

## King Saul's Pitiful Collapse

### 1 Samuel 28

October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

1. David's \_\_\_\_\_ crisis (28:1-2)
2. Saul's \_\_\_\_\_ crisis (28:3-6)
3. Saul's tragic \_\_\_\_\_ (28:7-14)
4. Samuel's stinging \_\_\_\_\_ (28:15-19)
5. Saul's pathetic \_\_\_\_\_ (28:20-25)
6. Take seriously the extended object lesson on shallow repentance.
  - a. Repentance is \_\_\_\_\_ to God in faith away from sin resulting in a change of \_\_\_\_\_ that leads to a change of \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. False repentance is hidden by \_\_\_\_\_ language.
  - c. False repentance is shown by a pattern of \_\_\_\_\_ behavior.
  - d. False repentance seeks to avoid \_\_\_\_\_ without confronting heart issues.

## Questions for Discussion/Reflection on 1 Samuel 28

1. What are some different reasons that the Lord included such a long, detailed description of Saul's fall and David's rise in 1 Samuel 9-31?
2. How would you describe the crisis in 1 Sam. 28 for Saul? What crisis was David in?
3. What do you think he expected to hear from Samuel through the medium? What did he hear instead?
4. What does the account of the medium at Endor in this chapter tell us about occultic/pagan activities or witchcraft? What questions does it raise for you or others?
5. What are some common (even well-intentioned) ways that Christians downplay the importance of repentance?
6. How does 2 Corinthians 7:10-11 compare and contrast godly sorrow and worldly sorrow about sin?
7. What are some critical aspects in our definition of repentance that can clarify misunderstandings about repentance?
  - a. *Repentance is turning to God in faith away from sin resulting in a change of heart that leads to a change of action.*
  - b. Specifically, how can we clarify that repentance in no way takes away from the simplicity of the gospel that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone?
  - c. How can we reconcile Romans 3:23-25; 11:6 and Mark 1:15?
8. How does 1 John 1:5-2:2 describe the life of repentance through a series of "if" statements?

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Big idea: Continued unrepentance leads to desperate attempts to find help in all the wrong ways.

The tragic, blind unraveling of shallow repentance

### Intro

In 2005 UCLA professor Jared Diamond released a book called *Collapse* that sought to explain the sudden collapse of ancient societies that at one time were powerful and flourishing. He explored how the weather and distance in Greenland contributed to the collapse of an early Norse society that left ruins behind. He looked at the collapse of the Mayan society in central America that built the huge pyramid structures that tourists still visit. The collapse of Easter Island because of competition on a small island among different factions.

In 1 Samuel 28 we see the collapse not of a society, but the collapse of a man. It's a collapse that we have seen coming. He started strong. He was tall, powerful, and commanded respect after rescuing the Israelites from their enemy, the Ammonites, in ch 11. But since then the decline has been steady and tragic and now we reach the collapse. His death won't come until the next scene. But it is predicted here as we see yet more evidence of his desperation but his unwillingness to own up to his sin and disobedience.

We often learn best through stories –

You can tell a child that slow and steady is better than fast and inconsistent, or you can tell them the story of the tortoise and the hare.

You can be told the value of planting deep roots in a local community for shaping your life, or you can read Wendell Berry's moving novels about life in rural America through ordinary eyes.

We can read in the Word...

**Proverbs 16:18** Pride *goes* before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.

But then we can read the slow, steady destruction of Saul over 22 chapters who in his pride continually shifted blame and failed to own up to his own sin, leading to destruction.

**2 Corinthians 7:10** For the sorrow that is according to *the will of* God produces a repentance without regret, *leading* to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

We see in Saul a man who was sorrowful, even pitiable, but who never saw himself clearly and turned in real repentance to the Lord for anything more than a rescue from his own self-destruction.

### 1. David's interrupted crisis. (28:1-2)

- a. The majority of the drama of chapter 28 focuses on Saul not David, but what we do learn about David is that he is in a difficult spot. It's a made-for-tv-moment.
  - i. In ch 27 David fled Saul again and crossed the border into the land of their hated enemies, the Philistines. There he presented himself to Achish, the king, and asked for a place to live. He pretended to attack Israelite cities but really he was attacking Philistine cities as a type of double-agent.
- b. That comes to a head now in chapter 28 as the Philistines line up for war against Israel.
  - i. Whose side will David be on?
  - ii. How can David avoid attacking Israel without giving away his true loyalty to Achish?
- c. David's answer is intentionally vague and evasive when he is told he will be with Achish in the battle.
  - i. "You shall know what your servant can do."

- ii. What does David mean? Achish takes it as “you shall know what we can do *to Israel*” but David could also be saying, “you shall know what we can do *for Israel*.”
  - d. And then the episode ends or at least the scene shifts.
    - i. What will happen to David? How will he get out of this?
      - 1. It’s like watching the old Batman tv show where every episode ended with Batman and Robin in some crisis with no way out and we had to tune in to the same “bat-time” and the same “bat-channel” to find out what would happen!
  - e. David’s crisis will pick back up in chapter 29. But side-by-side with his crisis, we see Saul’s greater crisis by intentional comparison.
2. Saul’s **greater** crisis. (28:3-6)
- a. Three factors that show Saul’s desperate situation:
    - i. Samuel is dead
      - 1. And all the mediums removed – a bright spot for Saul
    - ii. Philistines are gathered
    - iii. The Lord did not answer
  - b. Samuel is dead –
    - i. Samuel died in ch 25 but it was brought up here because Samuel was Saul’s go-to guy when he didn’t know what to do.
    - ii. A bright spot in Saul’s reign is that he had removed the mediums and spiritists.
      - 1. **Leviticus 19:31** 'Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.
      - 2. **Deuteronomy 18:9-11** "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. <sup>10</sup> "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, <sup>11</sup> or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.
    - iii. This served to confirm that Saul knew consulting a medium or spiritist was wrong, but in his desperation he did not care.
  - c. The philistines gathered against Israel.
    - i. The location is in the northern part of the country in a spot that cuts off the northern part of Israel from the southern part of Israel. If they are successful, the results will be devastating for Israel.
    - ii. Saul was afraid and trembling – a theme that runs through Saul’s life.
      - 1. He hid himself when chosen to be king in ch 10.
      - 2. He was afraid of Goliath in 17:11
      - 3. He was afraid of David in 18:12
    - iii. Fear is not the problem. It’s what he does with that fear. Will he make the Lord his strength or will he take things into his own desperate hands?
  - d. The Lord was silent.

- i. Dreams, Urim, prophets were the three basic ways that the Lord revealed his will at this time in certain situations. But the Lord did not answer.
  - ii. Similar to a person who has made a trainwreck of their lives by rejecting the Lord and His ways and then asks God for wisdom for how to pay the bills or navigate the divorce, etc. but they aren't repenting and turning to the Lord.
  - iii. God says at times that He will not hear certain prayers
    - 1. **1 Peter 3:7** You husbands in the same way, live with *your wives* in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.
    - 2. **Psalm 66:17-19** I cried to Him with my mouth, And He was extolled with my tongue. <sup>18</sup> If I regard wickedness in my heart, The Lord will not hear; <sup>19</sup> But certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer.
  - iv. However, don't assume perceived silence from God equals rejection by God.
    - 1. **Psalm 13:1, 3, 5** How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ...<sup>3</sup> Consider *and* answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the *sleep of death*... <sup>5</sup> But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation.
    - 2. Sometimes we feel like our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and God doesn't hear or care. We press on, trust in Him in the darkness, and don't follow Saul's desperate path.
3. Saul's tragic **solution**. (28:7-14)
- a. His desperation drove him to the very type of person he had obediently removed from the land – someone who claimed to speak to the dead.
  - b. Traveling to Endor would mean going through territory now occupied by the Philistine forces, so he goes at night for this dangerous mission.
    - i. The scale is different, but it's like the Israeli army in Pocatello, Philistines in Blackfoot, and the medium was in Idaho Falls.
  - c. She is cautious of a trap but he assures her that no punishment shall come. (vv. 8-10)
    - i. Notice Paul invokes the name of the Lord twice in his promise.
    - ii. Still invoking the name of the Lord even with as he violates the word of the Lord.
      - 1. His religious, pious language used in combination with a sinful action.
  - d. How are we to understand this strange situation?
    - i. Common questions:
      - 1. Does she really have the ability to contact the dead?
      - 2. Does Samuel truly appear?
      - 3. Does this passage condone trying to contact the dead?
    - ii. The plain reading indicates that she did in fact see Samuel
    - iii. Her reaction to his appearance is telling
      - 1. She's terrified and shocked, leading many to think she didn't anticipate this appearance. Perhaps she is used to faking it and is surprised when a real appearance occurs.
      - 2. It could be a hoax but the OT prohibition of contacting the dead is less because it's a hoax and more because it promotes a reliance on supernatural forces besides the Lord.

3. It seems that the Lord allowed this to occur in this unique moment, just as He allowed Moses and Elijah though dead to appear to Peter, James, and John in Matthew 17 when they were with Jesus.
  - iv. The speeches attributed to Samuel contained allusions to a prior interchange between the two, allusions that would have been appropriate only for the real Samuel to have made.
  - v. Does this account excuse or encourage in any way the practice of consulting with the dead?
    1. No, it's descriptive not prescriptive. The clear commands of scripture have already prohibited consulting with the dead.
    2. Additionally, this isn't a positive description – it doesn't go well for Saul! He doesn't get the answer he wants but is only incapacitated and destroyed (summary of Davis)
  - vi. No details are given as to how this occurred, probably to avoid stirring up an obsession with a practice that is out of bounds for the believer.
  - e. The main point is Saul knows it's wrong but in his desperation he does it anyways, thinking that he might find an answer to his crisis. He doesn't get the answer he wants.
4. Samuel's stinging rebuke. (28:15-19)
- a. Samuel's message:
    - i. Why do you ask me? (v. 16)
    - ii. The Lord has simply done what He said He would do (vv. 17-18)
    - iii. The Lord will give Israel over to the Philistines (v. 19a)
    - iv. You and your sons will die tomorrow (v. 19b)
  - b. This is not how Saul expected this conversation to go.
    - i. He wanted an answer to his immediate crisis but he still overlooked his greater need – repentance.
  - c. Back when Saul was told the kingdom would be taken from him because of his disobedience to the Lord, Samuel made an odd comparison:
    - i. **1 Samuel 15:23** "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has also rejected you from *being* king."
    - ii. Probably seemed like an odd comparison at the time for Saul, but here Samuel stands before Saul again and the comparison has proven literal.
      1. Rebellion leads to more compromise. Disobedience leads to a harder heart if not repented of.
  - d. Is it wrong to seek God during a crisis? To cry out to him when life seems bleak and hopeless?
    - i. Of course not.
    - ii. CS Lewis: God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.
    - iii. But do I want mere relief from my pain or do I want God?
    - iv. Thomas: "God often uses those moments to shake us up and open our eyes to our true need. Many people trace their first steps with Christ to a major crisis in their lives. The danger, however, is that we are prone to see God as our vehicle to avoid pain, suffering or hell. In that case we do not want God on His terms; we want whatever He can give us."

5. Saul's pathetic **collapse**. (28:20-25)

- a. This scene is described in some detail. Why? It gives us a picture of his decline.
- b. The strong, powerful, tall king of Israel was weak, famished, and terrified.
- c. Like a petulant child, he refused to eat until he gave in to their urging.
- d. He's broken, hungry, sitting on the edge of a bed while a woman makes him food over the course of a couple hours.

6. Applying the Word

- a. Take seriously the extended object lesson on shallow repentance.

- i. For several Sundays in a row, going back to Tom's message on 1 Samuel 15, this theme has come up in each message. But how could it not? It's so obviously what we are observing with Saul.
- ii. Repentance is **turning** to God in faith away from sin resulting in a change of **heart** that leads to a change of **action**.

1. **Mark 1:15** "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."
2. To repent isn't to clean yourself up so that God will accept you. It isn't to work your way to him by a good life. It's simply to turn, in faith, to him and from sin – saying, I want YOU not THIS (sin).
3. That happens in an initial way when we first believe and trust in Christ for salvation, and it happens in a day-by-day way as the Christian continues to turn from sin that the Lord convicts him of.
4. That fruit (change) is an evidence of our salvation, not the cause.

- iii. False repentance is hidden by **pious** language.

1. Saul used the name of the Lord while consulting with a pagan witch to talk to the dead, something clearly forbidden by the Lord.
  - a. Talk is cheap.
2. Josh Kirk in an excellent study on repentance made the observation that we can substitute renewed spiritual commitments for true repentance.
  - a. We might commits to leave many sinful ways but often doesn't touch the real heart issue that needs repented of.
  - b. Snap at wife but decide to make it up by setting up a date night, renewing desire to get up early for Bible study and prayer, but you don't touch THE issue that's there.

- iv. False repentance is shown by a pattern of **unchanged** behavior.

1. Saul repeatedly acknowledged that David was in the right and he was in the wrong and David would be king and it was wrong for him to try to kill David ... and on and on ... but he kept chasing him and trying to kill him.
2. **Proverbs 28:13** He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.
  - a. As we confess we agree with God about our sin. Not downplaying, justifying, or excusing.

- b. But if it is merely confessing and not forsaking, we get back to the pious language with no change.
  - c. Notice what we get – compassion. Mercy. God’s heart towards sinners is a heart of compassion. I think we fear really acknowledging our wrong because we think we might get rage from God like we might get from some people. What do we get instead? Compassion.
- 3. That change may be incremental, it may be two steps forward and one step back – especially if it is deep seated and habitual. But there will be a true forsaking and true steps taken to turn.
- v. False repentance seeks to avoid consequences without confronting heart issues.
  - 1. Saul wanted to find a way to defeat the Philistines. He wanted a way to avoid his own destruction.



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### 3. Saul's tragic *solution* (28:7-14)

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### 4. Samuel's stinging *rebuke* (28:15-19)

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