

1 Samuel 31:1–7

¹ Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

² Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons.

³ The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers.

⁴ Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it.

⁵ And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him.

⁶ So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day.

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

Lessons from Saul **1 Samuel 31**

INTRO:

Does the Bible engage your emotions when you read it? I have a hard time reading **1 Samuel 31**. In short, **1 Samuel 31** King Saul was defeated. Many Hebrews died on the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Three of Saul's sons, including Jonathan, were killed in the battle and Saul dies at his own hand. It is a depressing scene. But why did this happen? To understand, we need to review again the lessons we learn from King Saul.

I. It is Not Enough to just Start Well (1 Samuel 10-11, 1 Samuel 12)

II. Saul Needed God Even When he Didn't Think he Did (1 Samuel 13-17)

III. In The End We have to do business with our Creator. (1 Samuel 31)

I. It is Not enough to just start well (1 Samuel 10-12)

A. We begin with Yahweh calling Saul to be the first king in Israel.

1 Samuel 10:1 *“Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on [Saul’s] head, kissed him and said, “Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over His inheritance.”*”

Saul was a young man searching for donkeys and finding a kingdom. God chose Saul to be a king in Israel.

B. After the personal announcement to Saul, God then demonstrated His choice to the nation. Later in **Chapter 10**, Samuel brought the tribes of Israel together and the LORD demonstrated by the casting of lots that Saul was His choice. Saul hid himself among the baggage. He did not want to be king. Saul started out well recognizing that only with God’s help he could do the job.

C. The LORD had to push Saul into doing his job. In **1 Samuel 11**, we read how Nahash, the Amorite attack Jabesh-gilead.

1 Samuel 11:5–7 *“Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; and Saul said, ‘What troubles the people, that they weep?’ And they told him the words of the men of Jabesh. Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, ‘Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen.’ And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.”*

The LORD made sure Saul did his job by sending the Spirit of God on Saul like He came upon God’s prophets. The fear of the LORD mustered the people and they marched out and delivered Jabesh-gilead. Then they went to Gilgal and renewed the Kingdom. Saul became king for real.

D. Saul began as king very well. He was not full of himself. He openly acknowledged and followed God. But then trouble came. Lesson One Is: Starting Out Well Does Not Guarantee Finishing Well.

II. Saul needed God even When he Didn’t Think he Did (1 Samuel 13-14)

A. Over the years Saul reigned, he began to forget God and to take Him for granted. The first test which Saul failed happened the next time Philistia invaded the land. The Philistines outnumbered the Israelites and the children of Israel were afraid. Saul then panicked and put himself in Samuel’s place and offered the sacrifice. We read Samuel’s response,

1 Samuel 13:13–14 *“And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded*

you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

Saul does not seem to be at all remorseful he simply goes on with the battle and because God is gracious Israel wins. Saul thought The LORD was some kind of genie he could use when he needed Him.

B. Now we fast forward to the second and climatic moment of Saul showing his lack of fear and respect for God. In **1 Samuel 15:1**, Yahweh gave a very clear and detailed command to Saul. Kill the Amalekites. Saul amended the command by sparing Agag the king and the best of the sheep and livestock. Listen to what the Lord Himself said to Samuel about all this.

“Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, ‘I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.’”

We learned something of what was happening in Saul when we learn that Saul stopped in Carmel on his way back from the battle and set up a monument to himself there. This was Saul declaring, see what I did, not see what God did!

C. Samuel met Saul and confronted his sin.

“So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.’”

To reject the LORD as Saul did is very serious.

The second Lesson we learn from Saul is: We cannot finish well without keeping the LORD of glory the king of our lives. Half measures do not work with God.

III. In The End, We have to do business with our Creator (1 Samuel 31)

A. Now we come to this depressing account in **1 Samuel 31**. The battle has commenced and it is not going well for Israel and Saul. Israel is defeated and Saul's sons and Saul are killed.

B. Years before Saul decided he did not need the LORD. He killed the priests because of his hatred of David. We saw him alone and without God in **1 Samuel 28**. Now we find him at the moment he needed to be ready for and for which he did not prepare. He was going to meet his Creator.

C. The interesting thing is Saul's first act as king was to deliver Jabesh-Gilead. Upon hearing what the Philistines did with the bodies of Saul and his sons, the men of Jabesh-gilead, at great personal risk, travel a long way to take down Saul and his son's bodies and care for them.

1 Samuel 31:10–13 *“Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan. Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled 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. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.”*

The final lesson Saul teaches us is that we must live in relationship with the Lord of Glory every day to be prepared for the day we will go to be with Him. Are we ready to face our God when the time comes?

Have we learned these lessons?

1. Starting out well does not guarantee finishing well. We can begin recognizing everything is of grace, and then forgetting the God who saved us in our everyday life.
2. We cannot finish well without keeping the LORD of glory the king of our lives. Partial obedience is disobedience.
3. We must live in relationship with the Lord of glory every day to be prepared for the day we will go to be with Him. Are we ready to face our God when the time comes?

Hymn #372 *Living For Jesus*