

Alas! how terrible are the ways of sin. How difficult it often is for the sinner to retrace his steps! And how terrible is the state of mind when one says, I must commit this sin or that—I have no alternative! How terrible was Saul's position when he said, "I must destroy myself." Truly sin is a hard, unfeeling master—"The way of transgressors is hard." He only that walketh uprightly walketh surely. "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, that walk in the law of the Lord."

The terrible nature of the defeat which the Israelites suffered on this day from the Philistines is apparent from what is said in the seventh verse—"And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were beyond Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook their cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them." The plain of Esdraelon is interrupted, and in a sense divided into two, by three hills—Tabor, Gilboa, and Little Hermon. On the eastern side of these hills the plain is continued on to the Jordan valley. The effect of the battle of Gilboa was that all the rich settlements in that part of the plain had to be forsaken by the Israelites and given up to the Philistines. More than that, the Jordan valley ceased to afford the protection which up to this time it had supplied against enemies from the west. For the most part, the trans-Jordanic tribes were exposed to quite a different set of enemies. It was the Syrians from the north, the Moabites and the Ammonites from the east, and the Midianites and Amalekites from the remoter deserts, that were usually the foes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh. But on this occasion a new foe assailed them. The Philistines