at specific targets, but the language suggests they were definitely aiming for Saul. That Saul was wounded shows that he was in the midst of the battle.
- vs. 4 - Jewish tradition says that the armourbearer was none other than Doeg the Edomite who obtained the position after the murder of the priests in I Samuel 22. Take that with a grain of salt.
- vs. 4 - Saul sees that his situation is hopeless. He does not want to be captured alive and tortured by the enemy. Remember how the Philistines treated Samson.
- vs. 5 - Saul and his armourbearer both died by the same blade.
- vs. 7 - Not only did the Philistines destroy the house of Saul in this battle, they also took control of the fertile Jezreel valley.
- vs. 8-10 - The bodies of Saul and his sons were paraded as trophies. His armor was put in the temple of Ashtaroth, his head (see I Chronicles 10:10) put in their temple of Dagon, and the bodies of Saul and his sons were displayed on the wall of Bethshan.
- Bethshan "house of quiet". Mentioned in Joshua 17:11 and Judges 1:27. It was situated where the Jordan and Jezreel valleys met. The Canaanites that dwelt there may have been in league with the Philistines.
- The writer of I Chronicles adds an addendum to the death of Saul in 10:13-14 stating that Saul was rejected, killed, and his kingdom taken from him for the fact that he did not follow or seek God's will.

75. The Fate of Saul's Body - I Samuel 31:11-13, I Chronicles 10:11-12

- Was Saul not a great king? Yes. Did he do horrible things at times? Yes. But did he ever do good things? Yes. Here we see men who never forgot what Saul did for them and sought to repay him after his death.
- In I Samuel 11, Saul rescued the people of Jabeshgilead from Nahash and the Ammonites. This act united Israel in accepting him as king. The people of Jabeshgilead never forgot what Saul did for them.

- vs. 12 - The men of Jabeshgilead take the bodies of Saul and his sons at night. They would not have a man who saved them to be disgraced in such a manner.
- It is very uncommon for Jews to cremate their dead. Usually they were buried or embalmed and entombed. It is likely that this was the most practical and honorable way to treat the bodies which no doubt were decomposing.