



First Chronicles - Chapter Ten

Summary of Chapter Ten

The account in this chapter is taken mainly from 1 Samuel 31:1-13. Saul's reign is significant for the Chronicler only as a failure. It ends in disaster for Israel at the hands of the Philistines, against whom Saul had originally been raised up as a military saviour (1 Samuel 9:16). Saul's death, together with three of his sons, also marks the end of his royal house: none of his descendants will rule in his place over Israel.

Philistine forces advanced to Shunem from Aphek and prepared to attack the Israelites near their camp in Jezreel. When the Philistines attacked the next morning, the Israelites retreated up the slopes of Mount Gilboa. Saul and three of his sons were killed, and the Philistines triumphantly put their bodies on display in the temple of Dagon at Beth-shean. Later, men from Jabesh-gilead travelled through the night and recovered the bodies.

II 1 Chronicles 10:1-2 Chronicles 9:31 - The United Kingdom of David and Solomon

The second major section of 1-2 Chronicles concerns the reigns of David and Solomon over the whole people and land of Israel, and overlaps the division of Chronicles into two scrolls. The rule of these two kings is presented as a unity, in that David makes the essential preparations for what Solomon completes.

David is the dominant personality and human subject of interest from Chapter 11 to the end of the first book. With regard to his own rule and contributions to the kingdom, four achievements stand out in particular:

1. David conquers Jerusalem and brings the Ark of the Covenant there, as a precursor to the temple that Solomon will build (Chapters 11 and 15).
2. He secures peace for the land so that Solomon may complete his task (Chapters 18-20).

3. He provides Solomon with the plans for the temple and the wealth to build it (Chapters 22 and 28-29).
4. He organises the personnel for the future temple and the kingdom that Solomon will inherit (Chapters 23-27).

The two kings are bound together as well in the establishment of an enduring dynasty in the line of David, in which both the temple and the kingship will testify to God's unending covenant with David (1 Chronicles 17:11-14).

Chapters 10-12 recount the establishment of David's kingship over Israel in two episodes: the death of Saul and the end of his dynasty (1 Chronicles 10:1-14), and the transfer of power over the nation to David (1 Chronicles 11:1-12:40). The Chronicler presents these events in a strikingly different way from 1-2 Samuel. Presupposing his readers' familiarity with the earlier accounts, he omits most of the subsidiary episodes and details to concentrate on his central theme: David's entry into kingship inaugurated a permanent change for good in Israel's relationship with God. In short, David's rule was the instrument of God's own kingship in Israel, and he was raised to that office by the prophetic word for the salvation of the people.

II.a 1 Chronicles 10:1-12:40 - David's Rise to Power Over Israel

After the death of Saul, David rises to be king over all Israel. The Chronicler focuses on the unity of Israel as it acclaims David as its king, passing over most of the conflict with Saul and Esh-Baal/Ishbaal that Second Samuel describes.

II.a.i 1 Chronicles 10:1-14 - Death of Saul and His Sons

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. ² The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons; and the Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, sons of Saul.

1 Chronicles 10:1-2

Now the Philistines fought against Israel. The Philistines were an immigrant people from the military aristocracy of the island of Crete (Caphtor): <<*Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Aramæans from Kir?*>> (Amos 9:7b). Small numbers of Philistines were in the land at the time of Abraham; but they only came in force soon after Israel came to Canaan from Egypt. They were organised into five city states. Archæologists reveal two other things about the Philistines: they were hard drinkers, and they were the first in the region to effectively use iron, and they made the most of it.



Saul Dies on Mount Gilboa circa 1010 BC

The Philistines were a seafaring people, and traded with distant lands. Therefore they imported newer and better military technology from the Greeks and became a powerful enemy of the people of Israel. At that time, Israel could compete on more equal terms with Moab and Ammon, but Greek military equipment such as helmets, shields, coats of mail, swords and spears made the Philistines much more formidable opponents.

The men of Israel fled before the Philistines. The Philistines had attacked deep into Israeli territory, and Saul's army assembled and prepared for battle at Mount Gilboa; refer to 1 Samuel 28:4. Because of his deep rebellion against the Lord, Saul was not ready for battle: <<*When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly*>> (1 Samuel 28:5). It is no surprise that with such a leader the soldiers of Israel could not stand before the Philistines.

The Philistines killed Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchishua, sons of Saul. Tragically, Saul's sons were affected in the judgement of God against their father Saul. The brave and worthy Jonathan died as he had lived - loyally fighting unto the very end for his God, his country, and his father the king. Even though he had pledged his allegiance to David, knowing that he would be the king one day, he still was not permitted to survive his father Saul. No doubt, this could have caused division within the nation, as it did when his brother Esh-Baal, known as Ishbaal or Ishbosheth in Second Samuel, became king over part of Israel.

³ The battle pressed hard on Saul; and the archers found him, and he was wounded by the archers. ⁴ Then Saul said to his armour-bearer, 'Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, so that these uncircumcised may not come and make sport of me.' But his armour-bearer was unwilling, for he was terrified. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. ⁵ When his armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died. ⁶ Thus Saul died; he and his three sons and all his house died together.

1 Chronicles 10:3-6

The battle pressed hard on Saul. Saul, struck by many arrows and wounded, knew the battle was completely lost. He commanded his armour-bearer to kill him, and when he would not, Saul apparently killed himself, i.e. Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

First Samuel Chapter 31 agrees with the Chronicler that Saul fell on his own sword. However, another man came to David and claimed that he had killed the king: <<*Then David asked the young man who was reporting to him, 'How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan died?' The young man reporting to him said, 'I happened to be on Mount Gilboa; and there was Saul leaning on his*

spear, while the chariots and the horsemen drew close to him. When he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. I answered, "Here, sir." And he said to me, "Who are you?" I answered him, "I am an Amalekite." He said to me, "Come, stand over me and kill me; for convulsions have seized me, and yet my life still lingers." So I stood over him, and killed him, for I knew that he could not live after he had fallen. I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord'>> (2 Samuel 1:6-10). Some wonder if this Amalekite told the truth. He said he 'mercifully' ended Saul's life after the king mortally wounded himself by falling on his own sword. It may be that he merely was the first to come upon Saul's dead body and he took the royal crown and bracelet to receive a reward from David. The man was probably lying because 1 Samuel 31:5 says that Saul's armour-bearer saw that his king was dead.

If the Amalekite's story is accepted as true, this is a chilling statement. In a unique war of judgement, God commanded Saul to completely destroy the people of Amalek in 1 Samuel 15:2-3. Saul failed to do this and an Amalekite brought a bitter end to his tragic life.

Although the Bible does not specifically say it, Amalek is commonly regarded as an illustration of the human fleshly, carnal nature. Like such a nature:

- Amalek focuses its attack on the tired and weak and does not fear God: <<Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God>> (Deuteronomy 25:17-18).
- God commanded a permanent state of war against Amalek: <<He said, 'A hand upon the banner of the Lord! The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation'>> (Exodus 17:16).
- The battle against Amalek is only won in the context of prayer and seeking God: <<Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed>> (Exodus 17:11).
- God promises to one day completely blot out the remembrance of Amalek: <<Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven'>> (Exodus 17:14).
- Joshua wins the battle against Amalek: <<And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword>> (Exodus 17:13). He thus lived a life blessed by the Lord.

- Amalek was once first but will one day be last: <<*Then he looked on Amalek, and uttered his oracle, saying: 'First among the nations was Amalek, but its end is to perish for ever'*>> (Numbers 24:20).
- Amalek allies itself with other enemies in battle against God's people: <<*In alliance with the Ammonites and the Amalekites, he went and defeated Israel; and they took possession of the city of palms*>> (Judges 3:13).

Using this picture, Saul's failure to deal with Amalek when God told him to is seen as ending in ruin, with an Amalekite delivering the death-blow. In the same way, when people fail to deal with the flesh as God prompts them, they can expect that area of the flesh to come back and deliver some deadly blows.

Accepting that it was Saul who took his own life in this way does not mean that he committed an act of suicide. He was mortally wounded and would have died at some point. What he wanted to avoid was the pain and suffering he would have endured had he been captured by the Philistines before death.

Taking the Bible's teaching on this point in its entirety, it can be said that God does regard suicide as sin; it is the sin of self-murder. Yet, it is wrong to regard it as the unforgivable sin, for anyone who does commit suicide has given in to the lies and deceptions of Satan, whose purpose is to kill and destroy as Jesus states in John 10:10.

Thus Saul died; he and his three sons. So was the tragic end of this first king of Israel, who started with great promise but ended his reign in disaster for himself, his sons, and his kingdom. As Samuel's spirit had said in 1 Samuel 28:19, the Lord gave Israel into the hands of the Philistines, and Saul and his sons joined the dead. Truly, as David later wrote: <<*Your glory, O Israel, lies slain upon your high places! How the mighty have fallen!*>> (2 Samuel 1:19). As sad as anything was in this account is the absence of any kind of sorrow or repentance or crying out to God at all on Saul's part. He had been told the previous night that he and his sons would die, yet he did not seem to prepare his soul to meet God in any way. After all, he will need to give an account: <<*For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil*>> (2 Corinthians 5:10).

At the end of his life Saul became so hardened in sin that he did not want to repent. Many people put off getting right with God until a later time, assuming they will still want to get right with God then. But that is a dangerous assumption because repentance is a gift from God and if it is here today it should be received today.

All his house died together. The Amalekite's story of Saul's death in 2 Samuel Chapter 1 is ignored by the Chronicler, perhaps because its authenticity was

doubted in ancient as well as in modern times. There was one son who did not die in battle - Esh-Baal. He was made king over Israel: <<But Abner son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ishbaal son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, the Ashurites, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, and over all Israel. Ishbaal, Saul's son, was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for two years. But the house of Judah followed David>> (2 Samuel 2:8-10). When Esh-Baal was assassinated David became king over all Israel but he had no part in the assassination.

⁷ When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that the army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and fled; and the Philistines came and occupied them.

1 Chronicles 10:7

When all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that the army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead. When the leader King Saul was struck, it spread panic among God's people. Jesus knew this same principle would be used against his own disciples: <<And Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" >> (Mark 14:27). Saul's sin, hardened rebellion, and eventual ruin affected far more than himself and even his immediate family. It literally endangered the entire nation of Israel.

They abandoned their towns and fled; and the Philistines came and occupied them. The victory of the Philistines was so complete that even those on the other side of the Jordan fled in terror before the Philistines according to 1 Samuel 31:7. With the Philistine army occupying territory on the other side of the Jordan they had cut Israel in half, drawing a line from west to east. The rest of the nation was ripe for total conquest by the Philistines.

⁸ The next day when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹ They stripped him and took his head and his armour, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. ¹⁰ They put his armour in the temple of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

1 Chronicles 10:8-10

Philistines came to strip the dead. This was normal practice in war for the spoils, any valuables or articles useful for war, were taken by the victors.

They stripped him and took his head and his armour. Saul was no exception except for taking his head as proof that the king was indeed dead.

To carry the good news to their idols and to the people. Saul's tragic death gave opportunity for the enemies of the Lord to disgrace his name. First, they gave the ultimate insult to Saul; in that culture, to have your dead body treated this way was considered a fate worse than death itself. Second, Saul's death was used to glorify pagan gods and to mock the living God.

They put his armour in the temple of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. The Philistines offered the dead king to their gods, the most prominent of which was Dagon. It was in Dagon's temple that Samson performed his last act by destroying the building and killing all those present; refer to Judges 16:23-31.

The Philistines built carefully planned temples in Gaza, Ashdod, and Beth Shean. Dagon, their main god, was thought to be the god of grain. Ashtoreth, believed to be his mistress, was associated with war and fertility. Philistines at Ekron worshiped Baal-Zebul, thought to be Dagon's son.

¹¹ But when all Jabesh-gilead heard everything that the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all the valiant warriors got up and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. Then they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh, and fasted for seven days.

1 Chronicles 10:11-12

All the valiant warriors got up and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. These heroic men are recognised for their gratitude. Saul had saved Jabesh-gilead from the Ammonites at the beginning of his reign (1 Samuel 11:1-11), a fact that the men of the city remembered, giving a proper burial to Saul and his sons. However, David later reburied them: <<***They buried the bones of Saul and of his son Jonathan in the land of Benjamin in Zela, in the tomb of his father Kish; they did all that the king commanded. After that, God heeded supplications for the land***>> (2 Samuel 21:14). Upon taking the throne, David rightly thanked these valiant men for their kindness to the memory of Saul, Jonathan, and Saul's other sons; refer to 2 Samuel 2:4-7.

In a time of disgrace, loss, and tragedy like this, God still has his valiant men to do his work. The men of Jabesh-gilead took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from their place of humiliation and gave them a proper burial. God always has his valiant people. When one servant passes from the scene, another arises to take their place. If Saul is gone, God raises up a David. If the army of Israel is utterly routed, God still has his valiant men. God's work is bigger than any one person or any group of people.

¹³ So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, ¹⁴ and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.

1 Chronicles 10:13-14

Therefore the Lord put him to death. This is the Chronicler's theological explanation for the death of Saul, caused by his unfaithfulness, Hebrew *ma'al*, and expressed especially in failing to keep the command of the Lord, and Samuel had warned him of the consequences in 1 Samuel 13:13-14, failing to destroy the Amalekites despite a specific instruction to do so in 1 Samuel Chapter 15, consulting the medium of En-dor (1 Samuel Chapter 28), which was specifically against the commands of the Lord in Deuteronomy 18:9-14, and failing to seek guidance from the Lord, which here denotes not the search for a prophetic oracle, which Saul had sought; (1 Samuel 28:6), but rather the deficiency of his basic spiritual condition in 1 Chronicles 28:9 but received no reply. Saul did not have a genuine connection with God and did not seek God for the difficulties of his life.

The story of King Saul is one of the great tragedies of the Bible. He was humble at his beginning, yet seeming to lack any genuine spiritual connection with God; he was easily and quickly corrupted by pride and fear. Saul becomes a tragic example of wasted potential and opportunity.

Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David. This is the main point of this chapter. A second decisive turning point from God in the history of the kingdom occurs in 2 Chronicles 10:15, when Rehoboam did not listen to the people.

In 1 Samuel 13:14 God promised to take the kingdom from Saul and give it to a man after his own heart. This took many years to become a fact, but at the death of Saul, David became king first over Judah and then over all Israel.