

The Tragedy of Godlessness

1 Samuel 31:1-13

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.

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. 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.

⁷ When 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.

⁸ The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹ They 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. ¹⁰ They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

¹¹ When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all 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. ¹³ Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

Saul's Tragic End

"The Israelites fled before them ... and many died."

The chapter begins with the report of Israel's defeat and the heavy losses they suffered under the hands of the Philistines. Saul marched into this battle knowing that the Lord was not with him. The Lord through Samuel told Saul the outcome of this battle. Saul was shaken but he went on to face the battle without the Lord who called him and anointed him to be the king of Israel.

- What happens when we keep turning away from God to pursue our own agenda?
- Is it easy to walk away from God's calling?

Saul's Rebellion and Disobedience

1 Samuel 15:22-23

²² But Samuel replied: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king."

1. The above passage describes Saul's heart in a very accurate and concise way. It is amazing how well the Lord knows where we are and how He seeks to wake us from our self-deception. Sadly, Saul refused to listen.
2. The end of Saul's life was indeed a tragedy. Saul was arrogant and had drifted to a place where he would treat the Lord as someone he could summon for his purpose and pacify with his sacrifices. Yahweh was treated like any other idol. Unlike the story of David, Saul did not repent, neither did he turn to the Lord wholeheartedly. He was not a man of worship and only cared about his power, position, and praise. Saul was all about himself.

The Enemies and Their Agenda

1. The irony here is Saul's death was at the hands of the Philistines, the very people God had commissioned him to defeat.

1 Samuel 9:16

¹⁶ "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me."

2. This is what the Philistines did after their victory:

1 Samuel 31:8-10

⁸ The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹ They 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. ¹⁰ They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

- The Philistines celebrated their victory by making sport of the bodies and honoring their idols as victors over the God of Israel.
- What we must be mindful of, is the reality that God is not the only one who has a plan for us, the enemy too has plans for us. (¹⁰ *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10*)
- We may walk away from God's plan, but can we contend with the work of the enemy; the death and suffering he brings without the Lord?

The Contrast Between Saul and David in the Face of Suffering

In the final chapters the narrator tells us that both David and Saul faced suffering. Their response to God were very different. David was delivered twice but Saul faced defeat and took his own life.

David	Saul
<p>1 Samuel 30:3-6 ³ When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴ So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. ⁵ David's two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ⁶ David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the Lord his God.</p> <p>1 Samuel 30:7-8 Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, “Bring me the ephod.” Abiathar brought it to him, ⁸ and David inquired of the Lord, “Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?”</p>	<p>1 Samuel 28:4-7 ⁴ The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. ⁵ When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. ⁶ He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. ⁷ Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.”</p> <p>1 Samuel 28:16-19 ¹⁶ Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has departed from you and become your enemy? ... ¹⁷ The Lord has done what he predicted ... The Lord has torn ... Because you did not obey the Lord ..., the Lord has done this to you today ... The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines ... The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”</p>

In the previous chapter we see God delivering David from two very difficult situations. David was in a hopeless place. He had lost his family and his men wanted him dead. Yet David was not without hope. He turned to the Lord and found strength in Him. Saul relied on himself and the power he had. David was humble before God, for he believed that everything is in the Lord’s hands. In this story, we must learn the dangers of a proud and rebellious heart. Pride can lure people to a state where they would truly despise God’s will and are willing to take their chances with anything else, except God.

Saul Takes His Own Life

Saul falls on his own sword. He was injured and did not want to be captured by the Philistines. He would rather die by his own hands than to be tortured and made sport by his enemies. His armour bearer seeing this, also lost all hope and took his own life.

- Is Saul action justifiable? Was this the best option for him? Compare Saul’s story with the following narratives of those who faced suffering with hope.

Jesus

²⁷ Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. ²⁸ They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. ³⁰ They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. ³¹ After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. **Matthew 27:27-31**

Paul

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **2 Corinthians 4:7-10**

Joni Eareckson Tada

She broke her neck in a diving accident when she was 17. Her spinal chord was severed, and she became paralyzed from the shoulders down. She has limited arm motion, but can't use her hands or her legs

"...we will stand amazed to see the topside of the tapestry and how God beautifully embroidered each circumstance into a pattern for our good and His glory."

"He has chosen not to heal me, but to hold me. The more intense the pain, the closer His embrace."

Billy – Somalia

Somalia might be the most dangerous place in the world. Decades of conflict have gutted the country's infrastructure. Somalia's economy ranks dead last among all nations, and it isn't a matter of if you will experience a terrorist attack but when.

Billy was born into a religious family in Mogadishu. His father was a tribal and religious leader who had memorized the entire Koran. Out of curiosity, Billy started studying an English Bible alongside his Koran. After three years of study, he converted to Christianity. He learned a lot from Christian radio broadcasts from the Seychelles and Kenya, and it was on the radio that he first heard the voice of another Somali who was a Christian.

Billy's family threatened him when he confessed his new faith. That was when he first began to understand the words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:12: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Six years after his conversion, Billy met his first Christian Somali. Together, as underground Christians, they gathered fourteen believers and started an underground church. A year later, Muslims discovered the growing Christian community and started persecution in earnest.

One of their church members, Liibaan, now a famed Somali martyr, was the first to be murdered. Then a doctor who attended the church was shot to death. An educator was kidnapped and executed. A Christian man and his Muslim wife were executed together in their bedroom. Another church member was taken off a bus and executed in broad daylight. Twelve in all were murdered. None of the murderers were ever prosecuted.

Today, just two members have survived out of the original church of fourteen—Billy and one other. Billy escaped many attempts on his life before moving to another country. From that base, he travels in and out of Somalia, planting and nurturing underground house churches. No longer are there only fourteen Christians in Mogadishu. The church is quietly growing, partly because of the testimony of those twelve who died for Christ.

Faith and Suffering

As you have read the stories, you would have observed that there is a great difference between Saul's end compared to those whose hope are in God. Unlike Saul, the story of the people of faith is not a tragedy. It is filled with love, hope and purpose.

Reflect on the following verses:

Matthew 16:24-26

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

Lost Potential

The brave people from Jabesh Gilead came and rescued the body of Saul. They were grateful to him because he mustered the whole of Israel to rescue them from the Ammonites (1 Sam 11:1-11). God had called Saul for this very purpose, to deliver Israel from her enemies. Because of his pride, Saul handed Israel into the hands of her enemies. If only Saul listened, he could have done so much good. His story would have ended very differently.

As for Israel, they have rejected God as their king and demanded for a king like their neighbouring nations. Now they have to live with the choices, strengths and failures of their chosen king.

- Where are your choices and pursuits taking you?

Jeremiah 29:11-14

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

Prayer

- May the Lord teach us to love Him and keep His word.
- May we find strength and hope in the midst of suffering.
- May God give strength and courage so that we will learn to endure and not give up easily on His call on our lives.
- We may truly understand how God wants us to embrace the cross.

Church

- To be steadfast in our pursuit of God and His call over our lives.
- An intimate desire to be in His presence in prayer and worship.
- God will continue to shape our lives through His word.
- God will help us touch lives for His glory in our work place, schools and homes.
- To unite our hearts as a Church to care and stand together. God will help us use our resources and abilities to help the people around
- Ministries: Life Explorers, Redeeming Roses, Destiny Kids & Teens, Sunday School, Lifeline Youth, Life Cell Groups, Worship Team, Pulpit Ministry & Church Leadership
 - God will help us do His work during this season.
 - God will help us raise leaders.
 - God will open doors for us to reach others

Covid-19

- Children, Parents and Teachers
- Healing and quick recovery for those who are affected.
- Wisdom for Government
- Economy/those who are out of work

Healing

- Suba (Having severe headaches)
- Francis (Surgery)

Malaysia

- God will guide the leaders of our nation.
- Healing that brings unity. God will raise His church to be His instrument of reconciliation.
- God will restore Justice and Compassion. The leaders will look into the needs of the poor and vulnerable. We will care for the foreigners.
- Revival in the Church of Malaysia