

## MAKING WRONG DECISIONS OUT OF FEAR

1 Samuel 27:1-28:25

Key Verses: 28:6-7

*He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.*

In Chapters 27-28, both David and Saul make bad decisions out of fear. David and his men go to the Philistine territory to hide from King Saul. It was a mistake. King Saul becomes fearful when the Philistine army came to fight him. When the Lord does not answer his inquiry, Saul becomes desperate and tries to get a witch's help to find a direction. Let us learn from the mistakes of David and Saul as we study this passage.

### I. DAVID IN THE PHILISTINE TERRITORY (27:1-28:2)

Look at verse 1. *But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."* We learned from Chapter 26 that David once again spared King Saul's life, because he trusted in God. David said to the king, "The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD's anointed" (26:23). In response, Saul said, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly." However, Saul did not give up pursuing David. He was still searching for him (4). His informants were crawling all over Judea. That was the reality for David. Once again, he had to hide from Saul and his elite force.

So David thought to himself, "One of these days, Saul's going to get me. The best thing I can do is to escape to the enemy territory. Only then, he will give up searching for me." Strategically, this plan of David was brilliant. King Saul would not dare to enter the enemy territory to search for him. In fact, David's calculation was right on target.

Verse 4 says that when Saul heard about this, he called off his search for David.



So David and his 600 men left and went over to Achish king of Gath. Gath was one of the 5 major Philistine cities and it was the hometown of Goliath. This was the second time David went to Achish. Earlier, after getting some provisions from Ahimelech in Nob, David went to the king of Gath. He figured that he would be safe from King Saul in the enemy territory. But Achish's intelligence men recognized David as the one who had killed their hometown hero, Goliath. Fearing the worst from Achish,

David began to act like a mentally deranged man, by pounding his head on the city gate and letting his saliva run on his beard (1Sa 21:12-15). Achish let him go and David was happy to get away. Since that incident, David had to move around all over Judea trying to hide in places like Adullam, Mizpah in Moab, Forest of Hereth, Desert of Ziph, Desert of Maon, En Gedi, and back to Maon and Ziph. It seemed that he ran out of real estate to hide from King Saul. Finally, he decided to go back to Achish.

Now we notice there was something different about David when he made this decision. His plan seemed to be a smart one. However, we feel David was making a big mistake here. For one thing, he did not inquire of the Lord (In fact, there is no mention of God in Chapter 27. Compare this to his appeal to Saul in 26:9-11 when he mentioned the Lord five times.) Instead of praying to God, he thought to himself (1). He was sick and tired of running for life. King Saul would not leave him alone. So he cooked up his own plan to seek a refuge in the Philistine territory. This was uncharacteristic of him. He failed to trust in God. He made a wrong decision out of fear. This reminds us of Abram who went to Egypt when there was a severe famine. He did not pray to God for help. He made a decision out of fear. And he made a terrible mistake there. He almost lost his wife. God rescued him. Earlier we learn that we should not make important decisions while we are angry. We learn here that we should not make decisions out of fear.

This time, David and his 600 men were planning to stay long term in Gath. Look at verse 3. *David and his men settled in Gath with Achish. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal.* This time, David did not pretend to be a crazy man. He went to Achish and asked him to let him live in one of the rural villages, away from the royal city (David didn't want to be so close to the king and the capital city so he could hide his true identity and do some interesting things in secret). Surprisingly, Achish welcomed David. He probably reasoned that the enemy of his enemy was his friend. He assigned the town of Ziklag to David. (This is how Ziklag became one of Judah's cities). David ended up living there for a year and four months (7).

Look at verse 8. *Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.)* David did not sit tight in Ziklag. They conducted military operations against the three tribes. The Geshurites were a people who lived in the desert between Arabia and Philistia (Jos 13:2). We don't know much about the Girzites. The Amalekites, the descendants of Esau, had become the enemies of God's people (1Sa 15:1-3). As the future king of Israel, David fought the enemies of God's people. David raided these desert tribes because they were known to be cruel people who often conducted surprise attacks on the people of the region. The problem was that David knew Achish would not approve of these raids. So he lied to the Philistine king. He wanted to give a false impression that he was loyal to the Philistine king who was providing a shelter for him.



*Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish (9). When Achish asked him, "Where did you go raiding today?" David would lie to him saying, "Against the Negev of Judah" or "Against the Negev of the Kenites" (10).*

What was wrong with this? A lie leads to another lie. Honesty is the best policy. David might have thought his actions were justified because he would be the future king of Israel and he could not possibly do anything that would harm his own country. And he needed Achish's protection from Saul for the time being. He might have also thought that he was not attacking Achish's people. But lie is lie, no matter how you try to spin it. David did not please the Lord. In fact, he would get in trouble until the Lord came to rescue him.

Humanly speaking, David's plan was working well. Through his deception, David "earned" Achish's trust. Verse 12 says: *Achish trusted David and said to himself, "He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant forever."* Notice Achish's words: "He will be my servant forever." David was safe in the enemy territory. The Philistine king considered him as his trusted servant. Was David happy about this development? Not if he remembered God's vision and purpose for his life. It was not God's will for David to be Achish's servant forever (28:17). God had a great purpose for him. God had chosen him to be king and had his servant Samuel anoint him (16:1,13; 28:17). Now, because of his unbelief, David would fall into his own trap (28:1-2).

A day of reckoning came to David. The Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel and Achish wanted David and his men to be part of his army (18:1). What did David say to Achish? *David said, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do." Achish replied, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life" (2).* What a terrible situation David got into! He was about to fight against his own people, as a bodyguard of the enemy king! So what happened? Stay tuned as we will pick up this story in Chapter 29. We will find out how God helped David.

## II. FINDING ANSWERS ANY 'WITCH' WAY (28:3-25)

In Chapter 28, Saul becomes desperate. He tries to bring up Samuel's spirit from death to consult with him. It is a strange story. But first, verse 3 mentions again how all Israel mourned for Samuel when he died. They buried him in his own town of Ramah. The verse also mentions that Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. It was a good thing. He knew that God did not want his people to turn to witchcraft. Perhaps he wanted to do something right in honor of Samuel, the great spiritual leader. The problem was that he did not purge the sin of witchcraft from his heart. When he saw the Philistine army that came to attack his country, he was afraid. Terror filled his heart (5). What did he decide to do?

First, he inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets (6). The Urim and Thummim were two stones (black and white) that

were used by the high priest to get God's yes or no answer on certain matters. But God did not respond to Saul's inquiries. He tried everything. In today's terms, he tried to call God on the phone. He tried to text him. He tried to contact him through Facebook. But God would not answer him.

Why didn't God answer him? Actually the problem was Saul's. He considered God like a vending machine. He did not have a personal relationship with God. Only when he needed help, he went to God. When things went in his favor, he couldn't care less about God. Only when a problem arose, he asked for God's help. This is happening in our society as well. Many people couldn't care less about God in normal situations. Only when they become desperate, they demand God to do something for them as if God owed them. When God does not answer, they complain and say bad things about God. When we have a personal relationship with God and he is our loving Father, why wouldn't he answer our prayers? Jesus said, "If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:13) On the other hand, without a loving relationship with God, we have to face alone the challenges of life. We have to admit how difficult it is to face the world without our loving God.

When God was silent, what did Saul decide to do in his desperation? There are two ways people react to their desperate situation: (1) sincerely repent and seek God, or (2) try to find way out on their own. Saul did the latter. He tried to find God's guidance through a medium that God forbid (Lev 20:6). What a strange logic! Saul said to his attendants to find a medium. He wanted to resort to the witchcraft that he had banned. When he was told that there was a witch in Endor, he disguised himself in plain clothes and went to her. But the woman resisted at first, saying her life was in danger. She thought it was a setup by Saul's undercover agent to catch her. After Saul swore to her by the Lord, she agreed. "Whom shall I bring up for you?" she asked and his answer was, "Bring up Samuel."



Look at verse 12. *When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"* The woman was shocked when she saw Samuel. She realized that it was King Saul who used her to summon Samuel. She saw a spirit of old man coming up wearing a robe. After hearing her description of the spirit, Saul was sure it was Samuel. He bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. It was an irony that when Samuel was alive, Saul would not listen to him. Now that he was dead, he showed his respect for Samuel.

Look at verse 15. *Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by*

*dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.*" (Saul's response included "I" and "me" many times.) Then Samuel rebuked Saul for consulting the dead prophets only after the Lord had turned away from him and actually became his enemy (16). He said to Saul: *"The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today"* (17-18). Finally, the spirit of Samuel delivered bad news to Saul. He said that the Lord would hand over both Israel and him to the Philistines, and he and his sons would be killed in the battle (19).

How did Saul respond to the bad news? Immediately he fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. For the first time in his life, his response to Samuel's words was very serious. What if Saul responded seriously to God's words spoken to him through Samuel earlier? Then he would not have put himself in this situation. God had given him several opportunities to obey his words but he had rejected God, his words and Samuel time and again. Now he had to pay the price for his pride and disobedience. We learn that we should repent and obey God when we are given opportunities.

Now the question here is, "Did the woman really call up the spirit of Samuel?" Is witchcraft so powerful to bring up a great servant like Samuel from death? Was it really the spirit of Samuel or just a ghost that talked to Saul? Bible scholars are divided on this. Some including Martin Luther and John Calvin believed that it was an evil spirit masquerading as the prophet. Others say that it was Samuel who came back to rebuke Saul by a sovereign act of God. Perhaps we will never know the answer to this until we ask Jesus when he comes back. Nevertheless, this chapter teaches us several spiritual lessons: First, we should focus on building our personal relationship with God rather than considering him as our banker, doctor, or consultant we turn to only when we are desperate. God is not a vending machine. Second, we should listen to God and obey his words when we have the chance. God is kind and patient with us as he was with Saul. But we should not push the limit. We should not be like Saul who wanted to listen to Samuel only after he was dead.

The woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken (21). Saul lost his strength because he knew God was not on his side. The woman encouraged him to eat so that he could have the strength to go on his way. First, he refused to eat. He was like a little kid who refuses to eat because he does not get what he wants from his parents. Only after his men urged him, he got up from the ground. He ate the meat and bread prepared by the witch. That same night Saul and his men got up and left (25).

In today's passage, we learn that both David and Saul failed when they set aside the words of God and did their own things. David fell into his own trap when he went to Achish without praying to God first. Saul had ignored God's words time and again in the past and now was willing to listen when it was too late. Let us learn from their mistakes. Let us have a close personal relationship with God by listening to him and obeying his words so that we may not make bad decisions out of fear when we face the trials in life.