*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 5 - 10

The Death of Saul and Jonathan

**Monday, July 5 1 Samuel 31:1-6**

*“The death of Saul and Jonathan”*

Saul has rejected God’s authority as the true king of Israel, refusing to accept his own role as a limited ruler. His actions have manifested a character unacceptable in Israel’s king, and our journey through 1 Samuel has made this more and more apparent. Saul serves as an example for future Israelite kings about the dangers of self-reliance.

The second half of 1 Samuel has contrasted Saul and David. As David’s fortunes rose both politically and spiritually, Saul continued in a downward spiral, beginning with chapter 15 and ending here where the description of Saul’s death brings the contrast between David and Saul to a climax. Chapter 30 has just related David’s great success against the Amalekites; he rescued Ziklag and saved the lives of everyone associated with him. By contrast, Saul and those associated with him die in this losing battle with the Philistines. Saul had been commissioned as Israel’s king specifically to provide victory against the Philistines (9:16), which makes his death at their hands especially ironic and shows the measure of his failure.

*You, O God, are Lord of my life, and in all things I rely on you. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 6 1 Samuel 31:7-10**

*“The Philistines desecrate Saul’s body”*

The result of the battle at Mount Gilboa is devastating for Israel. The subsequent evacuation of the towns in the area leaves the Philistine military in control of Israelite territory. Saul’s decapitated body is fastened to the wall of Beth Shan, a major city in the area, and his armor is placed in the temple of the Philistines gods.

Philistine occupation of territory so far north of Philistia and so central to Israel marks a low point in Israel’s national history. She has become vulnerable to a complete takeover by the Philistines, and the king who was to rally the nation and protect them against their enemy is dead as are his sons, including the crown prince.

Saul’s defeat and death become occasions for proclamation of glad tidings in the temple of foreign idol gods, celebrating the apparent superiority of those gods over the God of Israel. The nation is in trouble and the name of God is being dishonored. From whence will come restoration for the nation and for the name of God?

*The forces of evil delight in mocking you, Lord, but their judgment is coming. Amen.*

**Wednesday, July 7 1 Samuel 31:11-13**

*“Saul’s remains are buried”*

Even in this dreary moment, the anointed of God cannot be left in such degrading circumstances. The residents of Jabesh Gilead never forgot how Saul rescued them from the Ammonites (chapter 11). Indeed, his triumph over Nahash the Ammonite and rescue of the citizens of Jabesh Gilead was Saul’s one shining moment, in which his role as the anointed of God was clearly manifested. Now they will repay his kindness with their loyalty.

Their actions pay homage not so much to the king of Israel as fallen hero but to the king of Israel as the anointed one of God. This is no rejection of God’s judgment on Saul but of the atrocities of the victorious Philistines in their jubilant celebration. The kindness of the citizens of Jabesh Gilead in return for his kindness toward them provides the king some dignity in his otherwise ignoble death.

*Grant me opportunity to show kindness, Lord, to those who have been kind to me. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

July 5 - 10

The Death of Saul and Jonathan

**Thursday, July 8 2 Samuel 1:1-10**

*“The report of Saul’s death”*

While Saul and the Israelite army were fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa in chapter 31 of 1 Samuel, David and his men were pursuing the Amalekites who had kidnapped their families in chapter 30. It is not until several days after having returned victoriously to Ziklag that David receives word of Israel’s defeat, and of Saul and Jonathan’s deaths.

The account of the Amalekite messenger differs significantly from what we are told in chapter 31. There we learned that Saul, in order to avoid capture and torture, fell on his own sword. Why would the messenger lie about what happened? He is seeking to win the favor of David. Having somehow acquired the royal insignia of Saul’s crown and armband (one assumes by taking them from the body before it was discovered by the Philistines), he offers them to David, the very person prepared by God to wear them. But, the messenger is not likely to arouse much support among those who have just returned to homes destroyed by Amalekites. Unaware of what some of his fellow clansmen have done, the messenger is in a bad place.

*As your Word declares, Lord, our sins will find us out. Amen.*

**Friday, July 9 2 Samuel 1:11-16**

*“David mourns Saul and kills the messenger”*

Some may expect David and his men to rejoice at the death of Saul. After all, he has been forced to flee for his life and has for months been living as an exile among the Philistines. His hopes of returning to his family are not good, much less his dreams of fulfilling his God-given mission of becoming king over Israel. It could be argued that Saul has ruined his life. Why not rejoice? But instead of rejoicing, David and his men grieve. Once again, we see that David is a man after God’s own heart.

Furthermore, his execution of the Amalekite messenger manifests an important theological point that motivates David. He has the highest reverence for the sanctity of the Israelite king, the anointed one of God. He himself passed up more than one opportunity to kill Saul. That which he refused to do out of respect for the king, this foreigner has actually done for the sake of gain, or at any rate has pretended to have done. He has confessed to a terrible crime (remember, David does not know that he is lying), a crime for which he must die.

*We do not delight in evil, Lord, but rejoice in the truth. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 10 2 Samuel 1:17-27**

*“David’s lament for Saul and Jonathan”*

Pivotal moments in Israel’s history are often marked by song. Just as Moses and Miriam sang after the crossing of the Red Sea and the women of Israel sang in celebration after Saul and David’s military victories, so this tragic moment is preserved in mournful lament. The poem explores the depths of national and personal sorrow, even as God’s will is becoming a reality for David and Israel.

David’s pain at the deaths of Saul and Jonathan comes through with singular clarity in the funeral song he composes. He addresses first the nation Israel, then the specific geographical location of the fateful battle (Mount Gilboa), and finally the “daughters of Israel.” The theme of the lament is clear from the phrase repeated three times, “How the mighty have fallen.” The unthinkable has occurred. The song of victory and celebration, “Saul has slain his thousands,” has turned into a funeral dirge of death and sorrow.

*When sorrow lies deep within us, Lord, you hear our lament. Amen.*