



August 31, 2025
“The Rise and Fall of a King”
1 Samuel 28,30,31
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Good morning. Please open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 28.

Where do you go when you are afraid? When you get terrified, full of terror—when the lights of life and hope go out—where do you go? It happens to each of us; life is difficult, life is surprising and there are plenty of things to be afraid of—but what do you do, where do you go, to whom do you find help?

Studying 1 Samuel these past many months has allowed us to look in on many lives and hear how they responded to the challenges of life. We’ve met Hannah and her prayer in chapter 2 has been an outline for us—we met Eli and his wicked sons, Samuel the young boy who became the prophet/priest...Saul, David, Jonathan, Nabal and Abigail, all responding to a crisis—some found strength in the Lord, while others not so much.

Where do you go when you are afraid? Where do you find strength? Chapters 28 and 30 contain parallel stories of Saul and David each facing their own crisis but both responding entirely differently. We’re watching the rise and fall of a king—the rise of David and the fall of Saul happening at the same time.

Recap: David is rejected in Israel. Saul was hunting him, so David fled to the Philistines (the enemy), but now they have rejected him. We have a jealous, paranoid king and a wandering, nomadic king-in-waiting. We have the Philistines who continue to harass Israel, and they are mounting a major military offensive against Israel. The Philistines draw up their battle lines and Israel’s armies (led by Saul) come out to meet them. Meanwhile, David and his men are about 100 miles to the south, returning to their home in Ziklag. It takes David and his men 3 days to get there.

Scene 1—The Crisis

Saul: While he is travelling to Ziklag, the Philistines gather and march out to war against Saul and the Israelites and in chapter 28:5 we read: “When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.”

David’s fear:

At the same time, David and his men are approaching Ziklag and they see the smoke rising in the distance—while they were away, Amalekites came in a raid, captured all the women and children and put the city to the fire.

“David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep...David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit...” (1 Sam.30:4,6).

Both at the same time are facing a massive crisis and are about to come undone.

When someone hits a point like this, what do they do? Where do they go? We are quick to deceive ourselves into thinking that we'll instinctively know the right thing to do as though we will just pull it out of our hats.

I recall as a kid thinking that if I was ever jumped by thugs, I would be able to find a way to use karate and protect myself. I believed that if the heat was really on me, I could do a flip and a drop kick.

There are many today that think they can live their lives any way they want and when the crucibles of life come, they can simply lean on God at that point. "Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts." Saul is a tragic example of someone who hardened his heart towards God earlier in his life and kept that as a pattern throughout.

Scene 2—Saul's Response

Saul's story is tragic—when he faced this fear, what did he do? Vs. 6 "He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets." Then in verse 15 he clarifies his spiritual predicament: **"I am in great distress, the Philistines are fighting against me and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams."** Is that not perhaps one of the saddest verses of all the Bible? In his moment of despair, he believes God has turned away from him.

It is as Paul describes our condition in Ephesians 2:12: "having no hope and without God in the world." What a point of despair.

What does Saul do? It says he goes to a medium, to a witch, to someone who dabbles in the occult (which was forbidden in Israel—by his own decree, by the way!)

The story of Saul with the witch of Endor is filled with curiosity and silence. Saul has to disguise himself, taking off his royal robes (symbolic!) and he goes at night—across enemy lines to Endor—where she is. He is desperate, needs to know how things will work out and doesn't care how he gets the information. She senses a trap but then he promises on oath—that in the name of the Lord God she won't be punished. Ironical that he would invoke the name of God to protect a practice that God forbade...it just shows how far he has fallen spiritually, morally. Desperation often reveals what is inside.

When he arrives, he demands that she calls up a dead man—Samuel, of all people.

What are we to make of this? On the one hand, Saul has hit his rock bottom, but he is simply (in my opinion) acting out his natural instincts. Anything supernatural exists for his own welfare and advancing his agenda and ideas.

What happens next is nearly as surprising as the fact that he did this. The surprise is that Samuel actually comes up from the dead and talks with Saul; here we need to curb our curiosity. The Bible is silent on whether she actually did this—the fact that the woman screams when Samuel comes up tells me that she was likely a fake or in that moment she realized what was going on and that Saul was there to catch her.

But the primary focus of this chapter is what Samuel says to Saul— “Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has turned away from you and become your enemy?” In other words, why is the Lord quiet to Saul? **“The Lord had gone quiet to Saul because there was nothing left to say.”**

Of course, Saul fails to mention that he killed all the priests earlier. He fails to mention that he hasn't repented, doesn't call on the Lord and has a pattern of being more interested in his own glory and reputation than that of the Lord's. Why has the Lord turned away? There was nothing left to say—Saul just didn't like what God originally told him. Isn't that our culture today? People do not like to hear from the Bible on issues of sexuality, truth and purpose...so they turn away and wonder why God doesn't listen.

Samuel tells him that everything that is happening is just as it has been told to him and that by the end of the next day Saul and his sons will be dead.

Saul is devastated, discouraged and defeated; he is prostrate on the floor and refuses to be comforted. We hear an echo of Hannah's prayer from chapter 2, **“The Lord will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness.”** His last meal alive was prepared by a witch.

For those of you who are fascinated by this part of the story, let me ask you: did it help him? No, it made things worse. He refused to believe the Lord right up to the end.

Scene 3—David's response (this is happening at the same time)

David is back in Ziklag. Mutiny is about to blow up in David's face (around the same time as Saul is seeing the Philistines.) It says in **30:6 “He strengthened himself in the Lord.”**

Here we go. Here we have David's regular pattern—we see it in the Psalms—**Psalm 62 “My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation he is my fortress, I will never be shaken...Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.”** or from **Psalm 34:8 “Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him.”**

This is David's pattern: finding strength in the Lord. Where was his strength when he fought Goliath? Was it in the rocks or his own power? No, it was in the name of the Lord! Jesus, as was his custom, frequently went away to pray to find strength in the Lord God. “David's genius was his spiritual resilience.” “David refused to interpret

obstacles as signs of God's opposition to him; rather they provided opportunities to see what he would do in answer to the prayer of his servant."

What happens next flows quickly. Once you know the right thing, it clicks. David calls the priest (the last one!) and inquires of the Lord for direction (Saul goes to a witch, David goes to the priest.) But before David figured out what he needed to do, he sought out who he should be with—knowing the right thing to do was secondary. What was primary was to WHOM he went and found strength. That is a key distinction!

Well, David goes and rescues their wives and children—everyone is accounted for, not one is lost. David is a unifying character in chapter 30, rallying the troops from mutiny and disunity to clarity, focus and integrity.

They gather such plunder that he has piles to share—so his chapter ends with him generously giving to his friends in Israel.

Scene 4—Saul's Death

Now we come to the last chapter of 1 Samuel, and it reads soberly and quickly. Saul and his army engage in battle, and it goes very badly. He and his sons and men retreat up onto the hill of Mount Gilboa, but there his sons are killed, including Jonathan; Saul is fatally wounded from the archers but is not dead. It is a pitiful final scene. So Saul turns to his armour bearer, his closest ally, and says, 'Kill me...finish me off.' But he refuses, so Saul falls on his own sword and dies. vs 6 **"So Saul and his three sons and his armour bearer and all his men died together that same day."**

Word spreads among the Philistines that Saul is dead; his armour is placed in the temple of their gods and 'good news' is spread across the land. His body and the body of his sons are pinned to a wall as 'trophies.' This is a Philistine gospel: that the God of Israel has been defeated. It's not unlike 1 Samuel 4, when Eli and his sons die and the ark is captured by the Philistines—they cheer the good news of their victory.

The story ends on a bitter note of justice: the men of Jabed Gilead come and rescue Saul and his sons' bodies and bury their remains under a tamarisk tree.

1 Samuel began with a very ordinary family, a nobody from nowhere in a time of chaos and disorder. The people want an earthly king, one just like all the other nations, so Saul is given to them—his name literally means, 'the one asked for.' They reject God as their king, but God does not abandon them; rather, he gives them what they ask for.

They become like the nations around them...but!

Instead, God in his forbearance and kindness was patiently at work through 1 Samuel. God's word begins to spread across the land, quietly and faithfully taught through Samuel. When Saul blunders, God raises up an unknown young shepherd boy: another nobody from nowhere to do something incredible.

He was a man after God's own heart; he found refuge in God even when the lights went out, for he knew the Lord and trusted in Him more than trusting in his circumstances. Was he afraid? Yes, and often—but his fear drove him back to the Lord, not away from him. That is the key difference between Saul and David. Saul had all the outward appearances, but his heart was far from the Lord.

Where is your heart today? Have you heard what God wants of you and expects of you, but you won't obey? Are you facing a crisis, a season of fearful expectations? Where are you tempted to turn to find strength? Your money, your reputation, your education, your plans? Do you turn to the Lord, embrace his promises and words? **"As a man is in the presence of his God so is he."**

About a thousand years after this event, Jesus climbed the Mount of Olives to pray. To find strength in God his Father on the night he would be betrayed, condemned and be crucified. He knew this was all coming, yet he prayed. Satan had earlier tempted Jesus to reject God's plans (like Israel did) and then he would inherit all the kingdoms of the world. But Jesus would not bow to that, but chose a life of poverty, obscurity; he was a nobody from nowhere (or so people thought.)

But Jesus came from the line of David, from Bethlehem. He came, given as the 'Messiah,' the one asked for—but this time God gave them what they needed, not what they wanted: A saviour who would die, but his death would be a victory, a conquering of evil, sin and death. Where Saul turned to darkness for help, Jesus crushed it under his feet.

There is that curious moment when Saul says, "I called out to the Lord God but he does not respond." Jesus also called out to God in his time of need, on the cross with his enemies surrounding him and all his friends gone—he cried out, 'My God, my God why have you forsaken me?' It wasn't because Jesus had disobeyed; it was because in that moment, Jesus became sin. He took on himself all the disobedience of the Sauls and Davids of our world. He took on the sins of men like Saul, a stained and ruined heart...so that people with no hope could come to God. **Ephesians 2:11-13**

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

Saul's one mistake was that he did not realize the love of God that was for him—if he had, that was where he would have found his strength, as David did. That was where Jesus went as well. Even in the silence, Jesus said, 'Father, I commit my spirit into your hands.' Even in death, even in darkness—his comfort, his strength was in the Lord God.

His mercy is more, stronger than darkness, new every morn...our sins though they are many, his mercy is more.