

# EXPERIENCE THE LAND AND THE BOOK

## Saul: A Study in Tragedy

1 Samuel 9; 13–15; 17; 28; 31; 2 Samuel 1:19–27



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

There is a special grief over a life *not* well lived. We love to celebrate the stories of those who have finished well, but when we encounter those whose lives bear the consequences of poor decisions and slow erosion, we sigh and wonder what could have been. And then, in quiet, private moments, we wonder how our lives will end. Will we finish well? Are we on a good track?

Discover from the life of one of the Bible's greatest examples of failed potential just what it means to take God seriously. And then choose to finish well.



### LET'S DIG DEEPER

#### 1. A Life Well Begun (1 Samuel 9, 10)

Saul had everything going for him. He was tall, handsome, and humble . . . and anointed by Samuel to be God's choice for Israel's king.

When Samuel anointed Saul as king, Saul seemed like the perfect fit—a military leader, tall, powerful, and handsome (1 Samuel 9:1–2). He had a mystique that appealed to the people. On top of that, he was genuinely modest, and God blessed him spiritually (10:6–10).

#### 2. A Life Not Well Ended (1 Samuel 13–15; 17; 28; 31; 2 Samuel 1:19–27)

Saul made five major errors in judgment because his character had become corrupted. He slowly eroded into a paranoid, frightened shell of a man who ended his life in suicide.



### Quotable

*The message of Saul is for all: take God seriously and don't play with sacred things.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Instead of taking God seriously . . .

- Saul took his circumstances seriously (1 Samuel 13:7–14)
- Saul took himself seriously (14:24–45)
- Saul took the people seriously (15:21, 24)
- Saul was plagued by an evil spirit (16:14–23)
- Saul tried to manipulate (28:3–20; 31:4)



### DOORWAY TO HISTORY

#### *Beth-shan*

The city of Beth-shan was originally allotted to the tribe of Manasseh, but Manasseh, fearing iron chariots, failed to drive out the Canaanites who lived there (Joshua 17:11–16). As a compromise, part of the tribe of Manasseh settled on the hills across the Jordan Valley. Israel finally conquered Beth-shan during Solomon's reign, four hundred years after Joshua's conquest of the area (1 Kings 4:12).

One of the oldest cities in Israel at that time, Beth-shan sat strategically at the junction of the Jordan Valley and the Jezreel and Harod Valleys. Some have called it the “garden land of the north” because of the numerous springs that irrigated the land. Beth-shan's rich pastureland made it an ideal crossroad between the north-south trade route and the east-west route leading to and from the Mediterranean coast.

Five or six major temple complexes, whose inscriptions mention several deities, have been found in the ruins, suggesting that Beth-shan was an important center for worship. During the time of Saul and David, at least two temples stood in Beth-shan; the temple of Ashteroth and the temple of Dagon (1 Samuel 31:10; 1 Chronicles 10:10).

Saul and the army of Israel were fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, a stone's throw from Beth-shan, when he and his three sons were killed. Out of contempt, the Philistines decapitated the men and hung their bodies on the walls of Beth-shan.

In New Testament times, Beth-shan was one of the chief cities of the Decapolis and was renamed Scythopolis—linking it with Greek culture. The Round Temple—with an area paved with white limestone and an inscription to honor Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and to the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine—dominated the center of the city. The city flourished until AD 749 when it was destroyed by an earthquake.

Until excavations began in 1989, the city's remains were buried underground.



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### LET'S LIVE IT

King Saul's life is a sobering study for any time. This is especially true for anyone who doesn't take God seriously. Rest assured; insensitivity to God always leads to a life adrift.

**Ask the Lord to help you target areas of your life He wants to improve for His glory and for your good. Pray through this list, asking God to help you pinpoint areas you desire to submit to Him:**

- Reading God's Word
- Tone of communicating with loved ones
- Efforts in disciplining children and expressing love toward them
- Work ethic
- Prayer life
- Entertainment choices



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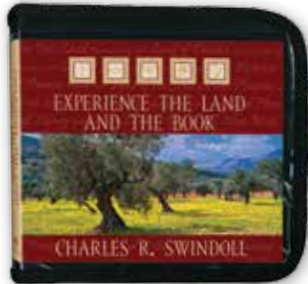
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