

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY
STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL
LESSON 12

FAITHLESSNESS: WAR AND WITCHCRAFT
1 Samuel 27-28

I. DAVID'S FLIGHT TO THE PHILISTINES 27:1-12

INTRODUCTION:

David had twice received Saul's assurances of goodwill, but did not feel easy. He had become so discouraged and despondent because of Saul's determination to kill him that he left the land of Israel. God had not told him to leave any more than He had told Abraham to leave the land. On the part of both it was a lapse of faith. So David stepped out of the land and moved over into the country of Philistia. The Philistines were definitely the enemies of his people. So here David is doing something he should not have done. There is nothing in this chapter that would reveal that David is a man of God.

David had just seen a great miracle: God had caused a deep sleep to fall upon Saul and his entire army (the same word is used of Adam at the creation of Eve). The miraculous does not necessarily build spirituality or faith. Just when we are on top of a spiritual mountain, God trips our emotional circuit breaker, and lets us feel down. The test is whether we will continue to trust in Him at those times or try to do something in the flesh to make ourselves feel better. David failed this test.

A. David's Apparent Defection 27:1-4

He led his immediate family and 600 followers, each with his household, to Gath and threw himself on the mercy of Achish. A relationship of lord and vassal was undertaken then between Achish and David for a year and four months (vs. 5-7). This move accomplished two important objectives: it delivered him from any possible danger from Saul, and it ingratiated him with the Philistines so he had no further need to fear them. No less important, this 16-month respite gave him an opportunity to develop even further his combat and leadership skills.

B. David's Occupation of Ziklag 27:5-7

David's presence with so large a following must in many ways have been inconvenient as well as expensive to Achish. Such an influx into Gath could have been an embarrassment for both sides. A mutually satisfying solution had to be worked out. According to the terms of the covenant, David pledged loyalty to Achish in return for a vassal city. Achish granted David the town of Ziklag, a small settlement on the southern frontier of Philistia, between Gaza and Beersheba about 13 miles south of Gath. This remained David's headquarters for over a year, until the death of Saul and David's subsequent move to Hebron (v. 7; 2 Sam. 1:1-2).

C. David's Raids as a Mercenary 27:8-12

1. The slaughter

Partly to occupy his men and partly to gain supplies, David carried out pillaging raids against various desert peoples, including the Geshurites (Joshua 13:2), the Girzites, and the Amalekites (1 Sam. 27:8), killing the people and looting all their livestock and other goods (v. 9).

It is certain that Achish wanted David to make attacks on Israelites for two reasons. In the first place, the Israelites were the Philistines' major enemy and in the second, Achish realized that as soon as David did attack his own people, he would lose forever the possibility of changing sides. Using Ziklag as home base, they raided in the region of the modern Gaza strip, toward the Desert of Shur, east of the present Suez Canal (v. 8). But David reported to Achish that his attacks were against his own tribe, Judah, or Jerahmeel, or the Kenites. The gullible Achish imagined that David was earning the reputation of a traitor to his people, thus barring the way to subsequent return. The expeditions did seem to have brought David great renown, for in 1 Chronicles 12:1-22 we read of warriors from far distant tribes coming to him to swell his forces, and the enthusiasm was even such that a band of men came across the Jordan to join him (1 Chron. 12:15)

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 12

2. The victims, real and pretended

- Geshurites: the name is used here of a people occupying the coastal area to the southwest (Josh. 13:2f.).
- Gizrites or Girzites: It can hardly be "the people of Gezer" which is too far north, but must refer to a people in this same area.
- Shur: an area to the east of the Nile delta.
- Negev: the term regularly used for the dry land which formed not only the most southernmost part of Judah, but extended far into the Arabian desert. The word comes to mean simply "south," though its original meaning is likely to have been the "dry country." The three areas mentioned must be particular districts associated with tribes closely linked with Judah.
- Jerahmeelites: a clan associated with David's policy of building contacts in the south (30:29), and later fully integrated into Judah.
- Kenites: The Kenites had close association with Israel. According to one tradition, Moses' father-in-law, was a Kenite (Jud. 1:16). The story of the victory over Sisera shows Jael (the Kenite) as friendly to Israel (Jud. 5:24). They are warned to desert their Amalekite associates and escape the massacre (see Jud. 5:31).
- Amalekites - the ancient enemy that God cursed to destruction (Ex. 17:14).

3. The lies

David claimed to Achish that his raids were against the allies of Judah. Achish understood "Negev" as the proper name for that part of the Negev which belonged to Judah, where as David meant it for the larger area. Of course, in reality the victims of David's campaigns were the Amalekites and other nomads who were prone to attack any of the settled population, Israelite and Philistines alike. Prisoners to be sold as slaves formed an important part of the spoil of war in ancient times. But David put all his prisoners to death, lest, if taken to Gath and sold, they should betray him.

His very success in deceiving Achish led David into even deeper difficulties, because as we shall see in Chapter 28, the Philistine king became so sure that he could trust David that he incorporated the small Israelite force into his own army. Thus, David's deception led to even worse problems.

APPLICATION OF CHAPTER 27

A. The Cause of David's Discouragement

1. He became burnt out.

- a. Constant pursuit -- years of relentless pursuit -- no escape ever.

(Vacations and days off are a very important preventive medicine for burn out. Jesus in his brief ministry went apart three times for rest.)

- b. Broken promises
- c. Personal disappointments (Michal)

2. He forgot Who was protecting him -- unbelief, worry, lack of trust.

Can a king protect you more than the Lord of the universe?

- a. He did not seek God's will.
- b. He thought he could find the answer with the enemy.

B. The Consequences of David's Discouragement

1. Discouragement led to compromise.

2. Compromise led to deception.

He deceives both Saul and Achish (by pretending to be his mercenary by fighting friends of the Philistines) -- vs.10 is a half-truth.

3. Deception led to an atrocity.

Deception is never a solitary sin. The lie always invites another sin event. David can't risk being told on, so during the raid he kills everyone so they can't tell on him. This is one of the major reasons why God did not allow him to build the temple (this was not a holy war of God).

4. Atrocity led to retaliation by the Amalekites on David's family 30:1, 6.

C. The Cure for Discouragement

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 12

1. Realize you are human.

You are not perfect, you need rest. Do not try to become the composite of everyone's expectations.

2. Resist compromise -- seek the will of God.

3. Recognize the qualifications for service.

- a. Character
- b. Spiritual gifts
- c. The experience of trouble

4. Remember WHO is in control.

II. SAUL'S FEAR OF THE PHILISTINES 28:1-6

A. The Circumstances

1. The Philistine's plan to assault Israel 28:1-2

A day came when the Philistines decided to make another assault against Israel. They were probably encouraged to do so because of the obvious instability of the government under the now-aged king Saul and because of David's apparent shift of allegiance.

2. David's dilemma

David now found himself in a most compromising position, for he would now be called on to demonstrate his loyalty to his new lord by fighting against his own people. Achish required him to march as his own bodyguard. David's response was ambiguous: "very well" means "if it be so", "if that proves to be." This incident is a good example of the problems you encounter once you have compromised with the enemy. "He who rides the tiger finds it hard to dismount." -- Chinese proverb

B. The Fear of Saul 28:3-5

The writer takes us suddenly back to Saul in a parenthetical flashback or a "meanwhile." Saul is terrified by the numbers of the Philistine army (see 1 Sam. 29:2) and by their strategy. This was a war on a much larger scale than any that had been carried on since the defeat of the Philistines in the valley of Elah. The invasion was made in the north and the battle to be fought in the territory of Issachar in the area of Jezreel. The Philistines probably had marched northward through their own territory on the coast, raising the whole of the military population as they went, and then, turning eastward from the Mediterranean, went into Israelite territory by the valley of Jezreel. It was probably the rapid decline of Saul's power which encouraged the Philistines to attempt once again to subdue the nation Israel.

C. The Silence of God 28:6-7

The only one who could have helped Saul is dead; David, who could have saved him militarily, is with the enemy; and the high priest is with David. Saul had probably removed the spiritists ("soothsayers" -- those who contact the spirits) and the mediums ("necromancers" -- those who communicate with the dead) from the land early in his reign. God had sternly commanded Israel to root out Canaanite practices of spiritism and necromancy, for He Himself would speak to them through His prophet. To seek to know His plans by magical means was a detestable practice (Deut. 18:9-22). God forbids us to have anything to do with mediums (Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:31-32; Deut. 18:10-15). Witchcraft, astrology, and necromancy hold a great fascination for those who have no secure faith. Isaiah 8:19 provides a vivid comment on such futility. Horton Davies has written,

At heart Spiritism is not trust in God: it is born of distrust in Him. It is an attempt to substitute experimental certainty for faith. It is the monstrous design to subject God to the indignity of a test tube examination.

But it is one thing to prohibit a popular religious practice and quite another to abolish it. Josiah of Judah also attempted such an end (2 Kings 23:24) but the practices did not end there either (see Isa. 66:17).

Up to this time, Saul has not cared to inquire of the Lord. Even now he really did not want the Lord, he only wanted to know what was going to happen in the future. Though Abiathar had fled to David with the ephod, it is quite possible that Saul may have had another ephod and sanctuary made, perhaps at Gibeon. If so, Zadok of the family of Eleazar would have acted as his high priest. This

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 12

would explain Zadok being joined with Ahimelech, the son of Abiathar, as one of two high priests early in David's reign (2 Sam. 8:17). On the other hand, the Urim may be mentioned in verse six, not because the ephod was actually used, but as one of the various ways by which men inquired of the Lord.

III. SAUL'S VISIT TO THE WITCH OF ENDOR 28:7-25

A. The Geography

The Philistines first assembled their armies at Aphek (29:1) and then marched northwards to the Valley of Jezreel and encamped at Shunem (28:4), which was well inside Israelite territory. The geographical details show clearly that the events recorded in chapter 29 happened before those of 28:3-25. The narrator has rearranged his material for literary reasons, switching attention back and forth from David to Saul.

Till now nearly all the battles between Israelites and Philistines had taken place in hilly or mountainous areas. But the Philistines' chariots were of little value except on level ground. On this occasion they pitched in the Valley of Jezreel, where it is possible to reach the Jordan River from the Mediterranean coastal plain without having to cross the mountains. Saul could not ignore such a thrust. Their invasion threatened to cut Israel in half. The range of Gilboa rises 1500 feet above the sea. As the valley is only about 250 feet above the sea level, Saul, from an elevation of 1200 feet, would easily see the camp of the Philistines pitched upon the slopes of the opposite range at a distance of about four miles. This was evidently Saul's first sight of their forces and his alarm was caused by finding them so much larger than he had expected.

Endor ("the spring of the round") lay a little to the northeast of Shunem, where the Philistines were camped. Saul was taking his life in his hands -- to get to Endor he had to pass by the Philistine camp.

B. The Dialogue Between Saul and the Witch 28:8-11

The medium received Saul somewhat suspiciously because her arts were illegal. Promising her immunity, Saul asked her to call up Samuel. There is a great deal of pathos in his request.

Samuel had been Saul's friend in his youth, and his guide and counselor in those happy days when the young king walked uprightly and all went well with him. But gradually the light yoke of respect for one who loved him became too heavy for a despotic temperament, which would brook no will but its own.... Intense as was the degradation for one so haughty, in disguise by night, at the risk of his life, to seek help from a sorceress, he bears it all that he may at least for a few minutes see the spirit of the true though stern monitor, whose memory once again filled his whole heart.

-- Pulpit Commentary

C. The Appearance of Samuel 28:12

1. The theories

- a. That the whole thing is a fraud.
- b. That it is not Samuel but an impersonating demon.
- c. That God, who is the blessed controller of all things, makes an exception here and does answer Saul.

2. A possible answer

Personally, I think God made an exception in this case and allowed Samuel to come back to earth in a body similar to his old one. Samuel's appearance here is best explained by God graciously permitting Saul one last encounter with the prophet. My reasons are because:

- a. The woman is afraid.

Samuel did appear. The woman is dumbfounded. It could only have been God Himself who made this possible, and it was a shock to the woman to realize that she was in the grip of something much more powerful than she had supposed. The description of what the woman sees (it is not visible to Saul) also suggests the appearance of the prophet. She may have been frightened by the appearance of Samuel, but it seems to me she is more frightened to find out that her client is the king himself (who could have her killed for this) but in a strange twist has disguised himself. She could not have helped but wonder if she had just been set up, and

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY, LESSON 12

if not that, why on earth the king himself would be wanting her services. Either way, there was no other way to feel but frightened.

b. The prophecy is given in precise detail.

1) The genuineness of the prophecy

In death as in life, Samuel told Saul the straight and unvarnished truth. His words bear two of the marks of a true prophet: he foretold the future in precise detail, and he denounced sin. A prophet also often appealed for a change of heart, but in this case it was far too late. One particular point to note is that Saul asked Samuel what he ought to do, but to that question there was still no reply; instead he was told what was going to happen. He wanted a plan of campaign to avoid disaster; instead he received a confirmation that disaster was certain.

2) The content of the prophecy

a) Samuel's earlier prophecy that God had rent the kingdom from Saul and that David would be king was being fulfilled (1 Sam. 13:14; 15:28).

b) The cause of God's rending was Saul's sparing of Amalek (v. 18).

c) Israel would be defeated (v. 19)

d) Saul and his sons would die on the morrow.

Nothing new is added.

Samuel, before his death, had already pronounced the death, the destruction, and the rejection of Saul. Certainly Saul did not gain any comfort, any direction, or any new information from his excursion into the spirit world. -- McGee

c. The writer seems to say that it was Samuel that spoke (28:15-19). Scripture is not adverse to seeing the will of God declared even through means which it regarded as hostile. God's purpose is stronger than man's limited contrivances.

d. Saul's response

Saul collapsed, appalled at Samuel's response. His fear was aggravated by fasting, undertaken possibly as part of the attempt at making an approach to God.

D. The Woman's Provision 28:22-25

In spite of his fear and degradation, Saul inspired pity and loyalty. The woman may also have been afraid he would die in her house. But the gloom is illuminated by a gleam of compassion. Bread was baked and a fattened calf roasted and the king and his men, fed and refreshed, left for Gilboa.

CONCLUSION:

The last word of judgment has now been spoken against Saul; nothing can now avert the tragedy of his defeat and death. God, though condemning the seeking of mediums, is still within the shadows. The question of knowing the future is not so much "Can you?" but "Should you?" It is not a question of true or not. It is a question of whether it is morally right (Isa. 8:19-20; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 4:1). The right attitude in seeking divine guidance is to seek God's help in prayer and in His Word as to what to do and to investigate what actions would glorify Him, not to ask to read the future. God provided a succession of prophets and finally His Word. The Chronicler attributes Saul's final disaster to this consultation of "ghosts" (1 Chron. 10:13). However the future is clear in one respect: David will be King.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13

READ LESSON 12.

1. Do you agree with Dr. Borrer's theory of what happened at Endor? Explain.
2. What did you find new or interesting to you?

READ CHAPTER 29.

3. Explain how David was kept from fighting against his own people.
4. Do you think David was sincere in verse 8?

READ CHAPTER 30.

5. What did David find when he returned home?
6. How did his men take it?
7. How was David encouraged? What did he do differently this time that he did not do before going to Achish in Gath?
8. What was the nationality and position of the one who told David where the enemy was?
9. (a) What was the situation and the major principle laid down by David in verses 21-24? (b) How can that principle apply to us today?
10. What diplomatic action did David take in verses 26-31?

READ CHAPTER 31.

11. How did Saul die?
12. (a) What did the Philistines do with his body and armor? (b) What men rescued Saul's body? (c) Why did those men do it? (See 1 Sam.11:1-11).