



Finer Grounds Bible Study

1 Samuel

Lesson 13: 1 Samuel 27-31

When we are at our most desperate, we always have two options. The first is to seek God and his counsel. The second is to seek out worldly means of comfort. The correct choice is obvious, right? If only it were that easy! During persecution, frustration, or misery, our judgment is easily clouded by anger and fear. Both Saul and David struggled to make wise choices in 1 Samuel 27-31. Both made decisions that defied God to preserve their own safety. When God rebuked them, both dealt with the realization of their errors in very different ways.

Read 1 Samuel 27:1-12

Why did David go to Philistia?

How did this choice reflect trust/distrust in God's plan for him?

Read 1 Samuel 26:19-20. What accusation did David make against the men who promoted discord between David and Saul?

On the hill of Hacilah, David had fervently defended his right to an inheritance in the Promised Land and his need to worship God in the tabernacle as God commanded (see Deuteronomy 16:16-17). Since he had been running from Saul, he had not

been able to partake in either of these things. David cursed any man who would attempt to drive him out of Israel and away from the only place David could properly worship.

Little did David know that his speech on the hill of Hacilah would condemn his own future actions. Sadly, after years of frustration and fear resulting from his struggle with Saul, David chose to leave the boundaries of Israel on his own accord. He believed that Saul would eventually kill him if he stayed in the land. Notice that he did not inquire of the Lord when he made this decision as he had on previous occasions. Instead of resting in the hope of God's promise that he would become king, David sought help from the Philistines, the sworn enemies of Israel. David's physical departure from Israel mirrors his heart's spiritual departure from trusting in God's protection.

What happened the first time David sought help from the Philistines? See 1 Samuel 21:10-15

The Philistines had many good reasons to ally with David. By now, the rivalry between Saul and David had been going on for years, and the Philistines surely knew about it. Gaining David as an ally would help them in their ongoing war against Saul and Israel. The Philistines may have also thought that making a pact with David would prevent him from becoming the future king of Israel. His loyalty to Israel could easily be discredited by his decision to fight for the Philistines. Even if he had supporters remaining in



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Israel, few would be willing to forgive David for allying with the enemy.

How did David deceive Achish?

There are a variety of interpretations concerning the morality of David's raids. On the one hand, David deceived his protector and killed many women and children to preserve the ruse. However, the people that he attacked were also enemies of Israel.

Read Exodus 17:14, Deuteronomy 20:16-18, Joshua 13:13, and 1 Samuel 15:2-3.

What had God commanded concerning these peoples? Had the Israelites fulfilled this command?

God had commanded that these Canaanite nations (the Amalekites, Geshurites, and Girzites,) be utterly destroyed. However, Israel had failed to carry-out this command. David's raids actually fulfilled directives that God had given Israel hundreds of years earlier.

Read 1 Samuel 28:1-2

David's reliance on his Philistine protector put him in a terrible predicament. With David on his side and Saul's kingdom divided, Achish and the other Philistine rulers decided to attack Israel again. David, who had only fought against Israel's enemies, now had to fight against his own brethren in war. Would the future king really take up arms against his own people?

From David's own words and actions, it seems as if he may have considered double-crossing Achish. While David appeared to be a willing servant when Achish told him of the upcoming battle, his statement in 28:2 is grammatically ambiguous. It is usually translated "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." However, an equally valid interpretation of the Hebrew is "You will know what your servant can do to double-cross you!" (MacDonald 319). Obviously, Achish accepted the more favorable meaning and David may have been purposefully vague. Whatever the true intent of this statement, David was in an impossible situation. Marching against the Israelites meant killing his own people. If he refused to do it, there was no telling what Achish would do to him, his men, and their families.

Read 1 Samuel 28:3-11

Saul's visit to the Witch of Endor is out of place chronologically in 1 Samuel. This event occurs after the events of chapter 30, which is made clear by the description of the Philistines movements. In 28:4, the Philistines are gathered at Shunem, which is close to Gilboa while in 30:1, they are farther away from Gilboa in Jezreel. The placement of the story here helps the reader to see the comparable failings of faith by David and Saul. David failed to trust that God would make him king as promised, so he made an alliance with an enemy nation for protection. At Endor, Saul made the decision to seek help from a medium, a practice that was abominable to God, in hopes of finding comfort and direction in the battle ahead.

Verse 3 reminds us that Samuel had been dead and buried to set us up for the coming events.



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What are the three ways Saul tried to discern God's will?

When God did not answer Saul through the usual prescribed means, Saul took matters into his own hands. Again, we see Saul's skin-deep devotion to God. He was willing to do the things that God prescribed if they gave him the results he desired. When they did not, he used forbidden methods to get his way.

Read Deuteronomy 18:9-14

What was God's warning concerning mediums?

Just as David aligned himself with the Philistines, Saul, by seeking a medium, aligned himself with the detestable practices of the Canaanites. Saul was even reminded by the medium that he had once driven out the mediums he now intended to consult. At one time, Saul knew that God did not approve of divination, and yet he chose to use the practice anyway. He even swore to the medium, by the name of God (Yahweh), that she would not receive punishment! Saul's understanding of God was so twisted that he was willing to swear by God to protect a medium, while God had condemned all mediums long ago!

Read 1 Samuel 28:12-15

What is the medium's reaction to seeing Samuel?

It is hard to say what really happened at this moment and a variety of interpretations exist. Some, believing that the spirits of the dead cannot

reappear on Earth, say that what Saul saw was an evil spirit impersonating Samuel. However, the dead appeared on other occasions in the Bible with no indication of a demonic presence (think of the transfiguration of Jesus when Moses and Elijah appeared.) The medium herself screamed when she saw Samuel coming up. It may have been that she was surprised that her typical "tricks" of "conjuring" spirits resulted in an actual spirit appearing before her. The medium described Samuel as a "god," which can also be translated as "divine being" (Tsumura 624). It appears that God allowed Samuel's spirit to deliver a final message to Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 15:23

To what did Samuel compare the sin of rebellion? Whose rebellion was he referring to in this passage?

Read 1 Samuel 28:16-19

Compare this passage to 1 Samuel 15:26-29

Saul had heard these words before, Samuel's spirit simply filled in the details. He told Saul that David was the neighbor who would replace Saul as king (which Saul already knew.) Saul also learned of the impending demise of him and his sons on Mount Gilboa.

According to 28:16, why did God not answer Saul through any of his previous inquiries?



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In modern times, what are common ways that people seek God’s counsel in the wrong places/ways?

Read 1 Samuel 28:20-25

Saul finally accepted that the word of the Lord, twice delivered through Samuel, would come true. Sadly, even when he finally believed that the consequences would come, there is no record that Saul ever truly repented of his sins. On the outside, he played the part of a loyal servant to God. He kept the prescribed feasts, offered sacrifices, and even used phrases like “as the Lord lives.” However, these things alone meant nothing when his heart was not willing to repent and obey God.

Take a moment to reread Samuel’s words to Saul in 1 Samuel 15:22-23.

Saul’s heart was in rebellion against God, and he never tried to turn it around. Instead, he tried to avoid the consequences of his sin which in turn led to more sins including the murder of the priests, the attempted murder of David and Jonathan, and now the use of sorcery. While a repentant heart may not have kept Saul from losing his kingdom, it would have given him something infinitely better: a restored relationship with his creator. Instead of seeking redemption, Saul cowered in fear, unable to face the path before him with any confidence or strength.

Read 1 Samuel 29:1-11

God’s providence interceded for David. The Philistine lords did not trust the man who once killed their countrymen. God used this mistrust to

save David from the repercussions of joining the Philistines in battle.

Read 1 Samuel 30:1-8

Even though God had saved him from fighting the Israelites, David still faced consequences for his actions. With Ziklag unprotected, the Amalekites raided the city and took David’s family and the families of his men as slaves. David’s men may have questioned the wisdom of seeking safety with the Philistines in the first place. Most likely, many were hesitant to go to war against their fellow Israelites. Now, their families gone, these doubts and misgivings about their leader reached a boiling point and the men prepared to take David’s life in payment for their loss.

From whom did David seek help and strength?

Read Psalm 25. Some believe this Psalm was written during this time in David’s life (Tsumura 638). If so, what does the Psalm reveal about David’s outlook in this situation?

If this Psalm was indeed written in response to this situation, it shows that David repented and sought forgiveness for his actions. He then sought strength from God to deal with the situation at hand and inquired of the Lord through Abiathar the priest. This is the first indication that David inquired of God since 1 Samuel 23:12 is the first time that he sought the Lord’s favor since his encounter with Saul on the hill of Hacilah in 1 Samuel 26. While in Philistia, David had not only separated himself from his kinsmen, but from God as well.

Read 1 Samuel 30:9-25



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After consulting a deserted Egyptian slave, David found and attacked the unsuspecting Amalekites, killing most of them. He recovered the families of his men as well as spoil from Ziklag and several other areas of Judah.

According to the slave, where had the Amalekites raided (v. 14)?

Who received the spoils of the battle?

David fairly treated the men who stayed behind. Even though they did not fight, they still were given a portion of the spoils.

Read 1 Samuel 30:26-31

David took his portion of the spoil and made gifts for all the people of Judah who had helped him. He knew that he had not survived his wilderness experience on his own. It was only through God's mercy and the help of his brethren that he was able to last for so long. This gift may have also been a kind of peace offering. It showed his dedication to Judah despite his having served the Philistines in recent times. The people of Judah would remember this act, as they would soon seek David to be the king over their tribe. David's action against the Amalekites preserved his relationship with his mighty men and allowed him to solidify alliances that would lead to his kingship over Judah. While David faced consequences for seeking help from God's enemies, his repentance and trust in God allowed him to overcome the Amalekites and come out stronger in the end.

David's destruction of the Amalekite forces was also in accordance with God's directive that Saul

had refused to complete in 1 Samuel 15. David killed all but 400 Amalekites in his pursuit. David's action against the Amalekites forged relationships that would help him to become king. For Saul, his inaction against the Amalekites led to his loss of the monarchy, and eventually, the loss of his life.

Read 1 Samuel 31:1-13.

Saul finally faced the painful, humiliating ending that God foretold through Samuel. The Israelite army suffered terrible losses at the hands of the Philistines, and three of Saul's sons laid dead. Saul, scared of being tortured by his enemies, took his own life, prompting his armor-bearer to do the same. The Philistines, now unable to torture him, desecrated the bodies of Saul and his sons and displayed them as trophies in their temples.

Who rescued the bodies of Saul and his sons and gives them a proper burial?

Why did the people of this city have reason to honor Saul (see 1 Samuel 11:1-11)?

According to 1 Chronicles 10:13, why did Saul lose his kingdom?

Saul's death and burial encapsulated his time as king. His death resulted from his failures of his later years. He refused to trust God's word and didn't rely on God for counsel or help. Unwilling to repent, he chose instead to give up and he took his own life in cowardly defeat. After his death, the works of his early reign were remembered by the



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people of the city that he valiantly defended and rescued. We can't forget that Saul began his reign as a mighty, Spirit-filled warrior and unifying figurehead. His choice to stop following God's word caused God to withdraw His favor, His blessing, and His Spirit. When Saul stopped choosing God, God stopped choosing him to do His work.

As we close our study of 1 Samuel, let's take some time to complete our character studies of Saul, David, and Samuel. Review what you learned about these men and answer the following questions for each man.

- **What was his greatest accomplishment? What was his greatest failure?**
- **Pick one to two verses that define each man's actions in the book of 1 Samuel.**
- **How did God use this man for His purposes?**
- **What lessons did you learn from this man's life?**
- **What does this man's life reveal about God's character?**

What does it mean to be "after God's own heart"?

Reread 1 Samuel 2:1-10. How did Hannah's prayer foreshadow the events of the remainder of 1 Samuel?

What a merciful God we serve who displays His power by choosing to use the weakest among us. Through a barren woman, a prophet was born. From a small boy, the word of God was made known to a nation. A herdsman from the weakest of the tribes became a mighty king and warrior. A

young shepherd boy defeated a giant. God looked at the heart of these people and saw opportunity. Where there was weakness, God saw an opportunity to show His strength. Where there was want, God saw an opportunity to reveal the riches of His love. Where there was a lost cause, God saw an opportunity to display His limitless grace. What does God see when he looks at your heart?

MacDonald, William. Believer's Bible Commentary a Complete Bible Commentary in One Volume! Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.

Tsumura, David T. The First Book of Samuel. Eerdmans, 2009.



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