

1 Samuel 28 “The Rise of David, and the Decline of Saul”[\[1\]](#)

Series: “*Learning to Wait on God: The Life of David Before He Became King*”

1 Samuel 16-31

Last week we saw David in the valley. He struggled in 1 Samuel 27—specifically, he doubted the promise of God, he feared, and he left the Promised Land. He went to Achish and settled in the land of the Philistines, where he remained for 16 months. He may have felt forgotten by God, but God had not forgotten him.

Key: God can use unusual means to accomplish His purposes.

We see this in 1 Samuel 28. The sovereign Lord used a pagan king and a witch (though unsuspecting) to carry out His plan for His chosen people. In this chapter we see the beginning rise of David, and the further decline of Saul.

Big Idea of 1 Samuel 28: God is at work on two fronts, in David’s rise and in Saul’s decline...

I. The Rise of David (1-2)

The first two verses deal with David, the rest of the chapter with Saul.

Q: Review--What's David been doing for the past 16 months?

Q: What happened in v 1?

A. Achish threatened Israel (1a).

B. Achish recruited David (1b-2).

Q: How did David respond? V 2

Q: What does Achish's response indicate about David's reputation? He was trustworthy. Notice that whatever David touches "turns to gold"! Even while in hiding, God's blessing is apparent. The opposite was true of Saul.

II. The Decline of Saul (3-25)

Notice four evidences of the downward decline in Saul's life here in ch 28.

A. Saul's fear (3-6)

Q: Why was Saul afraid? Three reasons...

1. *Samuel was dead (3).*

Q: Why is that significant? Samuel was one of the only godly influences in Saul's life.

Q: What interesting piece of information are we given in v 3? Mediums put out...

2. *The Philistines were about to attack (4-5).*

Q: Where? Shunem (see map)

Q: What happened to Saul when he saw the Philistines? V 5 "his heart greatly trembled"

Q: But Saul had an even bigger cause for fear. What was it?

3. *The LORD was silent (6).*

Q: Notice--how did the Lord speak to His people in Saul's day? Dreams, Urim, prophets

Discuss: How does He speak to us today? See 2 Pet 1:19-21 "We have a more certain word"

B. Saul's folly (7-14)

Q: Since God was silent, what recourse did Saul take? V 7

1. *He sought a medium (7).*

A "medium" is a person who claims to communicate with the dead. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, this Hebrew word is translated "ghost, spirit, spirit of the dead, necromancer, and wizard" (TWOT, 16). Here it refers to a woman who practiced sorcery.

Key: Man has always had a fascination with knowing the future. In OT days, some occultists claimed to predict the future by reading cloud formations, examining livers, and consulting ghosts. God commanded His people to stay away from occultists (Lev 19:31). The punishment for going to a medium was death by stoning (Lev 20:27).

2. *He disguised himself and went to the medium (8).*

Q: What was his request? V 8

3. *He asked to see Samuel (9).*

Q: How did Saul seek to calm the woman's fear? V 10...

4. *He swore by the Lord to justify necromancy (10).*

Discuss: Saul violated the 3rd commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of God in vain." How so? Even though he didn't "swear", he used God's Name in a flippant, irreverent way. How do we do the same?

Q: What counsel did Saul give the woman in v 13? "Don't be afraid." Notice...

5. *He wasn't afraid when he should have been (13).*

Q: What's going on here?! Is it possible to communicate with the dead?

Notice something very important. How did the woman respond when she saw Samuel?

V 12--She was petrified! She was surprised.

Comment in Bible Knowledge Commentary, "Drawing on the demonic powers of necromancy (Deut. 18:10-11), she called up the apparition of Samuel. So startled was she by Samuel's appearance that she immediately realized that the work was of God and not herself and that her disguised nocturnal visitor was King Saul. This implies that she did not really expect to raise up Samuel but only a satanic imitation. After she described the vision as a spirit (־ÓIÙhîm, "mighty one") and as an old man clad in a robe . . . Saul knew it was Samuel. That Samuel's appearance, even in visionary form, was not the expected result clearly teaches that necromancers or mediums have no real power over the deceased, especially the righteous, but can only produce counterfeits. Samuel's appearance here is explained by the intervention of the Lord who graciously permitted Saul one last encounter with the prophet whom he had first sought so long ago in pursuit of his father's lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9:6-9)."

Isaiah discredits the "necromancers" in his day and implies that they used ventriloquism to fool people (Isa 8:19--TWOT).

C. Saul's finding (15-19)

Watch the dialogue...

1. *Samuel: "Why have you disturbed me?" (15)*

Q: What answer did Saul give? V 15

2. *Saul: "I'm in trouble, and God is silent!" (15b)*

It's ironic that here we see Saul begging for advice from a man whose counsel he rejected time after time when he was alive!

Discuss: What does this teach us about Saul? About human nature?

3. *Samuel: "Why do you trouble me now? It's too late..." (16-19)*

Key: Notice the repetition of the "Lord" in Samuel's response...

The Lord has departed from you

The Lord is your enemy.

The Lord has done what He predicted through me.

The Lord has torn the kingdom from you, and given it to David.

The Lord will hand Israel over to the Philistines tomorrow.

You and your sons will die tomorrow.

For a sober commentary on Saul, see 1 Chronicles 10:13, "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance..."

D. Saul's fright (20-25)

1. *He was filled with fear (20).*
2. *He lost his strength (20).*
3. *He initially refused to eat (23)*
4. *He finally ate and left that night (25).*

As Dale Ralph Davis reminds us, there was another who ate a fine meal and then went out into the darkness of night. Remember Judas in John 13:30? Beloved, there is nothing worse than being cut off from God.

Lessons:

1. *God can use unusual means to accomplish His purposes in our lives.*

Think of how God brought salvation to the world, how He worked through a series of ‘unusual means’ to provide redemption for His people. He sent His Son into a peasant home, who then lived in obscurity for 30 years. In Jesus’ public ministry the religious leaders rejected and opposed him, and eventually called for His crucifixion. The Romans unjustly and brutally nailed Him to a cross. Yet God worked through that injustice to provide an atonement for sin. Three days later He raised His Son from the dead, and today offers forgiveness and eternal life to undeserving sinners like us!

Think of an example in your own life how God used unusual means to accomplish His purposes...

2. *It's possible to come to God for wrong reasons. Saul did. He wanted to use God to accomplish His own self-centered agenda.*

Prayer is good, but we must always check our motive. Why are we praying? What are we really wanting from God, for Him to work in ways that will magnify Himself *or* for Him to do what we want?

3. *The time to get right with God is now, not later. Saul learned the hard way.*

[\[1\]](#) These are unedited teaching notes used initially for a Wednesday evening Bible study at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . They are provided for your edification as you personally study God’s life-changing Word. Pastor Brad Brandt