

• *The end of Saul's family*

The Philistines' fighting on mount Gilboa is energetic and successful. The Israelites are scattering^{□1} and the Philistines seem to be determined to kill the entire family of Saul. First the sons are killed^{□2}. Then Saul is fatally wounded^{□3}.

□1 31:1
□2 31:2
□3 31:3

First rejection from the kingship and finally loss of reward

God leaves the backslider on his own. Years previously Saul had 'fallen aside'^{□1}. God had told Saul that he had lost his ministry and was rejected from being king^{□2}. This does not mean that Saul was rejected personally. If he had accepted God's verdict and had allowed God to give the kingdom to his successor, his life might have turned out differently. But Saul persisted in his disobedience. He had lost his ministry of being king in Israel, and it would never be returned to him^{□3}. He lived the remainder of his life without fellowship with God.

□1 Hebrews 6:6
□2 15:23

□3 15:29

Saul's fall and its results

At the end of his life it became apparent what it meant for a believer to lose his reward.

1. No guidance in the kingship

1. Saul had already lost his ministry and his anointing as king. He was no longer able to function as king. God would give him no guidance in the kingship.

2. Incapable of being a channel of blessing

2. Saul was incapable of being a channel of blessing. Instead he involved others with his own doom. As Samuel had predicted^{□1} the Philistines attack Israel^{□2}. The Israelites flee and fall^{□2}. Saul's sons fall with him^{□3}, as does his armour-bearer^{□4}. Verse 6 emphasizes the three groups that fell with Saul: people, sons and armour-bearer.

□1 28:19
□2 31:1
□3 31:2
□4 31:5

3. Brought defeat upon his people

3. Saul brought defeat upon his people. The lifetime of Saul had been a story of decline for Israel as well as for Saul personally. At one stage Saul had even been more concerned to hunt down David than to hunt down Philistines, which was the reason the people had wanted a king in the first place. Now we reach the end of the story and Saul had led the people into nothing but defeat and deepened subjection to the Philistines.

4. Previous successes reversed

4. Saul lives to see the reversal of his previous successes. Before he had chased Philistines^{□1}; now the Philistines chase him^{□2}. Before Philistines had left their bodies along the roadside when defeated by Israel's armies; now it is Israel whose bodies are covering mount Gilboa^{□3}.

□1 14:22
□2 31:2
□3 31:1

5. He lives without God's special help

5. Saul lives without God's special help. The picture is one of his being hard-pressed by the archers^{□1}. It is not that he has been hit by them but he is in great distress as he comes under their fire. The psalmist could say 'I called on the LORD in distress'^{□2}. But Saul was not in a position to do so. He already knew what the future was to be; Samuel had told him. There was no possibility of God coming to his aid. He knows the Philistines are likely to torture him^{□3}, and thinks that to die before they get him would be preferable^{□3}. He wants help in committing suicide but can get no help in that^{□3} and so takes his own life^{□4}. Like Ahithophel^{□5} and Zimri^{□6} and Judas^{□7} he can see no other remedy^{□8}.

□1 31:3
□2 Psalm 118:5
□3 31:4
□4 30:5
□5 17:23
□6 1 Kings 16:18
□7 Matthew 27:5
□8 31:4

6. Calamity rather than blessing upon those around him

6. Saul brings calamity rather than blessing upon those around him. His armour-bearer who could have shared his honour (as happened with Jonathan's armour-bearer^{□1}) instead shares his failure and disgrace^{□2}. Three groups of people were dragged down when Saul came to his end^{□3}.

□1 14:6, 7, 12, 13
□2 31:5
□3 31:6

7. Loss of territory

7. Saul's fall led to loss of territory. Philistines who before had been subdued, now came in to take over many Israelite towns^{□1}.

□1 31:7

8. Disgrace

8. Saul's fall led to great disgrace. His body was dishonoured by being beheaded. In days gone by it was the Philistine Goliath who had been beheaded^{□1} and his head had been displayed in triumph^{□2}. Now that very thing happens to the body of Saul^{□3}. The news gets sent round the Philistines. His life ends in disgrace^{□4} and only the men of Jabesh-Gilead remember him for his past assistance to them^{□5}.

□1 17:51

□2 17:54

□3 31:8-10

□4 31:1-10

□5 31:11-13

Saul falls from the highest position while David rises from the lowest

• Saul reaped what he had sown

The way of the backslider gets narrower and narrower. The way of the man of God gets wider and wider. During these years covered by 1 Samuel 16-31 Saul had been in a position of prestige and power as the king of Israel. He was in the highest position of earthly glory that could be obtained in Israel. David's pathway had been rough indeed. He had been despised by his father, apparently. His stay in Saul's palace and his days of glory as the slayer of Goliath had been brief. He had suffered anguish as the object of Saul's jealousy and had 'suffered the loss of all things'. But now, as the reader knows, Saul having sown to the flesh has from the flesh reaped corruption. David, as the reader of the story can now guess, is moving towards the kingship of Israel and is God's man for the hour. Whose position was the greater, Saul's or David's? The story has made the answer clear. 'The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out'^{□1}.

□1 Proverbs 13:9

• What matters is not how we begin but how we end

The story will continue (in 2 Samuel) with the account of David. Saul's reputation, despite all his good beginnings, will be a bad one. Our honour comes not through how we started but through how we end. It is he who perseveres to the end that obtains the 'well done' of God and of other people. David endured in the will of God. It is his name, not Saul's, that goes down in history with honour and glory attached to it. Similarly Jesus, our Son of David, 'for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame.' We have to be like Jesus, David's greater Son, who endured until he had totally achieved God's will for his life. 'Watch yourselves,' said John, 'so that you do not lose what you have accomplished, but receive a full reward'^{□1}. Jesus got to glory. He is able to keep us from falling, so that we hear Jesus himself say to us 'Well done!'

□1 2 John 8

• Those who persevere to the end obtain the 'well done' of God



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