

DEFEAT, DEATH AND DEVOTION

INTRODUCTION

When we came to the end of chapter 29, I suggested, on the basis of my understanding of all known information, that David and his men must have been engaged in battle with the Amalekites at about the very time that Saul and the army of Israel were engaged in battle with the Philistines.

And, as I see it, this is entirely consistent with what we are told at the beginning of 2 Samuel 1 – namely, that the Amalekite messenger reached David with news of the outcome of the battle at Gilboa ‘on the third day’ after David and his men arrived back at Ziklag, 2 Sam. 1. 1-2. As I see it, the relevant data runs as follows.

At the beginning of 1 Samuel 30, David and his men had arrived back at Ziklag *from the Aphek area* ‘on the third day’, 30. 1 – that is to say, a fully armed fighting unit took between two and three days to cover a distance of about 40 miles. For the Amalekite messenger to reach Ziklag *from Gilboa*, he needed to travel a further 50-55 miles – a total of some 90-95 miles.

For his part, now David had needed to get back to Ziklag from the scene of his battle with the Amalekites. This journey would likely have taken David and his men a full day – and possibly part of a second. Remember that these 400 weary men now had large herds and flocks to drive – and to manoeuvre across the Besor. And there had clearly been some short delay at the Besor, while David sorted out ‘the spoil issue’ on behalf of the 200 men who had remained there, 30. 21-25.

As we know that the Amalekite arrived at Ziklag sometime during David’s third day there – *if* the battles with the Amalekites and the Philistines had been fought at the same time – the Amalekite would have had around four days to cover the 90-95 miles *from Gilboa to Ziklag*. It goes without saying that he would have been able to travel faster than David and his fully-armed troop – who, as we saw, took between two and three days to cover the 40 miles or so *from Aphek to Ziklag*. We also learn from 2 Samuel 1 that the Amalekite was a ‘young man’, vv. 5, 6, 13. I am satisfied therefore that all the evidence points to Saul and the men of Israel fighting the Philistines up in the north at much the same time as David and his men were fighting the Amalekites down in the south.

But what dramatic contrasts there were between these two battles – and between the narratives which describe them!

First, and most obvious, there is the difference between the length and detail of the two accounts. For obvious reasons, Saul and his men play no active part after verse 6 – the remainder of the chapter being concerned with what happened to Saul’s head, armour, and body, and to men not present on the battlefield. But David remains centre-stage throughout chapter 30 – all 31 verses. That is, the Holy Spirit devotes a very long chapter to a victory secured by a few hundred men over a marauding band of desert fighters, but only a handful of verses to a great national defeat and disaster – and to the death of the reigning monarch. And why is this?

I suspect that one of the reasons for the detailed narrative in chapter 30 is that it highlights a cluster of qualities which marked David out as an effective leader – as a man fit to be king. In that chapter, the Holy Spirit draws attention to (a) David’s sensitivity to loss and hurt, v. 4, (b) his recourse *to* God when under intense pressure and in time of tragedy and trial, v. 6, (c) his seeking direction *from* God before taking any significant decision, v. 7, (d) his making time for a someone in need, together with his consideration and kindness, vv. 11-12, (e) his courage and persistence, v. 17, (f) his keen sense of justice and equity, (g) his recognition of the contribution made by those less prominent, coupled with (h) his skill in dealing firmly yet diplomatically with discordant elements in the company, vv. 23-25, (i) his giving glory to God for all that had been achieved, v. 23, (k) his readiness to express his appreciation for what others had been and had done in the past, and, finally, to (j) his unstinting generosity, vv. 26, 31. These were qualities which indeed befitted Israel’s future king!

But when recording the death of Saul in chapter 31, the Holy Spirit has nothing to record beyond the *fact* that Saul died, and the *way* that he died – as the curtain falls abruptly on Israel’s outgoing king.

In terms of *detailed* contrasts between the two chapters, I note :

(i) If in chapter 30, as we are told twice, David recovered ‘all’, vv. 18-19, in chapter 31 we find that Saul lost all. In chapter 30, David was chiefly concerned with three matters – that of *his family*, v. 5, that of *his men*, v. 6, and that of *the spoil which he had acquired*, vv. 21-31. In chapter 31, Saul lost three leading members of *his family* (his sons), v. 3, lost ‘all *his men*’, v. 6, and lost, *as spoil to the enemy*, his armour, v. 9, his crown and his ‘bracelet’ (his ‘armlet’), 2 Sam. 1. 10.

- (ii) In chapter 30, David 'smote' the Amalekites, v. 17. In chapter 31, the Philistines 'slew' (the same word, 'smote') the royal princes of Israel, v. 2.
- (iii) In chapter 30, those Amalekites who survived the battle 'fled' from David, v. 17. In chapter 31, we are told twice that 'the men of Israel fled', vv. 1, 7 – and then that those on the other side Jordan forsook their cities and 'fled' also, v. 7.
- (iv) In chapter 30, David gave 'presents' to his 'friends' in Israel out of spoil which had come, to no small degree, initially from the Philistines, vv. 16, 20, 26. In chapter 31, David's enemies, the Philistines, took spoil from Saul and from the men of Israel, 31. 7-9.
- (v) In chapter 30, we read of the glorious victory gained by a man who was strong in God, v. 6, and who enquired of the Lord, v. 8. In chapter 31, we read of the disastrous defeat suffered by a man who was weak, both physically and spiritually, 28. 20, and who sought help from the powers of darkness. The man of chapter 30 prevailed. The man of chapter 31 perished!
- (vi) Yes, it is true that the man of chapter 31 had, in his time, roundly defeated the Amalekites much as the man of chapter 30 had done. But the man of chapter 31 had then handled the spoil taken from the Amalekites in an improper, ungodly and rebellious manner. By way of contrast, the man of chapter 30 handled the spoil taken from the Amalekites in an entirely proper, godly and generous manner. And so the man of chapter 31 must experience the practical fulfilment of the words of Samuel, '*the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand*', 28. 17, whereas the man of chapter 30 is shortly to come into the good of the fulfilment of the words of Saul, '*the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand*', 24. 20.

The content of chapter 31 is repeated, in a slightly abridged form, in 1 Chronicles 10, save that in that passage the Holy Spirit has added the reasons, from the Lord's perspective, for the death of Saul and for the transfer of the kingdom to David.

CHAPTER DIVISION

Verses 1-6	Death on Gilboa
Verses 7-10	The sequel – (a) for Israel, (b) for the Philistines and (c) for Saul and his three sons
Verses 11-13	A heroic act of gratitude

EXPOSITION

Verses 1-6 Death on Gilboa

Verse 1. '*Now the Philistines fought against Israel: and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa*'. The tension had been mounting since the opening of chapter 28, when we were first told 'that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel', 28. 1. But, as we have already noted, the text gives only a very brief account of Israel's defeat, concentrating mainly on the fate of the key members of the royal family.

It seems that the main fighting took place in the plain of Jezreel, but that, when the tide of battle went against them, the forces of Israel fell back to the steep ridges of Gilboa, where they had previously pitched, 28. 4. But there again they were badly defeated.

I understand that the Valley of Jezreel, together with the Plain of Megiddo, to which it is joined on the west, has been the scene of 'more than two hundred battles'.¹ Four of those battles are recorded in the Old Testament. Previous to this, there had been the victories (i) of Deborah and Barak over the host of Jabin and Sisera in Judges 4 and 5², and (ii) of Gideon over the vast hordes of the Midianites in Judges 6-8. Here it is the defeat of Saul at the hand of the Philistines. And, finally, four hundred years later, Josiah, the king of Judah, lost his life at Megiddo, when he rashly attempted to intercept the army of Pharaoh Necho II, which was en route to help prop up Assyrian resistance against the Babylonians, 2 Chron. 35. 20-24.³

According to scripture, it is this region which is to provide the arena for 'the battle ('war', literally) of that great day of God Almighty' spoken of in Revelation 16 – when 'the kings of the whole habitable earth' will be gathered together to the 'place called in Hebrew Armageddon', vv. 12-16 – which name, 'Armageddon' ('the Hill of Megiddo'), I think we can assume refers to the hill country surrounding Megiddo. At that time, enormous forces from the east, west (the kings allied to the Beast) and north (Gog) will converge on God's land, 'summoned by God that He might execute His fierce anger against them as a prelude to establishing His kingdom on earth'.⁴

Verse 2. '*The Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons*'. 'Followed hard' – that is, the Philistines 'clave, clung to, pursued closely'⁵ the four royal personages. Back in chapter 14, after Jonathan's courageous attack on a Philistine garrison, and the ensuing confusion and panic it caused to the Philistines in general, 'all the men of Israel which had hid themselves ... when they heard that the Philistines fled, even they also *followed hard* after them in the battle. So the Lord saved Israel that day', 14. 22. Sadly, now the tables were turned – and it was the Philistines who '*followed hard* upon Saul and upon his sons', including, of course, Jonathan. And, indeed, it was Jonathan who was the first reported casualty on Gilboa. And the good and brave man's fond hopes of living to see David become 'king over Israel' one day, 23. 17, were dashed by some Philistine weapon.

In many ways it was no doubt for the best that Jonathan died in the same battle as his father. For, although Jonathan's ambition was to be David's 'second-in-command' ('thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee', 23. 17), it is questionable whether the men of Israel would have ever allowed Jonathan – the crown prince and logical heir to the crown – to relinquish his claim to the kingship. They may well have attempted to 'make him king', just as Abner later 'made' Ish-bosheth king, 2 Sam. 2. 9 – and just as, a thousand years later, an enthusiastic multitude would have taken the Lord Jesus 'by force, to make him a king', John 6. 15. No doubt it was also providential that Jonathan's two brothers died with him, for his brothers may not have been as ready as Jonathan to yield their claims to rule over Israel. It is probably significant that the previous night at Endor, in the context of reminding Saul that the Lord had rent the kingdom from him to give it to his 'neighbour', David, 28. 17, Samuel had forewarned Saul that his sons were to die with him, 28. 19. In the death of Saul and his three sons on Gilboa, the Lord was clearing the way for David to become king over a united Israel.

Saul had another son, Ish-bosheth – also named 'Esh-Ba'al', 1 Chron. 8. 33; 9. 39, who features prominently through 2 Samuel 2 to 4, having been appointed by Abner as a rival king to David. Scripture doesn't tell us why it was that both Ish-bosheth and Abner survived the defeat at Gilboa – whether they *escaped out* of the battle, or managed somehow to *avoid* it altogether.⁶ It certainly seems strange that Abner in particular, who was not only Saul's cousin but commander of Saul's army, 14. 50; 17. 55; 26. 5, should have been absent at such a critical time. From the way in which Ish-bosheth is consistently mentioned last in the listings of Saul's four sons in 1 Chron. 8 and 9,⁷ it is likely that he was Saul's youngest son. By this, I do *not* mean that Ish-bosheth was young in years. He wasn't. According to 2 Samuel 2 he was about 40 years old at the time; 'Abner ...took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and ... made him king ... Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David' 2 Sam. 2. 8-10. What I am saying is that the evidence points to him being the youngest of Saul's four sons.

We know that, the night before the battle, Samuel had informed Saul that on the coming day both he and his sons would join him, Samuel, in the realm of the dead, 28. 19. And I therefore think it possible that, even if he hadn't done so before, Saul himself charged Abner with Ish-bosheth's safe conduct and ordered him to keep him away from the field of battle. But in the end I don't know – scripture is silent on the matter.

Indeed, Saul had fathered two more sons. 2 Samuel 21 speaks of 'the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth (not to be confused, of course, with the son of Jonathan)', v. 8. But it seems that, because Rizpah was only Saul's 'concubine', 2 Sam. 2. 7; 21. 11, in contrast to his 'wife' – 'Ahinoam, the daughter of Ahimaaz', 1 Sam. 14. 49 – her sons were not ranked with Saul's other sons.⁸ We know that Rizpah's sons also survived the battle with the Philistines because it was much later that they were killed and publicly impaled, to make amends for the guilt and blood-guiltiness brought on Israel by Saul's slaughter of some of the Gibeonites, 2 Sam. 21. 1-9.⁹

Verse 3. *'The battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore ('exceedingly') wounded of the archers'*. Saul was taller than any others 'from his shoulders and upward', 9. 2; 10. 23, and doubtless his arms were considerably longer than average. It may well be that the Philistines therefore learned to keep their distance both from his sword – which, in David's eulogy in 2 Samuel 1, he spoke of as not returning 'empty', 2 Sam. 1. 22 – and from his spear. It is stressed (by the double use of the word) that it was the Philistine 'archers' who 'exceedingly wounded' him – the root meaning of the word translated 'wounded' being to twist or writhe in pain.¹⁰

Curiously, king Josiah, to whom I referred a little earlier, was mortally wounded, not only in a battle which took place in roughly the same area as the battle in which Saul was mortally wounded, but in very similar circumstances. For 2 Chronicles 35 tells us that, when Josiah 'came to fight in the valley of Megiddo, the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore ('exceedingly') wounded', 2 Chron. 35. 22-23.

Verse 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'*. Interestingly, the last king to reign in either Israel or Judah in the Old Testament feared exactly what the first king of Israel feared, namely being 'abused' – mocked and made sport of – by his enemies; 'Zedekiah the king said unto Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews that are fallen to the Chaldeans, lest they (the Babylonians) deliver me into their hand, and they (the Jews who had defected) mock ('abuse') me', Jer. 38. 19.

Clearly, Saul wasn't afraid that the Philistines would treat him as they once had treated Samson – putting out his eyes, binding him in fetters of bronze, making him to grind in the prison house and bringing him out on festive occasions 'that he may make us sport', Judg. 16. 21-25. Saul knew that he wasn't going to live long enough for that. He feared rather that the Philistines would 'abuse' him while 'thrusting him through'.

It is, I have to say, a great pity that Saul hadn't been as jealous for the honour of God during his life as he was for his own honour in the hour of his death!

And so Saul wished to die in the same way that Abimelech, a son of Gideon and the first man to be made a 'king' in Israel, Judg. 9. 6, had died. We read in Judges 9 that, when 'a certain woman dropped an upper millstone on Abimelech's head and crushed his skull ... he called quickly to ... his armourbearer, and said to him, "Draw your sword and kill me, lest men say of me, 'A woman killed him'", v. 54 NKJV.¹¹

'But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid'. Saul's armourbearer didn't prove as obliging as had Abimelech's! We are not actually told what the armourbearer feared, but it seems to me that this brave and loyal soldier, who showed himself afraid neither of the heat of battle nor of death itself, feared to take Saul's life, not because he feared any natural consequences of such action, but because the king was what he was.

David himself had been Saul's 'armourbearer' once – before it had been necessary for him to flee from Saul's court, 16. 21. And now *this* armourbearer refused to kill Saul, just as David had several times refused when he had opportunity – and, I suspect, for exactly the same reason – that he would not put forth his hand against 'the Lord's

anointed'. And, in support of this view, I refer to David's words to the Amalekite in 2 Samuel 1, 'How wast thou not afraid (the same word) to stretch forth thine hand to destroy *the Lord's anointed?*', v. 14.

'Therefore Saul took a (the) sword, and fell upon it'. I think it true to say that most readers assume that Saul killed himself by falling on his own sword. And, indeed, several translations, including both the ESV and the NIV, actually render our verse, 'Saul took *his own* sword and fell (up)on it' – as they do the parallel account in 1 Chron. 10. 4. But that rendering is in fact *an interpretation* and *not a literal translation*. The words 'his own' are found in neither the Hebrew nor Greek texts of either passage. Both passages speak only of *'the'* sword. The literal translation of 1 Chronicles 10. 4-5 reads, 'his armourbearer would not; for he was very afraid. And Saul took *the sword*, and fell upon it. And his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, and he *also fell on the sword*, and died' (emphasis mine). It is at least *possible*, therefore, that both Saul and his armourbearer fell on the same sword – namely, the armourbearer's sword.

That is, it is possible that, although the armourbearer would not himself slay the Lord's anointed – because he could see that Saul was mortally wounded, and because his king, not unreasonably, sought to avoid the abuse of the Philistines – the armourbearer let Saul take *his* sword and fall on it, and then, extracting the sword from Saul's body, fell on it himself. Certainly such an interpretation is consistent with the Hebrew and Greek texts of the only two accounts we have of the event. But I readily admit that, if Saul 'took' the armourbearer's sword, I have no suggestion to offer about what had happened to Saul's *own* sword – which I think we can take for granted that Saul had with him in the battle – and which David, in his eulogy in 2 Samuel 1, certainly believed he had with him, v. 22.

I have an open mind on the issue – and it is hardly an important matter.¹² I mention it mainly to draw attention to how easy it is to simply assume things and to read them into the text.

What is important is that, with all Saul's horror of being abused by the heathen, he chose to die like a heathen – by taking his own life. And the man who would once have stooped to killing *David* with his own hand, when – as he then saw it – David lay a helpless and bedridden invalid, 19. 15, now stoops to kill *himself* with his own hand.

Saul's death at his own hand, if not his own *sword*, links him with three other cases of suicide recorded in scripture, as well, of course, with the suicide of his armourbearer : namely the suicides of Ahithophel, 2 Sam. 17. 23, Zimri (who reigned over the northern kingdom of Israel for all of seven days), 1 Kings 16. 18, and Judas Iscariot, Matt. 27. 5. The cases of Ahithophel and Judas were undoubtedly the more sinful, in that there was no hope of survival for either Saul¹³ or Zimri, both of whom who simply accelerated the actual moment of death by a few hours at the very most. But nonetheless, as I see it, the actions of Saul and Zimri still constituted a serious offence against the principle of the sacredness of human life – man having been made in the image of God. Only God can give life, and only God had the right to take it.¹⁴

Verse 5. *'When his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him'*. This was the man's final act of loyalty – and earned him honourable mention in verse 6 alongside Saul, his three sons and 'all his men'.

Verse 6. *'So Saul died, and his three sons'*. The Lord had determined back in chapter 13 that *Saul's dynasty* would come to an end, and further, in chapter 15, that *Saul himself* would lose his kingdom. On both occasions, God's judgement fell in consequence of Saul's disobedience *in the context of military battles*.¹⁵ In many ways, it was fitting therefore that Saul and his sons – in effect his dynasty – should perish in a military battle.

'And all his men'. Evidently not meaning the same as 'the men of Israel' of verses 1 and 7, because 'the men of Israel' – the main army – *fled*, whereas 'all Saul's men' *died*. 'All his men' is a reference rather to Saul's personal bodyguard and attendants.¹⁶

'So Saul died'. Many *men* feature in the accounts of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1 :

- (i) First, there were the men who *wanted to take* Saul's life, but, *in the event, didn't* – namely, the Philistines of verses 1-3.¹⁷
- (ii) Then, there was the man who *claimed to have taken* Saul's life, but, *in truth, hadn't* – namely, the Amalakite of 2 Samuel 1. 2-16.
- (iii) Then, there was the man who *was told to take* Saul's life, but, *in fear, wouldn't* – namely, Saul's armourbearer of 1 Samuel 31. 4-5.
- (iv) Then, there was the man who *did take* Saul's life, but, *in God's reckoning, shouldn't* – namely, Saul himself.

And yet there was Another, altogether unseen but very much present, on Mount Gilboa that day. I said that it was Saul himself who took his life, and, on the natural level, yes, he did take his life. But, ultimately, working behind the stage of history, was the Lord Himself. And, in the final analysis, it was not the Philistines, not the Amalekite, not Saul's armourbearer, not even Saul himself – but the Lord who was responsible for Saul's death.

1 Chronicles 10 verse 14 states boldly and unambiguously that it was the Lord who 'slew him!' Back in chapter 25, we were told that it was the Lord who 'smote Nabal that he died', v. 38. And equally now, though arrows from Philistine bows and a sword in Saul's hand were the instruments God used, it was the Lord who killed Saul.¹⁸

And the verses at the close of 1 Chronicles 10 state, separately, (a) the *reasons* the Lord had for slaying Saul, and, (b) the Lord's *purpose* in slaying him.

(a) We are told that God had *two reasons* for putting Saul to death, 1 Chron. 10. 13-14a. First, there was Saul's 'transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not' – in all probability referring to *both* the incidents recorded in chapters 13 and 15, when Saul flagrantly violated God's word through Samuel.¹⁹ And, second, there was Saul's consulting the medium in chapter 28 and his not sincerely seeking counsel of the Lord.

(b) And then we are told that the Lord's *purpose* in removing Saul by death was that He, the Lord, might turn the kingdom over to David, 1 Chron. 10. 14b.

As I see it, in detailing the Lord's *reasons* for executing Saul, the Holy Spirit was emphasising that God's action was in no sense arbitrary and that He was, and is, a God of righteousness and justice. And, in stating the Lord's *purpose* for executing Saul, the Holy Spirit was emphasising that David became king over Israel, not as a result of his own scheming or carnal ambition, nor because of any historical accident, but rather on account of direct divine intervention – in other words, that David was God's chosen king.²⁰

Verses 7-10 The sequel – (a) for Israel, (b) for the Philistines and (c) for Saul and his three sons

Verse 7. *'When the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley'*. That is, the people of Israel to the north of Mount Gilboa and across the intervening Valley of Jezreel – particularly the northern tribes of Issachar, Zebulun and Naphtali in the region of Galilee.

'And they that were on the other side Jordan'. That is, the area occupied by the eastern half tribe of Manasseh.

'They forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them'. The decisive victory at Jezreel made the Philistines absolute masters of northern Palestine. And so Israel's defeat had not only reduced the size of Israel's army; it had also significantly reduced the size of Israel!²¹ But there is no evidence that the Philistines made any land conquests south of the Valley of Jezreel – so that the southern tribal territories, including West Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah, remained free from Philistine occupation.

It was when the northern and eastern tribes learned of Saul's defeat that they forsook their cities and 'fled' – and with good cause. According to 2 Samuel 4, it was when the nurse of Jonathan's five-year old son Mephibosheth heard of the death of Saul and Jonathan at Jezreel that she also 'fled', and it was then, when she 'made haste' to get away, that Mephibosheth fell and became lame, 2 Sam. 4. 4. But I suspect that the nurse fled – not so much for fear of the Philistines, who were far up in the north whereas she no doubt dwelt in the tribal area of Benjamin in the south – but for fear that David would return and attempt to slay Mephibosheth as one of the displaced family and regime. In either case, her fears were groundless. As I said, the Philistines didn't penetrate into southern Israel, and, as far as David was concerned, he later showed only kindness to Mephibosheth 'for Jonathan's sake', 2 Sam. 9. 1-13, and, indeed, because of 'the Lord's oath' between him and Jonathan, was careful to shelter Mephibosheth from death at the hand of the Gibeonites in 2 Samuel 21, following the plague which came on Israel as a result of Saul's earlier slaughter of some of their number, 2 Sam. 21. 7.

Verse 8. *'When the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa'*. Naturally, the Philistines took full advantage of their victory and immediately ('on the morrow') scoured the battlefield for any weapons or plunder to be found.

On a later occasion²², thanks to the heroic stand taken by one of David's mighty men against the Philistines, Israel was able to repay the Philistines for these indignities – 'Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle ... arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the Lord wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil', 2 Sam. 23. 9-10.

Verses 9-10. The Philistines removed the head and armour of Saul – for, though his crown and royal armlet had already been taken, 2 Sam. 1. 10, Saul would have been easily recognizable, partly no doubt because of his face, partly because of his stature, in that he towered over any other man in Israel, and partly from some distinctive features of his armour and weaponry – such as his spear, which had always served as a symbol of his kingship. The Philistines then put the head of Saul and the bodies of Saul and his sons to use, making them the main focus of a huge and gory public-relations exercise.

First, they gave the ultimate insult to Saul. Throughout the Ancient Near East, for a dead body to be dismembered and denied a proper burial was considered a fate worse than death itself. It is bad enough for someone to die as 'a loser', but for someone not to be buried was an even greater disgrace – and was believed by some to jeopardise even his or her afterlife. And, second, the Philistines took the opportunity afforded by Saul's death to glorify their own gods.

'They cut off his head'. The head (in effect, the skull) of a conquered king was a highly treasured prize, and often exhibited as a means of boasting of the victor's triumph. I have read that the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal dined with his queen in the garden with the head of the king of Elam on display in a nearby tree.

In this case, the severing of Saul's head may also have been in retaliation for the similar treatment dealt to Goliath's head back at the end of chapter 17. There is a certain irony in that, on that occasion, the head of the slain Philistine champion was *brought* to Saul for him to see, 17. 54, while on this occasion it was Saul's head which was *taken* from him by the Philistines.

We learn from 1 Chronicles 10 that Saul's head was taken by the Philistines and 'fastened ... in the temple of Dagon', v. 10 – almost certainly the temple of Dagon at Ashdod, mentioned back in chapter 5 in connection with the captured ark of God, v. 3.

'Stripped off his armour', v. 9, *'and they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroah'*, v. 10. The word translated 'armour' includes, not only a warrior's protective and defensive clothing,²³ but his weapons.²⁴

Saul's armour and weapons were taken and treated as war trophies, and, in similar fashion to both the ark of God and the sword of Goliath earlier in 1 Samuel, were put on display in a central sanctuary – the ark of the covenant having been taken to the house of Dagon at Ashdod, 5. 2, and the sword of Goliath to Jehovah's shrine at Nob, 21. 9.²⁵ In this way, the Philistines attributed the honour for their victory jointly to their god Dagon and to their goddess Ashtaroah, who, significantly, was believed to be, not only the goddess of fertility, but the goddess of war.²⁶

It is not said whether 'the house (that is, the temple) of Ashtaroah' where Saul's armour and weapons were taken was located in Beth-shan, where Saul's body was fastened, or in one of the cities back in the land of the Philistines.

I incline towards the latter – for two main reasons. First, the head of Saul was taken to the temple of Dagon which, as I have said, was probably located at Ashdod. And it seems likely to me that, if Saul's armour and weapons were placed in a temple, as had been his head, that temple would also have been located in one of the principal cities in the land of the Philistines.²⁷

My second reason for suggesting that the house of Ashtaroth was in Philistia is the identity of Ashtaroth. Ashtaroth was the goddess of the Sidonians,²⁸ one of the leading female deities of Canaan.²⁹ And Herodotus, the Greek historian, referred to a famous temple to this deity at Ashkelon: 'I have inquired and find that the temple at Ashkelon is the most ancient of all the temples to this goddess; for the one in Cyprus, as the Cyprians themselves admit, was built in imitation of it'.³⁰ The depositing of Saul's armour and weapons in Ashtaroth's temple at Ashkelon might also explain, at least in part, David's special mention of that city in his eulogy in praise of Saul and Jonathan in 2 Samuel 1. Speaking of their death, David exclaimed, 'publish it not in the streets of Askelon', 2 Sam. 1. 20. I note also, but am doubtful about putting much weight on it, that the Septuagint renders this part of the verse, 'they stripped off his equipment, and sent it into the land of the Philistines' (emphasis mine).

'Sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people', v. 10. I see no evidence that the Philistines sent Saul's head, armour and weapons on some circular tour around their temples and other public places. The text says only that they sent word – through messengers, that is – to 'publish' – to make known the good news – both in their idol-temples and more widely. The word translated 'to publish' can signify 'to preach the gospel', and is in fact the word of Isa. 40. 9, 'O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength'. I note with amusement that the Septuagint translates the expression, 'sending around glad tidings to their idols and their people' – affirming that the Philistine idols themselves had to be informed of all that had transpired! Some gods these! And, even then, the messengers would have been wasting their breath, for, as both Psalm 115. 6 and Psalm 135. 17 say of the idols of the heathen, 'They have ears, but they hear not! How thankful we ought to be that we have a God of whom it can be said, 'if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us', 1 John 5. 14.

It is sad that a book – 1 Samuel – which more or less opened with scenes in 'the temple of the Lord', 1. 9, should more or less close with scenes in the temples of the gods of the Philistines – not that there had ever been any doubt how the Philistine media would handle the outcome of the battle at Gilboa. When David heard of what had befallen Saul and Israel there, he didn't find it difficult to imagine the Philistine news headlines and the jubilation of 'the daughters of the uncircumcised', 2 Sam. 1. 20.

Alas that Saul's disobedience and consequential defeat and death gave ample grounds for the enemies of the Lord to discredit and dishonour God's holy name. Worse by far, even than Israel's downfall, was Jehovah's disgrace. ! And yet again we learn that, alas, our spiritual defeats and failures can likewise cause God's name to be blasphemed among the heathen.

'And they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan', v. 10. Beth-shan was an important fortress city only a few miles from the battle area. Because it occupied a commanding position in the Jezreel Valley, being situated on a very tall mound, from the Philistine's standpoint it provided the ideal place to display Saul's dismembered body and the bodies of his three sons.

We are told in 2 Samuel 21 that, 'David ... took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the street of Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hanged them', v. 12 – where the word translated 'street' really means 'a broad open place, a plaza', probably signifying the public square near the gate of Beth-shan.³¹ In all likelihood therefore it was on some prominent wall in Beth-shan's city square that the bodies of Saul and his sons were impaled.

[O/H – Parallels 1 Sam. 4 and 11]

Before leaving the narrative of Saul's death and humiliation we ought perhaps notice some of the fascinating parallels between the record of Israel's battle with the Philistines here in chapter 31 and that of Israel's battle with the Philistines recorded in chapter 4.³² I note briefly:

(i) That these are *the first and last battles* recorded in 1 Samuel, and that in both cases *Israel suffered a humiliating defeat* at the hand of the Philistines.

(ii) That *the city of Aphek* played a strategic role in both battles, 4. 1; 29. 1.

(iii) That two leaders, Eli the judge and Saul the king, died as a result of the battles with the Philistines. According to chapter 4, Eli 'judged Israel for *forty years*', 4. 18, and, according to Paul in his address to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13, Saul reigned 'by the space of *forty years*', Acts 13. 21.

(iv) That Eli died when he '*fell off the seat*', 4. 18 literally, and that Saul died when he '*fell*' (the same word) on '*the sword*', 31. 4 literally.

(v) That Eli died *a little later the same day as his sons*, Hophni and Phinehas, 4. 11, 18, and that Saul died *a little later the same day as his sons*, Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua, 31. 2-4.

(vi) That *the outcome of the battles was conveyed in an almost identical manner*. In chapter 4 we read, 'And there ran a man of Benjamin *out of the army*' ('the battle-line'), and came to Shiloh ... *with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head*. ... And the man said unto Eli, ... *I fled to day out of the army*', 1 Sam. 4. 12-16a. In 2 Samuel 1 we read, 'a man came *out of the camp* from Saul *with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head*', and said to David, '*Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped*', 2 Sam. 1. 2-3.

(vii) That *exactly the same question was asked* of the messenger in each case; namely, '*How was the matter?*', 4. 16; 2 Sam. 1. 4 literally ... and that *the answers were roughly the same* – in chapter 4, 'the messenger answered and said, Israel is *fled* before the Philistines, and there hath been also *a great slaughter among the people, and thy*

two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead also', 4.17 – in 2 Samuel 1, 'he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also', 2 Sam. 1. 4. In both instances, the answer followed *the same order – of ascending importance to the hearer* – that the people in general had fled, that many of the army had been killed, and that, in particular, two specially dear persons were dead.

(viii) That both defeats were *not only national disasters but personal and family disasters*. For, although *Eli's priestly descent continued for a time* (through Ahitub, Ahimelech and Abiathar, 14. 3; 22. 9, 19-20), it was terminated (by Solomon, 1 Kings 2. 26-27) – *in accordance with the express word of the Lord through His prophet*. Similarly, although *Saul's kingly descent also continued for a time* (through Ish-bosheth, 2 Sam. 2-4), it was also terminated (2 Sam. 4. 6) – *in accordance with the express word of the Lord through his prophet*. In the case of *Eli*, God's prophet had announced in God's name, 'I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me ... Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house ... and I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart', 1 Sam. 2. 30-31, 35. In the case of *Saul*, God's prophet had announced, 'the Lord would have established thy kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people', 13. 13-14.

(ix) That a trophy of the Philistine victory was deposited on each occasion in the house of Dagon, 5. 2; 1 Chron. 10. 10.

(x) That, in the first case, *God's man, Samuel, went on later to retrieve the situation and to defeat the Philistines*. 'So the Philistines were subdued', we read, 'and the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel', 7. 10-14. In similar manner, in the second case, *God's man, David, went on later to retrieve the situation and to defeat the Philistines* also. 'David smote the Philistines, and subdued them', we read, 'and David took *Methegammah* (perhaps, 'the authority/control of the mother-city'³³) out of the hand of the Philistines', 2 Sam. 8. 1. In so many ways therefore the death of Saul and his sons in chapter 31 is reminiscent of the death of Eli and his sons back in chapter 4. I take it that the Holy Spirit has established these connections to draw our attention to the way in which disobedience to God and the dishonouring of God led, not only to death, but ultimately to the termination, in Eli's case, of his priestly line, and, in Saul's case, to the termination of his dynasty. Make no mistake – the price of disobedience and dishonouring the Lord is high!

It seems that the Philistines thought that the death of Saul had brought to an end their problems with Israel, for we read of no further action on their part against Israel until they realized that, having been anointed *king over a united nation*, David posed a real threat to them, 2 Sam. 5. 17-18. In one sense, therefore, the death of Saul and his sons bought David the time he needed to establish himself and to marshal a military force capable of facing up to the Philistines and indeed of subduing them, 2 Sam. 5. 25; 8. 1. Such are the ways of God!

Verses 11-13 A heroic act of gratitude

Verse 11. 'When the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul'. The last paragraph of the chapter makes a fitting end to the scriptural account of Saul's rule. His first action as anointed king – in one sense, his finest hour – had been to save the men of Jabesh-gilead from the humiliation of having their right eyes gouged out by the Ammonites, 11. 1-11.³⁴ Now, it is the men of Jabesh-gilead who saved Saul from the humiliation of having his body hung up for public display by the Philistines. Their action was therefore, in a sense, a payment of a debt.

To the inhabitants of Jabesh, Saul had always been a hero – and the idea that his headless corpse was left to swing in the wind on some wall of a pagan city was simply more than flesh and blood could stand. And so, just as some 40 years before Saul had led the men of Israel on a night-march to rescue the men of Jabesh, 11. 8-11, now the men of Jabesh undertook a night-march to rescue his body.

The exploit of the men of Jabesh was marked by several praiseworthy features:

(i) It was *altogether unexpected*. For who would have thought that a city which had once proved so cowardly and spineless as to say to a pagan aggressor, 'Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee', 11. 1,³⁵ could have produced such outstanding courage and devotion?

(ii) It was *anchored in an event long past*. For it had been 40 years since Saul had delivered them in their hour of great need. But their sense of gratitude had not – as, alas, so often happens – waned with the passage of time.

(iii) It was *spontaneous*. For no-one had made any special appeal to them to do what they did – unlike the time when they had broadcast their plea for help to which Saul had so readily responded. Actions and words of gratitude which need to be prompted and induced cannot be said to spring out of genuine gratitude.

(iv) It was *entirely unselfish*. For they knew that Saul and his sons were dead, and, as far as they knew, they were therefore unlikely to receive either praise or reward for their efforts. They had no way of knowing, of course, that David would respond as he did – sending messengers to them to say, 'Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth (faithfulness) unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing', 2 Sam. 2. 5.³⁶ Indeed, for all they knew, whoever took the crown might even have resented their action.

(v) It was *arduous and dangerous in the extreme*. From Jabesh to Beth-shan and back involved them in a round-trip of over 20 miles, and, once at the Philistine-held city, they then needed to remove four bodies from a wall in some open, public place and to return with them. Given the Philistine domination of the whole area, the risks they took were enormous.

I have no doubt that, by making mention of Jabesh-gilead here, the Holy Spirit intends to link this closing passage of 1 Samuel with the narrative in chapter 11.

At the outset, the Lord had given Saul to the people in response to their demands. 'Thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel', He had said to Samuel at the time, 'that he may *save my people out of the hand of the Philistines*: for I have looked upon my people, *because their cry is come unto me*', 9. 16. But Saul had failed abysmally. And now, *at the end*, far from finishing his allotted task – to 'save' God's people from the Philistines – he couldn't even save himself from them! Far from delivering Israel from the hands of the Philistines, he effectively delivered large tracts of Israel's territory into their hands, 31. 7 – no doubt causing the people to cry out to the Lord again!

And, if Saul's first military action, arriving as he did in the nick of time³⁷ to rescue the terrified men of Jabesh, reminds us of the proverbial 7th cavalry racing to the rescue of those who were outnumbered and endangered, I guess that his last military action is likely rather to remind us of 'Custer's Last Stand'³⁸

If Saul's first battle marked a glorious beginning to his reign, at which point 'the men of Israel rejoiced greatly', 11. 15, sadly, his last battle marked a shameful end to that reign, at which point 'the men of Israel fled', 31. 1.

And the man who had begun so well – so full of promise and potential – finished so very badly. The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders of his ambition, 'that I might *finish my course* with joy', Acts 20. 24. Is that *my* ambition? Lord, help me to finish well!

Verse 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 Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh*'. These men sure had stamina and courage, for Jabesh-gilead was about ten miles southeast of Beth-shan – and, as we noted earlier, their round journey required them to cover over twenty miles, much of it in enemy territory.

'*And burnt them there*'. This was *not* a cremation, for only the rotting skin and flesh was burned away – the bones themselves weren't consumed by the fire.³⁹

Verse 13. '*They took their bones, and buried them under a tree* ('the tamarisk tree', literally) *at Jabesh, and fasted seven days*'. The men of Jabesh gave the bodies of Saul and his sons as honourable a burial as they were able.⁴⁰

That they buried them under a tree may have had some significance in the case of Saul. For we read of more than one occasion in his life when Saul spent considerable time under a tree; 'Saul tarried in the uttermost part of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree', 14. 2, and 'Saul abode in Gibeah under a ('tamerisk') tree in Ramah', 22. 6. It is always possible that Saul had been fond of trees, and that the men of Jabesh knew of – and respected – this. But, in any case, it was fitting that Saul's bones should be laid to rest, initially at least, under a tree in the very town which was the scene of his first great military victory. I say 'initially' because David later had the bones dug up and laid to rest in the family burying-place at Zelah, 2 Sam. 21. 12-14.

The courageous action of the men of Jabesh spared Saul's body any further shame. I like to compare with this the courageous action of Joseph of Arimathæa, which God used to spare 'the body of Jesus' the shame of being disposed of as the bodies of the two malefactors who had been crucified with Him. In his gospel, Mark tells us that, 'Joseph of Arimathæa, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly ('took courage and went') unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus', Mark 15. 43.

The Lord Jesus had experienced the hatred and hostility of men throughout the later years of His life on earth. This hatred continued unabated *after* His death, and expressed itself in the intended manner of disposal for His body. Among the Jews, an important feature of any shameful punishment was the denial of an honourable burial. Josephus summed it up well, 'He that blasphemes God, let him be stoned; and let him hang upon a tree all that day; and then let him be buried in an ignominious and obscure manner'.⁴¹ The Jews therefore intended that the body of Jesus should be treated as the bodies of the two malefactors – by being thrown into the city rubbish dump. As Isaiah had written long before, 'They made his grave with the wicked'. But it was not to be – for God had other plans! And, in the event, the Saviour was 'with a rich (man) in his death', Isa. 53. 9 literally. For, according to John 19, although the Jews '*besought Pilate*' that Jesus '*might be taken away*' with the two criminals, 'Joseph of Arimathæa ... *besought Pilate* that he *might take away* the body of Jesus', John 19. 31, 38. Joseph was given the necessary permission, and our Lord was therefore buried, as Matthew tells us, in Joseph's 'own new tomb', Matt. 27. 60. And, as Matthew noted, Joseph was 'a rich man', Matt. 27. 57. God watched carefully over His Son's dead body, and, from the moment that the death of Jesus was confirmed by a thrust from a Roman spear, He allowed men to inflict no further mark of shame and humiliation. The very last enemy permitted to lay hands on Jesus was death! In His birth, He *had* been with the poor, but in His death, He was 'with the rich'!⁴²

Pick up the lessons :

Verses 1-7. We learnt from Saul's death and disgrace something of the high price and seriousness of disobedience.⁴³ We saw also that the fall of a man in a prominent position usually leads to disastrous consequences for others – often for his own family and for the people of God more generally. I should live my days with an eye to the effects which my actions might have on others – for good or ill.

Verses 9-10. We saw that Saul's disobedience, defeat and death gave grounds for the enemies of the Lord to discredit and disgrace the Lord's holy name. And yet again we learn that *our* spiritual defeats and failures can likewise cause God's name to be blasphemed among unbelievers.

We noted that, though the heathen have idols which, while having ears, hear not, we have a God who can and does hear us when we call upon Him. We are therefore able to address Him with confidence, in the words of David, as 'Thou that hearest prayer', Psa. 65. 2.

I suggested that the death of Saul and his sons bought David the time he needed to establish a military force capable of subduing the Philistines. Israel may have been defeated and Saul may have failed to fulfil his allotted task, but God was still God! Let us remember that today also – in all situations, whether of physical persecution, the indifference of the world around us, our own failures as God's people, or whatever – God is still God!

Verses 11-13. From the daring exploit of the men of Jabesh, we learn that we should always be ready, as occasion arises, to show our gratitude to all and any who have done something for us – even if this was sometime in the past.⁴⁴

And then we observed, with sadness, that the man who had begun so well – so full of promise and potential – finished so very badly. Here is a pointed lesson and warning for everyone one of us. Lord, help me to finish well!

End-notes

¹ John MacArthur on Rev. 16. 18 in '*Revelation 12-22 : The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*'.

² The River Kishon, Judg. 5. 21, runs through the Plain of Megiddo almost to Jezreel.

³ The many other important battles fought in the region range from that of Tuthmosis III of Egypt in 1468 BC to that of Lord Allenby in 1917.

⁴ The quotation comes from a series of three articles which I wrote for the Precious Seed magazine under the title, 'The Coming of the Son of Man', and which appeared in Volume 55, numbers 2-4, over the period June to November 2000. The following is an extract from the same series:

'Three distinct controlling factors account for the gathering of the various nations to the land of Israel. At the human level, the nations will be motivated by the desire for power and world domination. At the spirit level, they will be lured by the Satanic trinity, with the dragon's ultimate purpose of employing them in war against the Lamb, Rev.16. 13-14; 17. 14; 19. 19. At the *divine* level, they will be summoned by God that He might execute His fierce anger against them as a prelude to establishing His kingdom on earth, Joel 3. 9-14; Zeph. 3. 8; 2 Thess. 1. 7-9; Rev.16. 16 (note "He" not "they"). The forces of evil (both human and spirit) operate within the constraints of His will; cf. Rev.17.17'.

⁵ NIDOTTE number 1815, vol. 1, pages 910-912. Out of interest, see the use of the word in Judg. 20. 45, where it refers to *the men of Benjamin* being 'pursued closely' and many of them being slain – though there by the other tribes of Israel.

⁶ I assume that 'Abinadab' was another name for the 'Ishui' who is listed among Saul's sons in 14. 49; cf. 1 Chron. 8. 33; 9. 39.

⁷ See 1 Chron. 8. 33; 9. 39.

⁸ It seems that Saul actually had several 'wives', 2 Sam. 12. 8.

⁹ A helpful chart showing the key members of the house of Saul is in given in 'Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps and Charts, Revised'.

¹⁰ NIDOTTE, number 2655, volume 2, page 116. The word sometimes signifies 'afraid, terrified' – see 'tremble' in Psa. 97, 4; 114. 7; Jer. 5. 22; Hab. 3. 10 – or 'grieved, distressed' – see, for example, Jer. 5. 3. See also NIDOTTE, number 2659, volume 2, pages 126-127, and TWOT, number 623, volume 1, pages 270-271, which latter suggests the rendering 'harassed' in 1 Sam. 31. 3. The Septuagint gives 'he was wounded under the ribs' – that is, in the abdomen.

¹¹ In fact, Saul had more than one thing in common with Abimelech – for Abimelech also had been the object of an evil spirit from the Lord, Judg. 9. 23; 1 Sam. 16. 14.

¹² If Saul did fall on his own sword, it may well have been the sword mentioned in 13. 22, 'it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither *sword* nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found'.

¹³ See End-note 14 below.

¹⁴ We need to distinguish carefully between (a) *taking* one's life and (b) *giving* one's life – laying it down – for the sake of others, John 15. 13. As examples of the latter, we might think: (i) of the truck driver, at the wheel of a large vehicle out of control, who deliberately drives off a bridge in order to avoid hitting a party of children crossing the road ahead, (ii) of a soldier captured in war, who takes a poison capsule in order to escape torture because he possesses military secrets which, if extracted from him by the enemy, would lead to the death of many hundreds of his comrades, or (iii) of Captain Lawrence Oates with his frostbitten feet, who knew he was a liability to Scott's Antarctic expedition on their homeward journey. On March 17th 1912, his 32nd birthday, Captain Oates quietly said to Scott, 'I'm just going outside, and may be some time'. Most people receive gifts on their birthdays; Lawrence Oates gave his companions the only thing he had to give – his life. And then there is, of course, the *supreme* Example – that of the Lord Jesus Himself.

See the thought-provoking article by J. P. Moreland, '*The Morality of Suicide: Issues and Options*' in *Bibliotheca Sacra*—V148 #590—Apr 91—214. And, for a helpful article about cases of suicide among Christians, see chapter 5 of the booklet '*Is There an Answer?*' by Frederick Tatford, Everyday Publications 1983.

¹⁵ See 13. 5-14; 15. 4-31.

¹⁶ Called 'all of his house' in 1 Chron. 10. 6.

¹⁷ In one sense, of course, the Philistines were responsible for Saul's death – in that their archers had mortally wounded him, 31. 3. For this reason, 2 Sam. 21. 12 records that 'the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa'.

¹⁸ Personally, I do not think that Hosea 13. 11 refers to Saul; 'I gave thee a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath'. The verbs are in the imperfect tense, and therefore signify, 'I have been giving you a king and I have been taking him away'. In context, the reference seems to be to the line of the kings of Israel (as opposed to Judah) since the division of the kingdom. God had permitted each of them to reign, but on account of their evil ways he had been removing them.

¹⁹ The concept of 'transgression' occurs throughout the Books of Chronicles to indicate attitudes and actions which constituted flagrant violations of Israel's covenant with God. The references stretch from 1 Chron. 5. 25 ('they *transgressed* against the God of their fathers, and went a whoring after the gods of the people of the land, whom

God destroyed before them') to 2 Chron. 36. 14 ('moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, *transgressed* very much after all the abominations of the heathen').

²⁰ See 'He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: from following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance', Psa. 78. 70-71.

²¹ I do not think that would be fair to blame Saul alone for Israel's defeat and land loss. For the indications of the nation's own poor spiritual condition, see End-note 20 to chapter 29.

²² Probably either at the end of 2 Sam. 5 or the beginning of 2 Sam. 8.

²³ Not that this was the armour offered to David in chapter 17. 'It seems highly unlikely to me that this clothing and equipment was Saul's own personal clothing and equipment. Apart from any other considerations, it is most unlikely that the king would have stripped himself of his own armour on the field of battle. Again, Saul, as a man who 'from his shoulders and upward' was 'higher than any of the people', 9. 2, would have known that his own armour and weapons would have been far too big to be of any use to 'a youth', v. 33, like David – who, by reason of his age, was clearly much smaller than Eliab and his other brothers (see End-note 21 to 1 Sam. 16). Yet again, when declining to take the proffered items, David made no reference to any of them being too big for him – only that he wasn't used to them, v.39. I think it far more likely that the military clothing and equipment came from Saul's armoury – and that in that sense it was spoken of as "his" – an extract from the notes on 1 Sam. 17. 38.

²⁴ See, for example, the word in 2 Sam. 1. 27, 'the *weapons* of war'; compare Deut. 1. 41; Judg. 18. 16-17.

²⁵ In one sense, therefore, the sword which David took from Nob had been consecrated to the Lord – much as had the old shewbread which David also took.

²⁶ NIDOTTE, number 6956, volume 3, page 563. See also TWOT, number 1718, volume 2, pages 706-707. 'The Hebrew *'ashtarôt* is the plural form. Albright and Pope suggest that the plural refers not to many such goddesses, but reflects "an increasing tendency to employ the plural of the name 'in the clear sense of totality of manifestations of a deity'" (Pope, p. 20, quoting Albright, p. 213)', TWOT, volume 2, page 707.

²⁷ In archaeological excavations at Bethshan, two temples were discovered (in Level V) which have been dated to the 11th century BC. It has been suggested that these temples, one dedicated to the god Resheph and the other to the goddess Antit, were temples of Dagon and Ashteroth, and that they were, indeed, the temples in which Saul's head and armour/weapons were put on display. See the article 'Beth-shan' in *'The Biblical World'*, Baker Book House 1979, and the article 'Bethshean' in the IVP New Bible Dictionary. A brief description of the excavation results is given in *'Archaeology and Old Testament Study'*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1967. In the main notes, I have assumed that 'the temple of Dagon' in 1 Chron. 10. 10 is one and the same as 'the house of Dagon' at Ashdod in 1 Sam. 5. 2.

²⁸ See 1 Kings 11. 5; 2 Kings 23. 13.

²⁹ 'Astarte' is the Greek transliteration of 'Ashtaroht', TWOT, number 1718, volume 2, page 707. Scholars are agreed that Ashtaroht/Astarte corresponds to Aphrodite – worshipped by the Greeks.

³⁰ Herodotus 1. 105 – 'The Scythians marched forward with the design of invading Egypt. When they had reached Palestine, however, Psammetichus the Egyptian king met them with gifts and prayers, and prevailed on them to advance no further. On their return, passing through Ascalon, a city of Syria, the greater part of them went their way without doing any damage; but some few who lagged behind pillaged the temple of Celestial Venus [alias, Aphrodite, Astarte, Ashtaroht]. I have inquired and find that the temple at Ascalon is the most ancient of all the temples to this goddess; for the one in Cyprus, as the Cyprians themselves admit, was built in imitation of it; and that in Cythera was erected by the Phoenicians, who belong to this part of Syria. The Scythians who plundered the temple were punished by the goddess with the female sickness, which still attaches to their posterity. They themselves confess that they are afflicted with the disease for this reason, and travellers who visit Scythia can see what sort of a disease it is. Those who suffer from it are called Enarees'.

Source : www.herodotuswebsite.co.uk/Text/Book1.htm.

³¹ See Brown, Driver, Biggs, number 7339, page 932, and NIDOTTE, number 8148, volume 3, pages 1092-1093. Compare TWOT, number 2143, volume 2, pages 840-841, and the article 'Beth-she'an' in Smith's Revised Bible Dictionary.

³² See also the Samson/Saul parallels. Both Samson and Saul fell at the hands of the Philistines, from whom they were supposed to deliver Israel, Judg. 13. 5; 1 Sam. 9. 16 (the same word; 'deliver ... out of the hand of the Philistines'). Of both it was said that the Spirit of God came on him, Judg. 14. 6, 19; 1 Sam. 10. 6, 10.

³³ See End-note 10 to chapter 27.

³⁴ It is quite possible that some of the inhabitants of Jabesh were Saul's blood relatives. Two-thirds of the young women who preserved the tribe of Benjamin from oblivion during the lawless days of the Book of Judges had come from Jabesh, Judg. 21. 8-14.

³⁵ It may be that such a response was in character. The men of Jabesh-gilead had previously refused to honour their tribal obligations at Mizpah, Judg. 21. 5, 8-9, and had kept well away from the battles with the tribe of Benjamin. It is possible therefore that, in their earlier days, they knew nothing of the courage and dedication of the men of 1 Samuel 31.

³⁶ Did David contrast the gratitude of the men of Jabesh with the base ingratitude of the men of Keilah in the beginning of chapter 23 – when they too had been 'saved' from a foreign oppressor? See the comments about David's gratitude and appreciation in the notes on 30. 26, together with End-note 29 to chapter 30.

³⁷ Note how everything centred on 'tomorrow', 1 Sam. 11. 9-11.

³⁸ Fought in Southern Montana Territory on the banks of the Little Big Horn River on 25 June 1876, 'the Battle of the Little Big Horn' has become known as 'Custer's Last Stand' – after the surname of 'Lieutenant Commander, Colonel

George Armstrong Custer'. The 7th U. S. Cavalry had its beginning in August 1866 and spent almost five years in Kansas escorting peace commissioners, surveyors and other groups across the plains from the Missouri River to the Rockies, and from the Platte River in Nebraska to the Staked Plains of Texas. Although its first commander was Andrew J. Smith, the regiment is primarily identified with Colonel Custer'.

³⁹ Cremation was limited in Israel to the worst of sinners. For example, 'if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you', Lev.20. 14. see also Josh. 7. 25. Amos 6. 10 also speaks of the burning of bodies – quite possibly during a plague or where there were so many deaths that it was impossible to bury all the corpses. Again, the bones remained. Contrast this with Amos 2. 1, which condemns the burning of a man's bones into lime.

⁴⁰ In Israel, the denial of a decent burial was a shameful punishment; see 1 Kings 21. 19, 23; Isa. 14. 19.

⁴¹ '*Antiquities of the Jews*', Book IV, Chapter viii, paragraph 6.

⁴² Based largely on my article on Isaiah 53. 9 in '*Day by Day: Christ Foreshadowed*', *Precious Seed* 2002 – October 20th, page 308.

⁴³ Disobedience cost Adam a garden, Gen. 3. 24, Moses a land, Deut. 33. 51, Saul a kingdom, and many their souls, 2 Thess. 1. 8.

⁴⁴ Compare how Paul expected Philemon to remember his great debt to the apostle and, now that occasion presented itself, to repay it in part – saying of Onesimus, 'If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides', Philemon 18-19.