

1Samuel 31:1 ¶ Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa.

1Samuel 31:2 And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons.

1Samuel 31:3 And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers.

The narrative continues, but the scene switches back to the battle between the Philistine army and the army of Israel led by Saul. The men of Israel were overmatched and fled before the Philistines, many of them falling down dead on the slopes of mount Gilboa.

It seems that the Philistines were able to zero in on Saul and his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchishua. Fighting was fierce and Saul was severely and likely mortally wounded by enemy archers.

Though we are not told so, I assume the enemy had already killed Saul's three sons before wounding Saul.

1Samuel 31:4 Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it.

1Samuel 31:5 And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him.

1Samuel 31:6 So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together.

Saul knew that the enemy would want to torture him further, so he asked his armor bearer to kill him with a thrust from his sword. The armor bearer was too afraid and refused. Saul then took his own sword and committed suicide rather than risk further torture. When the armor bearer saw that his king was dead, he also committed suicide.

Some question whether this account of Saul's death tells the whole story because of the tale recorded in the first chapter of 2Samuel told by the Amalekite that reported the death of Saul and Jonathan to David. Personally, I believe the account in this chapter of 1Samuel. I believe the young man who reported to David assumed that he would reward him if he declared that he had killed Saul since he had sought to kill David.

Saul, his three sons, his armor bearer and all his men that had not fled died that same day.

1Samuel 31:7 And when the men of Israel that *were* on the other side of the valley, and *they* that *were* on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them.

When the Israelites on the other side of the Jezreel Valley and the far side of Jordan saw that Saul's men were in retreat and that Saul and his sons were dead, they also fled. The Philistines then took possession of the vacated cities.

1Samuel 31:8 ¶ And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa.

1Samuel 31:9 And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish *it in* the house of their idols, and among the people.

1Samuel 31:10 And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.

On the next day the Philistines came to take the spoil from the dead soldiers of Israel and discovered the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. They cut off the head of the king and stripped off his armor (and that of his sons I would assume) to send throughout the land of the Philistines to announce their victory. They put King Saul's armor in the house of their false god Ashtaroth or Dagon and fastened his body (and the bodies of his sons) to the wall of Bethshan.

1Samuel 31:11 And when the inhabitants of Jabeshgilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul;

1Samuel 31:12 All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there.

1Samuel 31:13 And they took their bones, and buried *them* under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

When the men of Jabeshgilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, some of their bravest men went at night to retrieve the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Bethshan. That took them to Jabesh and burned them. They then buried their bones under a tree at Jabesh and fasted for seven days to mourn their deaths.

Again, JFB provides some insight: "Considering that Beth-shan is an hour and a half's distance, and by a narrow upland passage, to the west of the Jordan (the whole being a journey from Jabesh-gilead of about ten miles), they must have made all haste to travel thither to carry off the headless bodies and return to their own side of the Jordan in the course of a single night."

The record of this account in Chronicles closes as follows:

1 Chronicles 10:13–14 "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 enquire of it; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

What a sad end to the life of a man that began so well. I would love to be able to say with Paul:

2 Timothy 4:7–8 “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Though I certainly don't expect to have earned anywhere near as many rewards as the Apostle Paul, I do hope to have some—and I think the crown that is given to those that “love His appearing” is one for which I will qualify.