

1 Chronicles Chapter 10

Verses 10:1-12

See notes on (1 Sam. 31:1-13; compare 2 Sam. 1:4-12).

In (verses 1-6), the focus abruptly shifts from the history of Israel to their exile in Babylon (586 B.C.), and then flashes back to the reign of Israel's first king "Saul", and his demise.

Little background information on Saul is provided, likely because audiences already knew so much about him and because he is far less important to the chronicle than David is.

1 Chronicles 10:1 "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa."

In the last lesson, we read of the genealogy of Saul through Jonathan, Mephibosheth, and Micah.

This battle at Gilboa destroys much of Saul's family.

Saul and three of his sons died in this battle.

The Philistines had been constant enemies of Israel.

God allowed this battle to end in this manner as punishment for Saul's sins, and to make the way clear for David to reign as king.

This was a terrible battle with much loss of life by the Israelites.

The battle took place in the valley of Jezreel, where 20 major battles have been fought.

This same valley is sometimes called Esdraelon.

It is also spoken of as Megiddo.

The last great battle that will take place there will be the battle of Armageddon.

1 Chronicles 10:2 "And the Philistines followed hard after Saul, and after his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul."

Literally, clave to Saul, that is, hotly pursued him.

(Compare 1 Kings Chapters 22 and 31).

The destruction of the king and his sons would make their triumph complete.

"The sons of Saul":

Esh-baal, Saul's fourth son, was not in the battle (2 Sam. 2:8; compare 1 Chron. 8:33).

Like Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, Saul may have witnessed the death of his sons (2 Kings 25:7).

Jonathan, at least, would not be far from him in the last struggle:

"In their deaths they were not divided."

Three of Saul's sons were killed:

"Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua.

Esh-Baal (9:39), was not.

Abner, the commander of Saul's army, later made Esh-Baal king (2 Sam. 2:8-10).

Esh-Baal is not mentioned, likely to emphasize David's sovereign rule over all Israel.

This is an explanation of which sons died there with Saul.

On hearing of their death, David mourned greatly.

1 Chronicles 10:3 "And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was wounded of the archers."

Literally, was heavy upon him, like a burden weighing him to the earth.

"And the archers hit him":

Literally, and they that shoot with the bow came upon him; and he shuddered before the shooters.

"He shuddered or trembled" (Deut. 2:25).

The verb is properly to writhe, travail (Isa. 23:4).

Saul's deadly terror was natural.

He believed himself forsaken of God, and stood now, after a lost battle, beset by murderous foes, whom he could not reach.

There was no chance of a fair hand to hand encounter.

The Hebrew word for “archers” is the same in both places in Samuel.

The Philistines were from Egypt, and the bow was a favorite Egyptian weapon.

The hieroglyph for “soldier” (menfat), is a man with bow and quiver.

1 Chronicles 10:4 "Then said Saul to his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and abuse me. But his armor-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. So Saul took a sword, and fell upon it."

"Lest these uncircumcised come":

Samuel adds, “and thrust me through.”

An inadvertent repetition there, or omission here, is possible.

Or, we might say, Saul preferred death by a friendly stroke to the thrusts of insulting foe.

"And abuse me":

The Hebrew means, strictly, “to make a toy of,” “sport with.”

“How I have made a toy of Egypt” (Exodus 10:2); and is used (Jer. 38:19), of insulting a fallen foe, as here.

"Took a sword":

Literally, the sword or his sword.

The Philistines were very cruel people.

They particularly hated Saul for the battles he had successfully brought against them.

Saul feared that they would torture him before he died.

He tried to get his armor-bearer to kill him, but he would not raise his hand against God's anointed.

It appears from this Scripture, that Saul killed himself.

1 Chronicles 10:5 "And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise on the sword, and died."

Samuel, “his sword,” i.e., the sword of the armor-bearer.

"And died":

Samuel adds “with him,” which seems to be omitted here for brevity, which may be the reason of other similar omissions.

Loyalty to his chief, and perhaps dread of the foe, were the armor-bearer’s motives.

The armor-bearer, probably feared the same fate that Saul feared.

He did not want to be tortured either and he killed himself.

It would not be until the next day, that the grave robber would find their bodies and bring word to David of their death.

1 Chronicles 10:6 "So Saul died, and his three sons, and all his house died together."

This verse deals with “Saul’s three sons” and the attendants that were with him at the battle.

Some of Saul’s sons were not here (2 Sam. 2:8; 21:1-14).

This massacre was so great that Saul's family did nearly perish.

There were just a few left, primarily of Jonathan's family.

Only three of Saul's sons were killed however.

1 Chronicles 10:7 "And when all the men of Israel that [were] in the valley saw that they fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, then they forsook their cities, and fled: and the Philistines came and dwelt in them."

"That were in the valley":

Rather, the plain, in which the main battle was fought, that of Jezreel.

Samuel has “that were on the other side of the plain, and on the other side of the Jordan.”

The curt phrase “who (dwelt) in the plain,” may be compared with (1 Chron. 9:2).

The people of the surrounding districts are meant; who, when they “saw that they” (viz., Saul’s army, “the men of Israel,” see Samuel), “fled,” or had been routed, they deserted.

"Dwelt in them":

The pronoun here is masculine, in Samuel, feminine, which is correct.

With Saul and his sons dead there was no one to lead the people, and they ran out of their cities and just left them for the Philistines to take.

These particular cities seem to be inhabited from time to time by the winning side, whoever it is at the moment.

1 Chronicles 10:8 "And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his sons fallen in mount Gilboa."

"His sons":

Samuel says, "his three sons."

Otherwise the two verses are word for word the same.

We are not told just how they determined who Saul's sons were.

Perhaps it was because of what they were wearing.

Saul's body had been found originally by a grave robber.

Then the Philistines found him.

1 Chronicles 10:9 "And when they had stripped him, they took his head, and his armor, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to carry tidings unto their idols, and to the people."

Better, and they stripped him, and carried off his head, etc.

Samuel, "and they cut off his head, and stripped his armor off."

With the phrase "carried off his head," (compare Gen. 40:19), "Pharaoh will lift thy head from off thee," where the same Hebrew verb is used.

And sent (Saul's head and armor), to carry tidings unto their idols.

"Unto their idols":

Samuel, "house of their idols."

But the LXX reading there is the same as here.

The expression of Samuel looks original, though it may have been copied by mistake from (1 Chron. 10:10).

Note the strictly local conception of deities implied in this act of the Philistines; as if their idols could neither see nor hear beyond their own temples (compare 1 Kings 20:23; 20:28; Psalm 94:9).

1 Chronicles 10:10 "And they put his armor in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon."

The Philistines worshiped “Dagon”, their god of grain.

The temple of Dagon was the site of Samson’s death (Judges 16:23-30).

(1 Samuel 5:1-7), recounts another incident that occurred in this temple, revealing that this false god was no match for the true, living God.

It was common among the heathen to vow to a national or favorite deity, that, in the event of a victory, the armor of the enemy's king, or of some eminent leader, should be dedicated to him as an offering of gratitude.

Such trophies were usually suspended on the pillars of the temple.

“Fastened his head in the temple of Dagon”:

While the trunk or headless corpse was affixed to the wall of Beth-shan (1 Sam. 31:10).

Perhaps, they beheaded Saul in retaliation for David cutting off the head of Goliath.

(1 Samuel 31:9-10), tells of them even nailing his body to the wall in the house of their false god, Ashteroth.

1 Chronicles 10:11-12 "And when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul," "They arose, all the valiant men, and took away the body of Saul, and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh, and buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted seven days."

Literally, every man of valor.

Samuel adds, “and marched all the night.”

"Took away":

Carried off.

Samuel has “took”.

"The body":

A common Aramaic word, gûfāh, only read here in the Old Testament, for which Samuel has the pure Hebrew synonym a'wīyah.

Samuel adds, “from the wall of Beth-shan.”

"And brought them":

Samuel, "and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there."

To burn a corpse was a further degradation of executed criminals (Joshua 7:25; Lev. 20:14; 21:9).

And as the Jews did not ordinarily practice cremation.

It is supposed that the phrase "burnt them" (in 1 Sam. 31), means "made a burning for them" of costly spices, as was done at the funerals of kings (Jer. 34:5; 2 Chron. 16:14; 21:19).

But perhaps the bodies were burnt in this exceptional case because they had been mutilated by the enemy.

"Buried their bones":

Samuel, "took and buried."

The phrase "their bones," contrasted with their "corpses," certainly seems to imply that the latter had been burnt.

"The oak":

Hebrew terebinth, or turpentine tree.

Samuel, "tamarisk."

The difference points to another source used by Chronicles.

"And fasted seven days":

In token of mourning (compare the friends of Job, Job 2:11-13); and Ezekiel among the exiles at Tel-abib (Ezek. 3:15).

For the behavior of the men of Jabesh (compare 1 Sam. chapter 11).

Jabesh-gilead was a city in the land of Gilead.

Gilead was on the east side of the Jordan River in the land of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

It was a terrible fate worse than dying, for the body not to be buried.

We see that these brave men of Gilead did retrieve the bodies and buried them in Jabesh.

The fasting for seven days could have been a time of mourning for Saul, or it could have been a time of cleansing.

Verses 13-14

This summary is unique to 1 Chronicles and provides the proper transition from Saul's kingship to David's reign.

The author of Chronicles adds a note to the historical narrative on the divine judgment of "Saul" (1 Sam. Chapter 31).

Saul's continued disobedience (1 Sam. 13:8-9, 15:3; 9-19), and the consulting of the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28:7-25), had brought on his downfall.

1 Chronicles 10:13 "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, [even] against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking [counsel] of [one that had] a familiar spirit, to inquire [of it];"

Saul consulted a "medium" even though he knew it was forbidden by God (Deut. 18:9-14; 1 Sam. Chapter 28).

How sad that his life could be summed up in one single word: unfaithful.

Saul perhaps thought that he had special privileges and would not be held responsible for his sins.

He acted as if he thought he was above the law of God.

He was very humble in the beginning of his reign, but soon lost his humble spirit and decided to do things his way, instead of God's way.

He let Agag live, and kept the finest of the sheep in a battle when God told him to kill everyone and all the animals.

He sacrificed once, because he was tired of waiting for the high priest, Samuel.

He also consulted with a woman with a familiar spirit, which was strictly forbidden.

He pretended to be living for God, but he would not accept God's instructions.

1 Chronicles 10:14 "And inquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

The account of Saul's death (in 1 Sam. 31:3-4), does not include the words found here: "therefore He" (the LORD), "killed him."

Apparently, God ultimately judged Saul because he did not obey what God had said, a judgment that resulted in death and loss of the kingdom (1 Sam. 15:15-26).

Saul's story provides a vivid picture for anyone who does not take God's Word seriously.

Only by the grace of God through the death of Jesus is anyone spared from death, the natural consequence of disobedience.

God took responsibility for Saul's death, which was fully deserved for consulting a medium, an activity punishable by death (Deut. 17:1-6).

This demonstrates that human behavior is under the ultimate control of God, who achieves His purpose through the actions of people.

The will of Saul to have his own way was the very thing that destroyed him.

He had tried to kill David, because he knew David had been anointed to be the next king.

David would not try to kill Saul, because he was the anointed of God.

God had to remove Saul for David to become king.

David was not only the son of Jesse, but the youngest son of Jesse.

This is the same David that killed Goliath.

He would be the opposite of Saul.

He was a man after God's own heart.

Even though it was an arrow of the Philistine that wounded Saul, it was God who killed him.

1 Chronicles Chapter 10 Questions

1. In verse 1, who fought against Israel?
2. Where did the Israelites fall down slain?
3. Who died in this battle, besides the regular army?
4. Why did God allow this to happen?

5. What are some other names for the valley of Jezreel?
6. What great battle is yet to be fought there?
7. Which of Saul's sons died there?
8. How did David take this news?
9. How was Saul wounded?
10. What did Saul ask his armor-bearer to do?
11. When he would not do what Saul asked, what did Saul do?
12. Why did he not want to fall into the hands of the Philistines?
13. What did the armor-bearer do, when he realized Saul was dead?
14. Who carried word to David of their deaths?
15. What is meant by all his house died?
16. What does verse 7, say the rest of the men in the cities did?
17. What happened to the cities?
18. When did the Philistines find Saul?
19. What did they do to the body of Saul?
20. Where did they put Saul's head?
21. Why did they behead Saul?
22. In 1 Samuel 31:9-10, what does it say they did to Saul's body?
23. Who came and got Saul's body?
24. What did they do with it?
25. Where was Jabesh-gilead?
26. Saul died for his _____.
27. What were some of his specific sins?
28. Who did God turn the kingdom over to?
29. Who was David's father?

30. David was his _____ son.

31. Who killed Saul?