

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 31:1-13

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1 Samuel 31:1-13

Verses 1-3

¹ Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. ² The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. ³ The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

- The war with the Philistines went badly for Israel. The Israeli army was routed, and the Philistines pursued Israel, killing many Israeli soldiers on Mount Gilboa.
- With the Israeli army in mass retreat, the Philistines honed in on Saul and his sons. They killed Saul's sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malki-Shua.
- They then turned their attention on King Saul. Saul was critically wounded.

Verse 4

⁴ Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

- Saul did not want to be captured alive, so he ordered his armor-bearer to kill him. But the armor-bearer was afraid. Of whom he was afraid is not clear. Perhaps he feared God. Saul was the Lord's anointed. Perhaps he was afraid of the Philistines. But because he was afraid, he would not kill Saul.
- So Saul fell on his sword and took his own life.

Verses 5-6

⁵ When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. ⁶ So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

- The armor-bearer, knowing that Israel's royal family had all died in the battle, fell on his sword and took his own life.

Verse 7

⁷When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.

- All of the Israelites in the area fled and the Philistines took control of the land.

Verses 8-10

⁸The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. ¹⁰They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

- The following day, the Philistines came to claim the plunder. They found the bodies of Saul and his sons among the dead. They cut off Saul's head and took his armor. They sent messengers to the Philistine people that the battle was won and Israel was defeated.
- They put Saul's armor on display and displayed his body, along with those of Israel's royal princes, on the wall of the city of Beth Shan.

Verses 11-13

¹¹When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. ¹³Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

- When the people of Jabesh Gilead (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11) heard that Saul's body and those of his sons were hanging in disgrace at Beth-Shan, they marched there, under the cover of darkness and brought the bodies back to Jabesh Gilead.
- They cremated the bodies and buried the remains. This was done so that the Philistines could not recapture the bodies and continue to disgrace them.

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