

The Life of David

Saul and the Medium of En-dor

1 Samuel 28:3-25

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Scripture

We concluded our study last time at 1 Samuel 28:2, where Achish decided that the Philistines were going to war against Israel, and he made David his bodyguard for life. Then, 1 Samuel 28:3 begins the incident about Saul and medium of En-dor. The geography indicates that the author of First Samuel had switched the chronology of what took place. Had the author continued chronologically, he would have written the final chapters in the following sequence: 27:1-28:2; 29:1-11; 28:3-25; 31:1-13; 30:1-30. It may be helpful to be aware of the author's overall structure for these final chapters of First Samuel. The structure is as follows:

- 27:1-28:2: David's dilemma—temporary faithlessness;
- 28:3-25: Saul's dilemma—permanent faithlessness;
- 29-30: David's deliverance—saved by the Philistines;
- 31: Saul's death—killed by the Philistines.¹

So, let's read about Saul and the medium of En-dor in 1 Samuel 28:3-25:

³Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. ⁴The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. ⁶And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. ⁷Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to

¹ This chronology is from Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 293–294.

him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor."

⁸ So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." ⁹ The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" ¹⁰ But Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." ¹¹ Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." ¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." ¹³ The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." ¹⁴ He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

¹⁵ Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." ¹⁶ And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷ The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸ Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. ¹⁹ Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines."

²⁰ Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no

strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night.²¹ And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, “Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me.²² Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way.”²³ He refused and said, “I will not eat.” But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed.²⁴ Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it,²⁵ and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night. (1 Samuel 28:3-25)

Introduction

I came to faith alone in Christ alone by God’s grace alone on Easter Sunday in 1976. My life was completely transformed, and I have lived my life in Christ ever since that day. In February 1977, I began my studies at the University of Cape Town. I did not have a church home during my first year as a student at UCT but by my second year I attended and soon became a member of St. James Church in Kenilworth, a suburb of Cape Town. I attended morning and evening worship services at St. James for seven years before coming to the United States to attend Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where I completed my theological studies.

The Rev. Frank Retief was my pastor at St. James Church. He planted the church a number of years before I started attending the church. St. James grew from a handful of people to over fifteen hundred people. Rev. Retief was a wonderful Bible teacher but a particularly gifted evangelist. The preaching on Sunday mornings was directed primarily to believers, whereas the preaching on Sunday evenings was directed primarily to unbelievers. Every Sunday

evening about fifteen to twenty people would respond in faith and repentance to the good news of the gospel. St. James was a wonderful church in which to grow as a young Christian.

One vivid memory I have of Rev. Retief is how often he would plead with those who had made a profession of faith to examine where they stood with the Lord. He would often say, "I know that in a congregation this size, indeed of almost any size, there are wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers. There are people who think they are Christians but really are not Christians. They have outwardly done those things which they think put them in a right relationship with God, but they do not. Please examine yourself. Put your trust in Jesus, and not in your own good works, your church attendance, your giving, your service, or your obedience to God's law. Trust only in Jesus and be saved."

I mention this because today's lesson is about Saul and the final hopelessness of a person who thought he was right with God but in fact he was not. When the people of Israel demanded a king, like all the other nations around them, God eventually had the Prophet Samuel anoint Saul as king over Israel. Early in his reign, Saul seemed to serve God faithfully. He defeated the enemies of Israel. He also upheld God's law that mediums and necromancers be cut off from the land (1 Samuel 28:3, 9). But then Saul's true colors showed through and he stopped obeying God wholeheartedly. He gave lip service to God but did not fully obey him. His heart was exposed as a person who was never truly transformed. He simply went through the motions so that he seemed to be sincere in his devotion to God. But, he really continually disobeyed God. Now, Saul was faced with a great crisis, and he panicked. He wanted comfort from God, but there was none.

This was a hard message to prepare. It was hard because it speaks to each one of us so clearly about making sure that we are in a right relationship with God, before it is too late.

Lesson

First Samuel 28:3-25 shows us the final hopelessness of a person who continually disobeys God.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Desperation (28:3-6)
2. The Defiance (28:7-14)
3. The Danger (28:15-19)
4. The Despair (28:20-25)

I. The Desperation (28:3-6)

First, let's look at the desperation of a person who continually disobeys God.

There were three reasons for Saul's desperation. First, Saul's desperation began when **the Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem** (28:4a), which is in the northern part of Israel. Apparently, the ground was flat in this region, which made the Philistines chariots much more formidable. **And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa** (28:4b). However, **when Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly** (28:5).

Second, Saul's desperation intensified for another reason: **Samuel had died** (28:3a). Actually, Samuel had died earlier (which was recorded in 1 Samuel 25:1). But, Saul had not had much contact with Samuel for a long time prior to Samuel's death, due to Saul's clear disobedience of the Lord's command and Samuel's announcement that the Lord had rejected Saul as king over Israel (1 Samuel 15:26). Now, however, Saul desperately wanted some spiritual guidance, but Samuel was no longer alive.

And third, Saul's desperation was because the Lord no longer answered his prayer. It was more than he could endure: **“And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him,**

either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets” (28:6). The silence of God was not new to Saul (cf. 14:37). But, now in his time of crisis, in his time of desperate need, the Lord did **not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets**. This meant that Saul was utterly and completely alone. He cried out to God in heaven, but God was silent. And the reason God was silent is because Saul had no personal relationship with God.

Saul’s desperation was because of imminent danger, inaccessible spiritual counsel, and the lack of a relationship with God.

The great Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in his autobiography, tells of a man who sent for him when he was on his deathbed. During the man’s lifetime, he had ridiculed Spurgeon and often denounced him as a hypocrite. But now, in desperation as he faced death, he called for Spurgeon. Spurgeon writes:

He had, when in health, wickedly refused Christ, yet in his death-agony he had superstitiously sent for me. Too late, he sighed for the ministry of reconciliation, and sought to enter in at the closed door, but he was not able. There was no space left him then for repentance, for he had wasted the opportunities which God had long granted to him.²

Oh, dear friend, do not wait until your own situation is desperate before you reach out to God.

II. The Defiance (28:7-14)

Second, note the defiance of a person who continually disobeys God.

Saul knew that God was opposed to mediums and necromancers (cf. Leviticus 20:6). In fact, earlier Saul had even “put the

² C. H. Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife and His Private Secretary, 1834–1854*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati; Chicago; St. Louis: Curts & Jennings, 1898), 373.

mediums and the necromancers out of the land” (28:3b). But Saul’s desperation led to defiance of God’s command. He **said to his servants, “Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.” And his servants said to him, “Behold, there is a medium at En-dor”** (28:7).

Now, En-dor was on the other side of the Philistine army. This shows Saul’s desperation and defiance of God’s command. He literally had to go around the Philistine army to get to En-dor. **So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, “Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you”** (28:8). But the woman knew about Saul’s earlier command to put the mediums and necromancers out of the land. She may have thought the person in front of her was laying a trap for her. Ironically, however, Saul invoked the Lord’s name to assure that she would be safe from punishment. **Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” He said, “Bring up Samuel for me”** (28:11). Then, to the woman’s great surprise, the spirit of Samuel appeared. She then realized that the person asking for Samuel was none other than Saul. Saul apparently could not see the spirit, and so he asked the woman to describe what she saw. When she described him as **“wrapped in a robe,” Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage** (28:14).

Exactly how do we explain what happened here? First, the Bible prohibits any communication with the dead (see Deuteronomy 18). Necromancy is an abomination in the eyes of God. Second, it really was the spirit of Samuel that appeared, because when he spoke to Saul, he said what one would expect Samuel to say. Third, the woman did not bring Samuel up from the dead. That is why **when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice** (28:12a). She was a spiritual charlatan and she was shocked to see him. And fourth, Samuel appeared not at the command of

the medium but rather by the will of God. God allowed Samuel to appear in order to tell Saul what was about to happen to him.

In his defiance against God, Saul was seeking guidance from the spirit of someone who had died. That is not the way to seek guidance. Friends, God has given us his Word. Let us go to the Lord and seek guidance from him in his Word. And the Spirit of God will lead us into the way of truth.

III. The Danger (28:15-19)

Third, let's observe the danger of a person who continually disobeys God.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" (28:15a). Saul told Samuel that he was in great distress because the Philistines were at war with him and **"God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams"** (28:15b). That is why he sought guidance from Samuel.

Samuel then spoke sobering words to Saul, **"Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?"** (28:16). Can any words be more dreadful to hear than **"the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy"**? Is there any danger greater than that? Saul did not realize that his continual disobedience to the Lord was the reason that the Lord had turned from him and become his enemy.

Samuel then went on to say that the Lord had removed the kingdom from Saul because of his disobedience. Moreover, the kingdom was going to be given David. In addition, the army of Israel would fall in battle to the Philistines. And finally, by the next day Saul and his sons would be dead (28:17-19).

This clearly was not what Saul wanted to hear. He was hoping to get some relief for his distress. Instead, Samuel announced that Saul would lose his kingdom, Saul's enemy David would be the

next king, the army of Israel would be defeated, and Saul and his sons would die within twenty-four hours.

When I was preparing this sermon, I was going to say that very few people have such a personal warning of their danger because of their continual disobedience. But, in fact, the Bible is full of warnings of the danger that will be faced by those who do not repent of their continual disobedience against God. For example:

- 2 Corinthians 5:10: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.
- Hebrews 9:27: And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.
- 2 Peter 2:9: Then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.

Friends, are you in danger of being condemned by God on the day of judgment? Are you going through the outward motions of thinking you are right with God, when in fact you are in danger of losing your soul?

IV. The Despair (28:20-25)

And fourth, let's see the despair of a person who continually disobeys God.

After he heard Samuel's words, **Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night** (28:20). Saul was terrified by what he had just heard. The medium tried to persuade Saul to eat something. But, Saul refused. Then Saul's two servants and the woman together urged him to eat, and he agreed to do so. The woman quickly killed a fattened calf and made some bread for Saul and his

men to eat (28:21-25a). **Then they rose and went away that night** (28:25b).

The *Gospel Transformation Bible* notes, “How far Saul has fallen! His royal career began with a special meal prepared by Samuel, after which Saul went forth to become king (9:19, 24; 10:1). Now he eats his last meal, prepared by a witch, and goes forth to certain death (28:19, 24–25).”³

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of Saul and the medium of En-dor as set forth in 1 Samuel 28:3-25, I urge you to examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.

Saul continually disobeyed God. He had gone through the outward motions of wanting to look as if he had a right relationship with God, but his heart was far from God. In fact, the Lord had turned from Saul and become his enemy.

My first closing application is addressed to every one of us. It is found in the words of 2 Corinthians 13:5: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!” Your hope and my hope are found only in Jesus Christ. Make sure that you have a living faith. Make sure that you are in Christ.

And my second closing application is addressed to you who may not know where you stand with God. You don’t have to be cut off from God. You don’t have to spend eternity in hell. Turn to God by believing that Jesus paid the penalty for all your sin. And then repent of your sin, and sin no more. Then, you too will have Jesus Christ in you! Amen.

³ V. Philips Long, “1-2 Samuel,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible: English Standard Version*, ed. Bryan Chapell and Dane Ortlund (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 379.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org