

1 Samuel 28-29 – “When Leaders Lose Their Way”

1. Saul’s Desperate Detour – 28:1-7

28:1-2 - *Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, “You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men.”² So David said to Achish, “Surely you know what your servant can do.” And Achish said to David, “Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever.”*

It’s an interesting time in Israel’s history. The king they wanted (Saul) is washed up and not serving the people as he should. Their true hero (David) has put himself in a precarious position pretending to work for the enemy.

The Philistines were a formidable enemy, and they’re gathering their armies to go up against Israel and were posing quite a fearful force. Plus, they feel they have David, the giant killer, on their side.

- Achish was a Philistine king, the king of Gath (one of their 5 chief cities). He’s still probably a little leery of David actually being on their side. So he comes to David to say, *you and your men are expected to go out and fight with us against Israel.*
- David’s response to Achish in vs. 2 seemed a little ambiguous: ***surely, you know what your servant can do.*** It’s kind of like this can be interpreted in a couple different ways. 1) You know what I can do to be of help to you, or 2) You know what I can do in turning against you. It’s almost like David was leaving room for him to defect against the Philistines.
- Nevertheless, Achish seemed convinced of David’s loyalty and made him his bodyguard for life.
- This puts David in a real bind. Because he had the chance to take Saul’s life twice before, but he wouldn’t touch the Lord’s anointed. What’s going to happen if he’s put in that position in battle as an ally with the Philistines? How will he handle things then. I’m sure he’s hoping that God will take care of that. Needless to say, when we veer away from trusting God and put our own plans into action, we’ll often put ourselves in very compromising predicaments.

28:3-6 - *Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.⁴ Then the Philistines gathered together, and*

came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. ⁵ When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. ⁶ And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.

Samuel's death was already mentioned back in 1 Samuel 25:1, but we're reminded of it again here because it paints the contrast of life in Israel with a godly leader versus how things are now with an ungodly leader. There's been a spiritual vacuum and Saul is going to walk in further disobedience to the Lord.

Now it seems that after Samuel's death, Saul attempted to bring some reforms by putting the ***mediums and the spiritists out of the land***. This was already clearly commanded in God's Word.

Exodus 22:18, *"You shall not permit a sorceress to live."*

Leviticus 19:31, *"Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God."*

Leviticus 20:27, *"A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.' ""*

Deuteronomy 18:10–11, *"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, ¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead."*

The fact that Saul previously took this action is not listed here to show how righteous Saul was, but what a hypocrite he is. He's on one hand getting rid of these things (perhaps in an attempt to gain some kind of favour with God), but on the other hand, he's going to be seeking help from them. It goes to show how far Saul has fallen and how far removed he is from a right relationship with God.

Saul sees the force coming against him with the Philistines. They're moving forward up north [show map]. They're looking to try and conquer the whole land. And Saul is freaking out, he's terrified. He's looking for any kind of help he can get. As the pressure mounted against him ***his heart trembled greatly***. When Saul should have been focused on wiping out the Philistines, he was more concerned with wiping out David. His energy was spent on the wrong enemy. This was wasted time, and it allowed the real enemy to take further ground

causing Saul to be all the more weakened and fearful when it was time to engage in battle.

- Be careful that this doesn't happen to you. It happens when we allow ourselves to get caught up in trivial arguments or battles with one another. We can so easily focus on the wrong thing, the wrong person, the wrong battle and in so doing, fall prey to the enemies tactics to our own detriment and hurt.

When ***Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him***. This is a tragic place to be. **Psalm 145:18**, "*The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, To all who call upon Him in truth.*" And that's the key – to all who call upon the Lord in truth and in honesty. Meaning we have no hidden agendas. Saul was all about himself. He wasn't interested in honoring the Lord. It wasn't that the Lord had rejected Saul, it was that Saul had already rejected the Lord.

- When we walk in disobedience and sin, we're not cut off from the Lord, but our relationship is hindered to where we don't hear Him as readily or clearly as when we are just abiding in Him. Draw near to the Lord and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). It's that place where you can enjoy that intimate fellowship and know His voice.

28:7 - *Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor."*

It's interesting that Saul really just needed to repent and get things right with the Lord. He's inquiring of the Lord, but he's not doing so in a way where he's interested in following the Lord. It's all about self-preservation for Saul at this time.

So instead of repenting and making things right in his relationship with the Lord, he just turns to another source of help – a very bad and wrong source for help. He inquires of a medium.

- A medium was a "person who acts as a channel of communication between human beings and the spirit world."¹
- They were engaged in witchcraft and sorcery.

This is not what Saul should have been entertaining. Notice what we read in 1 Chronicles regarding the reason for Saul's eventual demise:

¹ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). Medium. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1431). Baker Book House.
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- **1 Chronicles 10:13–14**, *"So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance. ¹⁴ But he did not inquire of the Lord; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."*
- Saul was too often doing his own thing and not inquiring of the Lord. Even when God was guiding him and giving direction, Saul wasn't obeying.

And now with word that there's a medium at En Dor, Saul is ready to go visit her. Only to do so, he's got to move right alongside the enemy camp of the Philistines [show map]. Again, when you choose your own way instead of the Lord's way, you'll put yourself in unnecessary danger.

2. Saul's Dangerous Dialogue – 28:8-19

28:8-14 - ***So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a séance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you."** ⁹ Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" ¹⁰ And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "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?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." ¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!" ¹³ And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." ¹⁴ So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down.*

We have a very interesting scene unfolding here before us.

First of all, look at the imagery. Saul is disguising himself, they're going at night. God wants us to walk in freedom and walk in light. Everything is completely off from what God would have for Saul if he had simply walked faithfully with the Lord.

Why is Saul disguising himself? There're probably a couple reasons. It's to disguise himself from the Philistines. As he's having to traverse close to enemy camp, he doesn't want to be spotted and picked off. But it's also because he doesn't want the medium to recognize him and run away. He's made this an illegal practice punishable by death. Yet he's coming to her and wants to get some help. So he can't let her know who he is or else she's going to run away to protect her life. And he'll be left without any help.

“There is a little known Jewish tradition that says when Saul walked up to the witch of En Dor she looked at him with a silly grin. He threatened her, “Woman wipe that smile off your face.” When she refused Saul slapped the woman. Later he was arrested, and charged with: “Striking a Happy Medium”.” (S. Adams)

Just a joke. Saul actually promises to protect her life and she's ready to jump back into this illegal business. She asks him who he wants to see. He says he wants to see Samuel, and she does her thing and suddenly Samuel is there. But notice her reaction, she screams; she's freaked out herself. She should be used to this sort of stuff, but something is different now.

Then she suddenly knows that it's Saul requesting this. What is going on here??

This is certainly a strange occurrence we have before us, one that has caused controversy and differing views as to what's taking place. Some popular views as to what's happening here are:

1. Some say that this medium was simply tricking Saul into thinking that Samuel was there. But this doesn't explain why she was shocked nor that Samuel spoke to Saul
2. Some say that this was a demonic impersonation of Samuel. But the message given to Saul by Samuel was obviously of the Lord.
3. That Saul was hallucinating the vision. This was part of his mental breakdown. But again, the medium was witness to these things along with Saul.
4. My understanding and belief is that this was a genuine appearance of Samuel from the grave. This was simply the plan of God, as only He holds the keys to life and death. God's purpose was to confirm to Saul the judgment that was against him for his disobedience.

It would seem that most times those that were operating in the spiritual realm relied on tricks or deception. It happens today too. Psychics and such can put on

a good show as though they are hearing from the dead, when it's simply cleverly put suggestions or parlor tricks being used.

- Having said that, there is a very real side to the spiritual realm. It's not that there's communication with the dead so much, but rather communication with the demonic realm.
- Illustration of confronting the head witch of Salem, Massachusetts.

Somehow through this experience the woman understood that it was Saul that was making this request. How did she recognize him all of a sudden? We're not sure. Some suggest that Samuel may have called out to him. Either way, Saul reassures her that nothing will happen to her.

...I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth...

Everyone who died prior to the death and resurrection of Jesus went to Hades. This was a place thought to be in the center of the earth. It was a place with 2 compartments: Abraham's bosom and a place of torment; as seen in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16). Those in Abraham's bosom were awaiting the promises of God, and as Jesus died and rose again, He led captives free (Ephesians 4:9). This is when I believe those in Abraham's bosom went home to be with the Lord. Some question as to why Samuel appeared in this old man state. I think it's because he had not yet received a glorified body, which would be waiting for him after the work of Christ was complete.

Then we see the confrontation unfold between Samuel and Saul.

28:15 - Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

Notice, Samuel is disturbed. In other words, he's been at rest. He's been in this place of comfort in Sheol and has to come back to this world because Saul has called for him. But again, this is God's doing and it's God's way of pronouncing this final judgment on Saul.

Saul is desperate here. He's stressed out over the Philistine threat that's intensifying. He no longer is hearing from God, so he's seeking these forbidden means. But again, this is not God deciding to ignore Saul. Saul is the one who

has driven away the very means of divine communication he once possessed and arguably never used well. Saul wanted God’s Word, but had never been in the habit of following God’s Word. Yet, if he hasn’t followed God’s Word, why would he follow a dead man’s word?

So Samuel brings the verdict of judgment down on Saul.

28:16-19 - *Then Samuel said: “So why do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? ¹⁷ And the Lord has done for Himself 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 nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. ¹⁹ Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”*

Samuel is asking why Saul would ask him for advice. Samuel isn’t going to share anything different than what God has already shared. And Samuel basically gives Saul a confirmation of what God has already said and shares a few new insights for Saul.

““Let me get this straight,” Samuel fires at Saul. “God has turned from you and become your enemy. But rather than reconciling with Him, you’re looking for favors from me?” Then Samuel gives Saul a promise no one ever wants to hear from a ghost: “I’ll be seeing you and your kids real soon” (v. 19). I doubt this is how Saul envisioned this scenario playing out.” ²

Samuel announced:

1. Political Judgment – vs. 17-18. The kingdom would be taken from Saul and would no longer remain in his family. This would happen because he did not obey the voice of the Lord in dealing with the Amalekites.
2. Military Judgment – vs. 19. The whole army of Israel would be delivered into the hand of the Philistines.
3. Personal Judgment – vs. 19. Saul and his sons would die in battle and by tomorrow, they’ll be with Samuel in the grave.

² Greear, J. D., & Thomas, H. A. (2016). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 170). Holman Reference.

Notice Samuel brought up the situation when Saul spared king Agag of the Amalekites and their choice livestock, when Saul was to destroy it all. And the word said in that situation that, *rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...* (1 Sam 15:23). And now this rebellion is leading him into witchcraft. And it's this witchcraft that stands as part of the reason for his demise:

- **1 Chronicles 10:13**, *"So Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance."*

3. Saul's Disheartening Development – 28:20-25

28:20-25 - *Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night. ²¹ And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. ²² Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." ²³ But he refused and said, "I will not eat." So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. ²⁴ Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. ²⁵ So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.*

Saul has already been in a weakened state, but after hearing this pronouncement of judgment, whatever strength he did have was completely gone.

- Living a life going against God's Word certainly is taxing. It will zap you of strength and peace.

So this woman wants to give him some food and get him on his way. She doesn't want this guy moping about around her that's for sure.

This becomes like Saul's last meal on death row. We'll see the fulfillment of this prophetic judgment next time in Chapter 31.

4. David's Dubious Dilemma – 29:1-11

29:1-5 - *Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel. ² And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by hundreds and by thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish. ³ Then the princes of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?” And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me.” ⁴ But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, “Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men? ⁵ Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands’?”*

As the Philistines muster for battle, David who's taking up the rear as Achish's bodyguard, gets questioned by the other Philistine princes.

- Remember there's the 5 chief cities of the Philistines (Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath). Each city had a prince or king over it. Achish was ruling over Gath. But each prince served together and formed a Philistine coalition out of these city states.

So these princes are watching David and they're thinking, *this guy may easily turn on us in battle. Why are we trusting this Israelite? We've already sang those hit songs of his – David has slain his ten thousands.*

So they're all suspicious of David and trying to get Achish to cut him loose.

29:6-8 - *Then Achish called David and said to him, “Surely, as the Lord lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army is good in my sight. For to this day I have not found evil in you since the day of your coming to me. Nevertheless the lords do not favor you. ⁷ Therefore return now, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” ⁸ So David said to Achish, “But what have I done? And to this day what have you found in your servant as long*

as I have been with you, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”

Achish calls David aside to let him know the Philistine lords aren't comfortable with David and his men joining with them in battle. Even though Achish has found David to be trustworthy, he gives him an out and lets him depart in peace.

- This was David's opportunity to go. He's not where he should be, he's put himself in a very compromising position. Yet he's arguing with Achish to stick around. David should have been running to get out of there.

Now what's interesting is that David said to Achish, ***and to this day what have you found in your servant as long as I have been with you, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?***

Now David has said to Saul previously that he is the king. He was the Lord's anointed that he wouldn't touch. But now David is saying that he wants to go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king. Which king is he speaking of?? Achish or Saul? Again, David is putting on a complete charade with his partnership with the Philistines. And he's been convincing. Either Achish is just really gullible, or David is a really good actor, as seems evident from Achish's response.

29:9-11 - Then Achish answered and said to David, “I know that you are as good in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless the princes of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’¹⁰ Now therefore, rise early in the morning with your master's servants who have come with you. And as soon as you are up early in the morning and have light, depart.”¹¹ So David and his men rose early to depart in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

David will be given the opportunity to head back down to Ziklag with his men. Only he's going to find out that walking in a compromising way rarely ends well. Ziklag has been raided by the Amalekites and David's men are ready to turn on him now. David has been deceptive and he's reaping what he has sown.

It's a lesson for all of us throughout these chapters that walking in obedience to the Lord and staying in close communion with Him always leads to a life of blessing and peace. The question isn't whether God is speaking – the question is whether we're positioned to hear Him and willing to obey what He's already said.

Points to Ponder:

1. When God seems silent in your life, what is your first response?
 - Instead of seeking alternative sources of guidance, examine if there are areas of disobedience that may be hindering your relationship with God.
2. Are you currently in any compromising positions that could force you to make decisions based on your circumstances rather than faith?
 - Like David with the Philistines, evaluate your alliances and commitments to ensure they align with your faith.
3. What "forbidden sources" are you tempted to consult when God's guidance seems delayed?
 - Social media opinions, ungodly counsel, or worldly wisdom often become our "mediums" when we're not hearing from God clearly.