

Divine Inevitability

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Let's take our Bibles tonight and open them, I guess we could say one more time, at least in this series of sermons, one more time to 1 Samuel because we'll finish that tonight.

! So we have come then to the final chapter of this book, chapter 31, if you want to find that. As you probably already know, if you've read Samuel, 1 Samuel before, we've also come to the final chapter of Saul's life.

You're at the end of 1 Samuel and then 2 Samuel, of course, will take up solely the life of David, the new king, anointed king.

But he had to wait quite a while for it. He will very shortly become king of Israel. I would say also, kind of by way of introduction, that what happens here in this chapter is inevitable.

Inevitable. And I'll explain why here in just a little bit. But let me go ahead and read the chapter, chapter 31. Relatively short chapter, 13 verses.

[1 : 22] Now the Philistines fought against Israel. And the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell, slain on Mount Gilboa.

Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons.

The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him. And he was severely wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.

But his armor-bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him.

So Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all his men died together that same day. And when the men of Israel, who were on the other side of the valley and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled.

[2 : 46] And the Philistines came and dwelt in them. So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent word throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim it in the temple of their idols and among the people.

Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan.

And they came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh and fasted seven days.

All right, so that ends the first book of Samuel. Now I've entitled this final message from this book, I've entitled it Divine Inevitability.

[4 : 00] I mentioned the word inevitable a moment ago before I read the text, and I wanted to expand that just a little bit and say this is divine inevitability. What happened in this chapter, not just to Saul but to Israel, also Saul's sons was inevitable, and it was divinely inevitable.

And sometimes, you know, we use that word inevitable, and we use it for things that to us at least seem inevitable. We use it, for example, for things that we expect to happen.

Sometimes we'll use that word to relate to things we just expected to happen, you know, a kind of fatalism. Well, it's just, you know, just inevitable. You know, nothing we could do, no way we could stop it, it was going to happen, what happens will happen, and so forth.

So it's kind of a fatalism. So we might use that word inevitable in that sense. We also may use it for things that are, at least from our perspective, bound to happen.

Based upon certain facts, you know, that we may have. You know, certain facts about a certain event or certain people or things, and so when things happen, we say, well, it was inevitable based upon what I know, you know, about this person or whatever.

[5 : 16] And yet we'd have to admit that sometimes what we think is inevitable doesn't always happen. It doesn't always come about. But having said all that, Saul and his sons dying on the battlefield was really inevitable.

It was inevitable. And it was not just possible. I mean, in the sense that you, you know, the risk that you take when you go out on the battlefield. You know, it's always possible that you won't live through it, that you be killed, you know, and die in battle.

So, but with Saul and his sons, it was not just something that was possible that might happen to them. And I would even go a step further and say it was not just probable that Saul and his sons would die in the sense of the law of averages.

You know, I mean, if you go fight enough battles, then the law of averages will eventually catch up with you. And it's quite probable. I mean, in all likelihood, you will be killed in battle.

You know, the likelihood becomes more and more probable. But still, none of that applies to Saul and his sons. Saul and his sons did not die simply because it was possible that they would die on the battlefield or probable.

[6 : 34] Saul and his sons died. Their death on the battlefield was inevitable. It was a divine inevitability.

Now, if you've been with us for our study all along, and you really don't have to go back too far, then you kind of know where I'm going with this. Because Saul and his sons and what happened to Israel happened to Israel because God ordained it.

And he said it was going to happen. He ordained it. He said this is what's going to happen. And you can be sure that that's what is going to happen.

Everything that happened that day, not just with Saul, not just with his sons, but even what happened to the armies of Israel was divinely inevitable.

And all you have to do is go back a few chapters to chapter 28. It hasn't been all that long ago that we studied that chapter. Chapter 28. In fact, and I'll explain this a little bit more later, but chapters 29 and 30 are kind of parentheses.

[7 : 39] So really, the author is taking up the story again that he kind of left off with back there at the end of chapter 28. But you remember what happened back there in chapter 28.

Saul, from his particular vantage point, he looked down and he could see the armies of the Philistines, this huge army getting ready to do battle against Israel.

And so Saul looked down and he saw all of these soldiers and their chariots and all of that. And suddenly a fear and a panic took hold of him, seized him.

Remember? And he didn't have Samuel anymore because chapter 28 begins by giving that little insert, little bit of information, Samuel is dead.

And the author gives us that information because of what is going to happen to prepare us for what's going to happen here in the chapter, in chapter 28. So Samuel is dead. His trusted prophet is dead.

[8 : 44] The man that he would go to for counsel and for help and for encouragement, he's gone. He's dead. And so what does Saul do?

Well, Saul violated the law of God. Even really his own reinstatement of that very law, chapter 28 tells us that as well, gives us that bit of information.

And so he violates the law. And what does he do? He consults a medium. Remember, that's what happened in chapter 28. He consults a medium. And what was Saul's desire?

What did he want? Well, he wanted to make contact with Samuel, dead Samuel, to make contact with Samuel from the grave or from wherever he was, whatever Saul thought about that.

Wanted to make contact with him. And he thought that he could get some comfort from Samuel as well as some advice, some guidance.

[9 : 43] And so in that chapter, if you will remember, he said to this, quote, spirit of Samuel, end quote, and we talked a little bit about whether or not this actually was Samuel or just a demon, you know, masquerading as Samuel or whatever the case may be.

But he said to this Samuel, I am deeply distressed for the Philistines make war against me and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore.

And all that was true. Neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore, I have called you from the grave, called you that you may reveal to me what I should do.

So what is he wanting? He's wanting, in the first place, comfort, kind of give him a peace, give him a confidence because he's fearful. And what else did he want?

He wanted guidance. What should I do? All right. That's what he asked Samuel for or whomever he was. But instead of comfort and instead of guidance from Samuel, what did he get?

[10:57] He got judgment, a word of judgment. He received a word from God directly and it was a word of judgment. And what was that word?

Chapter 28, verse 19, The Lord will deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And that's what we just, I just read about there in chapter 31.

And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. You're going to be dead. Come tomorrow, you'll be dead. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.

And all of that happened. That's exactly what happened. See, it was a divine inevitability. It was anything that was going to stop it. God said this is what would happen and it's going to happen and it did happen.

And, you know, sometimes we can doubt what God has said in his word. And there are people who will doubt that if God says thus and such, you do this, this is what will happen or, you know, this is what I'm going to do, you know, and so forth.

[12:03] Some people doubt that. Say, well, maybe that isn't exactly what's going to happen.

Maybe God is not going to do that. Well, listen, God's word cannot be broken. And Saul learned that firsthand.

All right, so we want to see then the key movements in this story. And it is a sad story. It kind of ends on a somewhat higher note. But it's a sad story and especially sad, I think, when it comes to Jonathan, right?

I mean, we actually were kind of conditioned not to really like Saul very much, you know. Not a lot about Saul that we liked but was likable.

But Jonathan, on the other hand, you know, he was a good guy. And so it's a sad story, sad ending to the book. But practically speaking, and this we need to understand, there can be no rival to the throne after the death of Saul.

That is, his sons could not have survived. Who's going to be the next king? It's going to be David. He's already been, at least privately, anointed to be the king, to replace Saul.

[13:22] It's all a part of God's decree, God's plan. And so in a sense, his sons had to be taken out of the way. David will be king and nothing is going to violate God's ordination.

All right, so now, there are four key movements in the story. And the first one is this, pertaining to Israel, the armies of Israel. There is, number one, the devastation of Israel's armies.

And it's pretty much complete. They are decimated, devastated. And so the narration there in chapter 31 begins, in verse 1 begins, now the Philistines fought against Israel.

And by the way, you know, the description of this is very short, very brief. I mean, there aren't any details, really very few details. And so it just begins, now the Philistines fought against Israel.

And as I mentioned earlier, this is a resuming of the story that the author had kind of put a pause on, kind of pressed the pause button, at the end of chapter 28. Because chapter 29 and 30 give us the account of David.

[14:36] And David aligning himself for becoming an ally with the Philistines. And you remember that story, even up to the point of David and his men marching in the parade, the battle parade, before the big battle.

And, of course, God gets him out of that. And then, chapter 30, we have David going back to Ziklag and delivering his people who've been imprisoned, taken captive by the Amalekites.

So you have that happening in chapters 29 and 30. And really the reason why the author puts a pause on things is to reveal to us how David, or really how God, made sure that David was not on the battlefield that day in chapter 31.

You see, either David would have been fighting for the Philistines, which could never be, or he would have gone to his own side with his own people and he would have been on the battlefield that day against the Philistines and very likely would have died.

I mean, it was a devastating time for the armies of Israel. And so God is sovereign. He's in charge of the affairs of mankind and God is working his plan and David will soon become king.

[16:02] And so he kind of took David and his men out of the way while this other is unfolding, coming to fruition as God had said it would. And so chapter 31 picks up where chapter 28 leaves off.

Saul has, if you can kind of picture the chronology here, Saul has just had his encounter with this witch of Endor, as some have called her, or so he thinks he's had an encounter with her.

In reality, Saul has just had a fateful encounter with Yahweh God himself, I think. And within a few short hours, after having lunch with this witch, that's kind of how the story ends, you know, Saul's about to faint on the floor, I think primarily because of what God told him through this spirit of Samuel, but also because the Bible says he was hungry, hadn't eaten for a long time, and so the witch has compassion and says, come have dinner with me.

And so they have dinner. And just a few short hours after that, Saul is going to be dead along with his three sons. So, three things happen in verse 1.

And you know how much of a slave to alliteration I am. I didn't even have to work on this one. It's right there in the passage. Three things happen. The Philistines fought, the Israelites fled, and the Israelites fell.

[17:31] Fought, fled, fell. It's all right there in verse 1. The Philistines fought against Israel. And by the way, it doesn't say anything about Israel fighting against the Philistines.

And we might be able to assume that they did. There was some battle, but primarily it was the Philistines fighting against the Israelites. And the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines and fell.

Fell, slain on Mount Gilboa. So fought, fled, fell. Pretty sad end to Saul's reign as king of Israel. I mean, you know that would be pretty bad on your resume.

Of course, he didn't need a resume. He's dead. All right, so it's all over for him. But what a tragic way to end his about 40-year reign, by the way.

Pretty long time as king of Israel. The Philistines absolutely routed the armies of Israel. In fact, I think from the narration, we have a sense that this battle did not take long.

[18:38] It was relatively quick. But the Philistines were not just content when they saw the Israelite armies fleeing, you know, retreating.

Most of the time, you know, when the enemy has had enough and they are fleeing for their lives, then, you know, they just kind of let them go.

They weren't content to do that. They were filled with a glorious purpose, at least glorious by their own definition. Because verse 2 tells us what this glorious purpose was.

Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. They followed hard. Now, here are the Israelite army and they're fleeing.

They're retreating. And it doesn't say here that they followed after them. But they followed hard after Saul and his sons.

[19:44] It says that very specifically. And so, then, the second thing I want you to notice, kind of the second movement in the story, that is the destruction of Israel's royal family.

You have the devastation of Israel's army and then the destruction of Israel's royal family. Their glorious purpose was the destruction of a dynastic family that had caused them so much grief over the past 40 years.

Their glorious purpose was to destroy the royal family, Saul and his sons. And in that, they were successful, weren't they? They accomplished that. though, kind of behind the scenes, we understand that they could not have been successful in that were it not for the decree of God.

God said this would happen. And, you know, the Philistines, they were just simply instruments in the sovereign hand of God. And so, verse 2 says, the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Nikeshua, Saul's sons.

killed Saul and his sons. Well, first they killed his three sons and apparently did that in pretty short order. But what about Saul?

[21:02] Well, Saul had a little bit more protection. I mean, after all, he is king. And he had his own soldiers, his own bodyguard, kind of a regiment of soldiers, and their sole task was to surround the king and protect the king on the battlefield and that's what they did.

And so, they were able to do that so efficiently that the enemy couldn't get through them and get into Saul to kill Saul. And so, what happened? Well, they used their archers.

You know, that's the only way they could get past Saul's personal soldiers and bodyguards. And so, verse 3 says, the battle became fierce against Saul.

He had his bodyguards. And since he was surrounded by them, then the archers hit him, the Bible says here, but they didn't kill him.

At least, they didn't kill him right away. He was severely wounded, critically wounded. It could be he was mortally wounded, though whatever happened wasn't sufficient to take his life, at least not right away.

[22 : 09] And so, verses 4 and 5, I think, are very interesting and probably the most controversial part, if you could use the word controversial, in this entire chapter.

This thing that Saul did to himself, taking the coward's way out. And so, verses 4 and 5, look at it again. Then Saul said to his armor bearer, so you understand, Saul's been pierced by an arrow. We don't know if he's mortally wounded. The word that, in the Hebrew text, really is probably best translated critically wounded. So it's a very severe wound.

And so he says to his armor bearer, draw your sword and thrust me through with it. He says, go ahead and finish me off. Lest, and this was his reasoning, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.

But his armor bearer would not. Why wouldn't he? Well, it says that he was greatly afraid. Afraid of what? Well, afraid of, you know, what would Israel do to me if I killed the king in whatever.

[23 : 24] So he was afraid. Therefore, Saul took a sword and he fell on it. He took his own life. Committed suicide. And when his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died with him, which would have been somewhat customary.

A sword bearer is going to stay with his captain to the very end. So it's not as unusual that he would take his own life, though still contrary to God's word, God's law.

Nowhere does God sanction suicide. And so I think we could say, although there are other opinions, we could say that Saul's life ended pretty much the way he lived it.

That is, as a coward, many, many indications throughout 1 Samuel that point to the cowardice of Saul, really from the very beginning when we're first introduced to him.

And, you know, he's about to be anointed king and they can't find him. He's hiding out somewhere. He's afraid. He's a coward. He's shy. And many other instances of that throughout his tenure as king.

[24 : 45] And so he died a coward, which is the way he lived. And not only that, but he died a lawbreaker. He broke God's law.

Thou shalt not commit murder. And that includes self-murder as well. And there are many other passages too that support. God is, God never sanctions.

It's against his will, against his law to take your own life. And I think it's fitting to note that the people of Israel somewhat emulated their king.

Because in verse 7 it says, when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, that is those who weren't engaged in the battle, they weren't out there fighting in the battle, but when they saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled.

And the Philistines came and dwelt in them. They kind of took over. So, you know, as the leader goes, so go the people.

[25 : 53] So go the people. Now, as we kind of go a little bit further here, half of what Saul feared did come to pass, didn't it? Remember what he said?

He said to his armor bearer, thrust me through with your sword. Why? I don't want these uncircumcised Philistines killing me, thrusting me through, and then abusing me, abusing my body. Well, that's exactly what happened. And so I want you to notice third, the desecration of Saul and his son's bodies. The desecration of their bodies.

So you have the devastation of Israel's armies, the destruction of the royal family, and now the desecration of Saul and his son's bodies.

And really, this is quite grisly. And it was probably worse than even words could describe. But, verse 8 says, so it happened the next day, this is the day after the battle, the day after Saul has been killed and his sons, the next day when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found

Saul and his three sons fallen, dead, on Mount Gilboa.

[27 : 11] And, you know, this, you can imagine this would be a common thing after the battle's over, to go out on the battlefield and pick up things of value, weaponry, armor, things like that, other things, money even, that soldiers would be carrying with them, gold, silver, whatever.

It would be very common, the victors would have the opportunity to confiscate anything of value that the fallen dead or dying, some of them may have still been dying, not yet dead, on the battlefield. And, and the fact that King Saul and his sons were still lying out there on the field testifies to the almost utter decimation of the army.

Because in normal conditions, the Israelite army would immediately go to the field and find their king and take his body off the field.

This would be the thing they would do. They wouldn't go out and perhaps, since they lost the battle, they wouldn't go out and, you know, try to gather up all the bodies of their people.

[28 : 19] But they would certainly go out and find their king and his sons and other leaders within Israel. They would take their bodies because they wouldn't want the enemy to come in and, you know, and violate them, which is, of course, what they did.

So, obviously, the army was so decimated there wasn't anybody left to go out there and those who were left who remained alive, they fled. And so, they find the bodies out there and they do unspeakable things to the body.

What did they do? Well, verse 9 says, they cut off his head, stripped off his armor. Verse 10 tells us they fastened, ultimately fastened his body, headless body, to the wall of Beth-shan.

Beth-shan, a little difficult historically, but Beth-shan had been under the rule of Israel. And whether this happened before this battle or whether this is one of the cities that fell as a result of the battle and all the Israelites fled and kind of turned over custody to the Philistines, whichever.

But it was now under the control of the Philistines and it was inside or very close to the territory of Israel. So this would make a big statement to Israel.

[29 : 46] They hung the bodies there on the wall for everyone to see. Now, I know in verses 9 and 10 it speaks as if this was something done just to Saul.

But when you get to verse 12 and the Jabesh Gileadites going and confiscating the body, verse 12, it says all four bodies.

They did this very likely to Saul and his three sons, cut their heads off and hung their bodies on the wall of the city. And what did they do with their stuff?

Well, they, you know, they took them as trophies and displayed them to their people. What did they do with Saul's head? Well, it doesn't so much tell us here, but if you look at another account of this same battle in 1 Chronicles chapter 10 and verse 10, it says there that they put Saul's head in the temple of Dagon.

Now, does that sound familiar? Do you remember something about the temple of Dagon? You remember what happened to the Philistines when, and to their god Dagon, when they capture the ark?

[30 : 57] Yeah, and they put the ark in the temple there beside Dagon, you know, and first they come back and Dagon's laying on his face there, you know, and then put him, had to prop him back up because that's what you have to do with false gods, you know, and next time he's, you know, fallen and he's broken, you know, well, things didn't go very well, did it, and other unspeakable things happened to the Philistines.

So, why would they do that? They would put the head of Saul because this represented a great victory, and so, very likely, they put Saul's head in the temple to somehow show the God of Israel that their God, Dagon, was stronger this time.

All right, so, the destruction, the desecration, rather, of the bodies of Saul and his sons, which, by the way, would have angered God, not just because Israel, you know, was his chosen people, is his chosen people, not just because of that, and that Saul was his anointed king, even though he had taken the kingdom from him.

It wasn't just because of who they desecrated, but the desecration of bodies is not something that God allows, God likes.

And in Amos, chapter 2, verse 1, and we don't need to spend a lot of time talking about, you know, the whole of this prophecy, but in Amos, chapter 2, verse 1, reveals that the desecrating of corpses, the corpses of one's enemies, was a reason, the reason why, one of the reasons why God's

judgment fell upon Moab, and you can go and read that passage.

[32 : 43] Here's a part of it. Thus says the Lord, and this is his judgment on the Moabites, he said, for three transgressions of Moab, the Moabites, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because he, the Moabites, burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime, desecrating the body of their enemy.

And to God, and I think, therefore, to mankind, the dead should be respected, even though, even if, they are your enemies.

Now, one more movement in the story, and the story will be over, and 1 Samuel will be done, and I'm not sure when we'll start on 2 Samuel, sometime after the new year.

And so, the story ends, as I mentioned earlier, on a somewhat positive note. And that is what I would call the dedication of the people of Jabesh Gilead.

The dedication. He's a dedicated people. Let me read again verses 11, 12, and 13. This is how the book ends. Now, when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and traveled all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Bethshan.

[34 : 15] And they came to Jabesh and burned them there. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh and fasted seven days.

Now, you're probably wondering, well, they burned their bodies. Well, they didn't burn them all the way through, just the skin. Probably very, very likely that there would be disease involved.

They'd been hanging on the wall. And so, they didn't burn their bones to lime. They buried those.

And so, this was not a desecration of their bodies as was the desecration of the Moabites that Amos addresses.

But this thing that the Gileadites did was very fitting. And it was fitting for them to do for Saul and for his sons.

And why is that? Well, the people of Jabesh-Gilead actually represent Saul's finest hour as a king. And you really have to go back in 1 Samuel to remember this.

[35 : 18] Really have to go all the way back to one of Saul's very first acts as a king. You have to go all the way back to chapter 11.

We're not going to go back there. But I'll remind you about it just briefly. 1 Samuel 11 tells us that Saul rescued the town of Jabesh-Gilead from the Ammonites.

And you can go back and read that story for yourself. But Saul, this was the first act as the new king of Israel. And he delivered them from humiliation and worse than that.

And so, of course, right, the people of Jabesh-Gilead never forgot that. And so, they probably, very likely, remained loyal to Saul all throughout his time as king.

They never, ever once forgot what King Saul had done for them. And it wasn't just Jabesh-Gilead that had respect for Saul, but even David.

[36 : 26] We'll get into this when we get to 2 Samuel, but later, in 2 Samuel, chapter 2, even David commended the Gileadites for their heroic act of loyalty to the king, to King Saul.

That's pretty much indicative of David's spirit when it came to Saul, even though Saul was his arch enemy. Even though Saul, on many occasions, attempted to take David's life, he still had respect and even a love for Saul, even though he was his enemy.

Thank you.