

# Saul's Treachery (1 Chr 10.1-14)

## Building a House for God's Name: Studies in 1 & 2 Chronicles

### I. REVIEW: THE SITUATION AND PURPOSE OF CHRONICLES

- A. The books of Chronicles are an important part of the OT canon. Within these books we find a remarkably rich theological telling of Israel's history with a particular focus on the Davidic royal dynasty and the centrality of the Temple in the life of Israel's worship.
- B. These books provide a necessary perspective on Israel's story (and therefore our story as the people of God) and are a needed supplement to Biblical theology. To rightly understand these books, it is important to understand the situation and purpose for which they were written.
- C. As we have seen, the opening verses of 1 Chronicles 9 give several pieces of information that situate the writing of the Chronicles as after the *Babylonian exile* when the people of Israel were *returning to the land*.  
  
<sup>1</sup>So all Israel was recorded in genealogies, and these are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel. And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith. <sup>2</sup>Now the first to dwell again in their possessions in their cities were Israel (1 Chr 9.1-2)
- D. The primary purpose of the author of Chronicles seems to be an attempt to remind the people of God that their distinction is in rightly ordered worship to the Lord with a specific focus on calling the people of God to *seek the Lord*.
- E. This first narrative in Chronicles is highly important within the overall scope of the work. Although the author gives little space to the life of Saul (compared to the author of 1 Samuel), he utilizes Saul as an "anti-type" related to the heart posture that he desires to provoke in the readers of the book.
- F. Outline of 1 Chronicles 10.1-14
  - 1. Saul's death and the end of his house (1 Chr 10.1-7)
  - 2. The desecration of Saul (1 Chr 10.8-12)
  - 3. Saul's treachery and God's sovereignty (1 Chr 10.13-14)

### II. SAUL'S DEATH AND THE END OF HIS HOUSE (1 CHR 10.1-7)

<sup>1</sup>Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. <sup>2</sup>And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. <sup>3</sup>The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was wounded by the archers. <sup>4</sup>Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and mistreat me." But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. <sup>5</sup>And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died. <sup>6</sup>Thus Saul died: he and his three sons and all his house died together. <sup>7</sup>And 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 cities and fled, and the Philistines came and lived in them. (1 Chr 10.1-7)

- A. After the opening 9 chapters of genealogy (like an introduction for the books), the author of Chronicles begins his narrative by retelling the story of Saul's death (compare with 1 Samuel 31).
- B. The writer of Chronicles is not concerned to retell any of the other events of Saul's life (cf. 1 Sam 8-15) or his death (cf. 1 Sam 28-31). This is likely because he presumes his readers would be familiar with the narrative events of Saul's life and death. He is not concerned with retelling the events for their own sake, but rather is concerned to demonstrate how Saul served as an anti-type of the heart response he is seeking to evoke in his narrative.

- C. We are brought right into the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites. The armies of Israel's enemies had pressed in upon them greatly and were causing great destruction and desolation upon them.
- D. The reader is meant to understand almost immediately the irony of Saul's destruction at the hand of the Philistines. Saul had been anointed as king over God's people precisely in order to deliver them from the hand of the Philistines — but now, the Philistines had been given the authority to destroy God's people and their king.

<sup>16</sup>Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me." (1 Sam 9.16)

- E. God had declared he would use the foreign people who remained in Canaan to chasten and discipline his people in seasons of their disobedience.

<sup>13</sup>They abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. <sup>14</sup>So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. <sup>15</sup>Whenever they marched out, the hand of the Lord was against them for harm, as the Lord had warned, and as the Lord had sworn to them. (Judg 2.13-14)

- F. In the heat of the battle, Saul turned to his armor-bearer to kill him rather than be delivered over into the hands of the Philistines. However, because the armor-bearer would not kill him, Saul fell upon his own sword.
- G. The Chronicler notes that Saul, his three sons, and all of his house died that day on Mount Gilboa. This does not mean that the Chronicler believed Saul did not have other sons (he includes them in the genealogy of Saul in 1 Chronicles 8.33). Nor is the author of Chronicles unaware that Saul's son Ish-bosheth ruled the 10 northern tribes for 7 years (cf. 2 Sam 2-4). Rather, the Chronicler is highlighting the *reality from God's perspective* that on the day Saul was judged in death, his house was ended.
- H. The final verse of this section highlights the humiliating reality of Saul's death for the nation of Israel. With their king dead and their armies defeated, the people flee the cities at their borders, and the Philistines take back parts of the land that had been won under Saul's reign.

### III. THE DESECRATION OF SAUL (1 CHR 10.8-12)

<sup>8</sup>The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. <sup>9</sup>And they stripped him and took his head and his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. <sup>10</sup>And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon. <sup>11</sup>But when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, <sup>12</sup>all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. And they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh and fasted seven days. (1 Chr 10.8-12)

- A. After the death of Saul, we are told of the desecration of Saul's head and armor as the Philistines take these to the temple of their god, Dagon.
- B. In the ancient world, this act would have been one of defilement and boasting. The Philistines sent their heralds out throughout their land to tell both the people and their gods (*carry the good news to their idols*) that their god had given them victory over the god of the Israelites.
- C. This picture is intended to show the readers that in the moment of Saul's death and the victory of the Philistines, that it looked to the natural eye like the Philistines and their gods had secured victory over Israel and her God.
- D. However, we are also to remember that what seem like apparent defeats for Yahweh are his using of the principalities and rulers of other nations merely to accomplish his own purposes (cf. 1 Sam 4-5).

#### IV. SAUL'S TREACHERY AND GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (I CHR 10.13-14)

<sup>13</sup>So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. <sup>14</sup>He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. (I Chr 10.13-14)

- A. With these two verses, the author of Chronicles gives his theological interpretation of the events surrounding Saul's death and their importance for his narrative on the whole.
- B. The author interprets the events for us stating that Saul died because of his *breach of faith*. This idea is important throughout the books of Chronicles.
- C. Already in the book, the author has defined the concept of breaking faith as turning toward other gods (as opposed to seeking the Lord alone) and has demonstrated the judgment of God in relation to such treachery.

<sup>25</sup>But they broke faith with the God of their fathers, and whored after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. <sup>26</sup>So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, the spirit of Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, and he took them into exile. (I Chr 5.25-26)

<sup>1</sup>And Judah was taken into exile in Babylon because of their breach of faith (I Chr 9.1)

- D. Throughout the latter portion of 2 Chronicles, this concept will become an important one in assessing the Davidic kings who do not follow in the way of the Lord (cf. 2 Chr 26.16-18; 29.6, 19; 33.19; 36.14).
- E. The Chronicler goes on to describe the two ways that Saul committed treachery against the Lord. First, we are told that Saul did not *keep the commandment* of the Lord. This is likely a reference to the two accounts in 1 Samuel through which Saul was rejected by God as king.

- 1. Saul sinned against God at Gilgal by functioning as a priest and disobeying a direct command from God.

<sup>8</sup>Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do. (I Sam 10.8)

<sup>4</sup>And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. <sup>5</sup>And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. <sup>6</sup>When the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble (for the people were hard pressed), the people hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns, <sup>7</sup>and some Hebrews crossed the fords of the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul was still at Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. <sup>8</sup>He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. <sup>9</sup>So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. (I Sam 13.4-9)

- 2. This picture gives us a vision of what happens when difficulties press in upon Saul and the people begin to scatter. Saul refuses to wait upon the Lord, but rather yields to the pressures of the people and his own troubled soul.

<sup>10</sup>As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. <sup>11</sup>Samuel said, "What have you done?" And Saul said, "When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, <sup>12</sup>I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering." <sup>13</sup>And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. <sup>14</sup>But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you." (I Sam 13.10-14)

3. Second, we see Saul disobeyed the Lord by failing to follow through on God's command to fully execute judgment on the Amalekites. This demonstrated that Saul was not zealous for the things that God demanded.

<sup>18</sup>And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, "Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed." <sup>19</sup>Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord/ Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?" <sup>20</sup>And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. <sup>21</sup>But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal." <sup>22</sup>And Samuel said, "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. <sup>23</sup>For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king." (1 Sam 15:18-23)

- F. The Chronicler also highlights that Saul's breach of faith consisted in the fact that he sought out guidance from a medium and ***did not seek the Lord***. The Chronicler desires to show that even up to the end of his life, Saul could have sought the Lord — but chose not to. The author is seeking to set Saul up as an anti-type of how he longs for his reader to respond. Later, the author gives us an interpretive key to the book in David's charge to his son Solomon.

<sup>9</sup>And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. (1 Chr 28:9)

- G. The Chronicler seems to highlight this aspect of Saul's death at the beginning of his narrative to demonstrate two specific things that are highly important to him throughout his narrative.
  1. ***God brings judgment for disobedience***: He argues that it was the Philistine armies or Saul himself who caused Saul's death — but rather that the Lord put Saul to death. The position of Israel at the end of Saul's life was God's judgment upon their disobedience — not the power of the Philistine gods.
  2. ***God brings life out of death***: The powerful reality of telling of Saul's death in this way is that it is precisely the means through which God gives the kingdom over to David. For the Chronicler, David serves as the ideal type of the king who pursues the heart of God and orders the life of God's people around seeking the face of Yahweh. This would have been important for the first readers of Chronicles as they had been sent into exile because of their own breach of faith. Just like God brought David out of the time of Saul's destruction, so he could bring redemption and life out of their destruction and death.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

- A. ***Our breach of faith and the glory of the gospel***: like Saul, we have not kept the commandments of God and have not sought his face (cf. Rom 3). However, in Christ Jesus God has made a way for his righteousness to be made known apart from our obedience and our pursuit of his glory.

<sup>10</sup>None is righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup>no one understands; no one seeks for God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned aside... no one does good, not even one... <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:10-23)

<sup>21</sup>But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law... <sup>22</sup>the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom 2:21-22)

- B. ***The judgment of the Lord and the hope of life***: we must remember that times of apparent defeat at the hands of other gods (naturalism, progressivism, consumerism, etc.) is not defeat for the Lord at all. In seasons of decline and crisis among his people, we must recognize that he utilizes the means of chastening and discipline to awaken his people and call them back to himself. As those united to him by faith, we can turn and repent from our waywardness and call upon his name — that he might turn and bring his power of healing and redemption to us.