

Homiletical Paper: 1 Samuel 28

Robert 'Brady' Henderson

Dr. McKellar PRCHG-3323

February 20th, 2025

Analysis of the Text: 1 Samuel 28:1-25

1 Samuel 28 begins a little obscure, and not what we would expect considering what is to come later on in the text. David was still in Ziklag within the context of verse 1. It must be remembered that at this time in the context of the book of Samuel, David had a plan to escape Saul (Saul was trying to kill him), and that involved fleeing to the land of the philistines¹. Still in verse 1, this creates an unthinkable problem for David for now, that won't be handled until 1 Samuel 29 (which does not pertain to the text of this exegetical paper). It is believed that David had been working under Achish for approximately a year at this point, and Achish tells him that David and his men are going to be under his command². David's response to this is rather arrogant, and then Achish responds by stating that David will be his body guard for life. David serving as Achish bodyguard for life is not going to occur, but the thought is certainly there. Robert D. Bergen even calls David's response, 'David's Superlative skill in deceptive speech'³. A quick word study shows that 'Body Guard' in the English comes from (Samar) in the Hebrew text. Samar שָׁמַר is compounded with Ros רֹאשׁ. While 'Ros' can mean leader or chief, Samar is a very common Hebrew word in the OT occurring 469 times. Here in 1 Samuel 28:2, it is a Masculine singular participle which means to hedge about (as with thorns on a bush), to guard, to protect, and to attend to. Achish wants David to attend to his every need. Quite the interesting turn of events for the future King of Israel. Which is coming sooner rather than later.

Before the writer of Samuel explains the situation that David got himself into, the voice of the author switches to discuss what was happening with Saul beginning in verse 3. The author/narrator brings us back to the heart and mind of Saul in a story which is the darkest moment in Saul's life, but can also be, arguably, one of the darkest narratives in the Old

¹ Andrews and Bergen, 184.

² The Holy Bible, 535.

³ Bergen, 263.

Testament. The information gathered in verse 3 is crucial to the actions of Saul that are getting ready to be told. Samuel had died. This information was previously given to us in 1 Samuel 25:1, which reads ‘Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah.’ So why is Samuel’s ‘obituary’ repeated here in 1 Samuel 28? Several reasons could explain this. One is because Israel is in big trouble and Samuel wasn’t there to get them out of the problems they created⁴. Secondly, Saul is in trouble and Samuel isn’t there to give him wisdom and advice from God⁵. It is clearly mentioned that Saul had expelled mediums and necromancers (people who claim to meet with the dead). But why? To show later on in the text why Saul had to leave Israel in order to have access to the mediums he was seeking, and also to show that Saul, in this area, was obedient to the law of Moses (Leviticus 19:31, Leviticus 20:6-7 and Deuteronomy 18:11). A quick word study will show that the english word ‘Medium’ is translated from ‘Obe’ אֹבִי which was a spiritist or what we would often call a witch.

‘Necromancer’ is translated from ‘Yidd’only יִדְדוֹנִי which means knowing one, or a conjurer.

1 Samuel 28:4, shows that the Philistines are gathering for battle and verse 5 tells us that Saul was ‘afraid’⁶. The fact the text tells us he was afraid is important because in verse 3, the narrator just told us that Samuel was no longer around to give him advice. In verse 6, Saul even inquires of God, but there is no answer. Why does God not answer Saul? I don’t think the Lord answered Saul either by direct revelation through dreams or by the priests because Saul had made it clear previously in Samuel, that he was not interested in the slightest in obeying God and doing things His way. Secondly, Saul had just had many aaronic priests killed, and only one of those priests survived that successfully fled to David⁷. Saul isn’t interested in following the Lord,

⁴ Wiersbe, 544.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Holy Bible, 536.

⁷ Bergen, 265.

He just wants God to save him from this situation. In verse 7, Saul makes it clear that yet again, he is going to do things his way. In verse 7, Saul tells his servants to find him a medium, and he wants to go there. This information given to us in verse 3 is so important because now we experience the shock of Saul seeking for a medium to assist him even though he is doing something that is completely against the Mosaic law⁸. Saul had cut himself off from God and lost the support of the prophets, so he was going to take a ‘non-yahwistic’ alternative for the guidance he desperately wanted⁹.

In verse 8, in the night before the battle (1 Samuel 28:19), we see that Saul along with two men go with him to see the woman at night¹⁰. Two things are important about verse 8, Saul disguised himself so he wouldn’t be recognizable and he went at night when it was dark, making it hard to see, obviously. That verb ‘disguised’ in verse 8 in the English is translated from the Hebrew verb ‘hapas’ חָפַס which occurs 24 times in the Old Testament. This verb is masculine and singular and has the meaning of to go into hiding, and to devise oneself. Saul is hiding his identity as King, to seek the answer concerning the next day from a non-yahweh’ source. The location was Endor was 4.5 miles northeast of where the Philistines were encamped¹¹. Geographically speaking Endor was to the east of the Philistine camp and based on this detail in verse 8, Saul had to make it through enemy lines to consult the Medium¹². Talk about desperation. Verse 8 is also significant because Saul states his purpose in speaking with this medium, ‘Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you’. The verb ‘divine’ is ‘loud’ in the text and quite interesting. It is translated from the Hebrew verb ‘qasam’ קָסַם which means to practice divination (the practice of seeking knowledge by supernatural

⁸ Wiersbe, 544.

⁹ Bergen, 266.

¹⁰ Wiersbe, 545.

¹¹ The Holy Bible, 536.

¹² Andrews and Bergen, 186.

ways). In the Hebrew it is an imperative in the feminine singular form. Showing how much this means to Saul personally. The Medium in verse 9 responds by suggesting that the ‘disguised man’ and the two who are accompanying him are seeking to put her in a trap, because even this Medium knows that Saul outlaws people like her according to the Mosaic law. In verses 10-11, Saul reassures her, and asks that Samuel be brought up by the Medium. This is where the text is quite strange yet interesting.

The shock of the medium in verse 12 when she brought up the Spirit of Samuel was because she realized that this was indeed, Saul¹³. In verse 13, Saul calms her down, because he really wants the information that she is going to provide him with. While many scholars believe this all fakery, I agree with Dale Ralph Davis when he wrote ‘I don’t think the text intends to suggest that.’¹⁴ One of the main issues that Bible students tend to have with this text is in verses 13-14, when Samuel appears that night to the Medium and Saul. There are many questions raised on how this occurred and why. I think the simplest answer is this, it was not because this Medium was so good, but it is because the Lord allowed it to occur¹⁵. According to this text, this was not a demon mitigating Samuel, but I think that it was God permitting Saul to have one more conversation with Samuel¹⁶. After all, it’s clear that Saul wouldn’t listen to anyone else, even when Samuel was living he would rarely listen to him. It’s interesting that the word ‘robe’ in verse 14 comes from the Hebrew word ‘miyl’ מֵיַל which literally means ‘sleeveless robe’¹⁷. This is significant because the same Hebrew word is found in 1 Samuel 15:27 where Saul grabbed the robe that the prophet was wearing and tore it.

¹³ Bergen, 267.

¹⁴ Davis, 291.

¹⁵ Wiersbe, 544.

¹⁶ Andrews and Bergen, 187.

¹⁷ Bergen, 268.

In verse 15 Samuel begins to speak to Saul. It is clear based on the text that it is truly Samuel's Spirit speaking to Saul, again, because God allowed this to happen. Saul then explains the predicament he is in with the Philistines and that God is not answering him. Verses 16-19 probably shook Saul to his core. Samuel informs Saul that he did not obey the voice of the Lord with the situation concerning the Amalekites earlier in Samuel, and that the Lord was going to give Israel into the hand of the Philistines the next day. This is God's judgement. The choices that Saul made in fact have real consequences. It was clear that Saul had lost the right to rule Israel due to his continual disobedience to the Lord and His Word¹⁸. Now, there were consequences to pay, and Saul does not like them.

In verse 20, Saul is distraught. His own hopelessness brought him to the point of committing the actions that night that he was guilty of. This man who was once the tall, handsome and impressive king of Israel was now fully laid out on the ground, helpless and hopeless¹⁹. Though Saul was still distraught and distressed, the medium (along with the persuasion of the two servants) convinced Saul to eat, and they left. Indeed, what Samuel had said, would come to pass in 1 Samuel 31. Even to the point of Saul committing suicide.

Authorship, Recipients, Purpose, Text

The author/narrator of 1-2 Samuel is anonymous. There are several educated 'guesses', but that is what they are, guesses. 1 Chronicles 29:29-30 seems to imply that Samuel is the author who left these historical records, but of course he dies in chapter 25 of 1 Samuel. One Scholar, David M. Howard Jr suggests that Nathan, Seraiah, Ahimaaz or Abiathar could be the potential writers. But, we don't know. The recipients would be the Jews, this was a historical narrative for the nation of Israel. The main purpose of the book of Samuel is to look at the

¹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹ Woodhouse, 517.

Israelite monarchy. Six details flow from the purpose. They are in the opinion of this writer, the initial request from the people for a monarchy, the actual establishment of the monarchy, the tragic reign of Saul, the choosing by God for David to be King, the Davidic covenant, and then the sins of David as a man 'after God's own heart'. The text of Samuel is Hebrew, although parts are difficult to understand as some scholars suggest it was 'pieced' together.

Scene by Scene Flow

The narrative begins with a scene of David and Achish's response for David to be his personal bodyguard in verses 1-2. Then the text of this narrative transitions from verse 3 to verse 7 to repeating Samuel's obituary, and that Saul had cast out the mediums and necromancers. This is done to set up the narrative for the next scene. Still in this scene, Saul is confronted with a Philistine military threat and he cries out to the Lord, but does not get a response. Taking matters into his own hands, he seeks a medium to consult the one he didn't listen to while he was living, Samuel. In the next scene, in verses 8-19, Saul disguises himself and finds a Medium to get Samuel's Spirit to speak to him. Because the text indicates this happens, we know that it did happen and it happened because God allowed it to happen. Still in this same scene, Samuel responds to Saul and lets him know that because he (Saul) did not obey the voice of the Lord concerning the Amalekites, that the Lord was handing over Israel and Saul, over to the Philistines. This is the judgement of God on display. In the last scene found in verses 20-25, Saul is distraught over this news. To the point where he will not eat until persuaded. His helplessness and hopelessness is on full display.

Main Idea of this Text

God can allow us to hear the hard truths even if we go through the wrong methods to try to get an answer.

Outline of 1 Samuel 28:1-25

Sermon Title: ‘The Helplessness and Hopelessness of those without God!’

Sermon in a Sentence: God can allow us to hear the hard truths even if we go through the wrong methods to try to get an answer but without Him we will be left helpless and hopeless.

Question to Ask: How does this text show us that without God, we are completely hopeless and helpless?

Truth #1: *The Fear without God. (vv. 3-7)*

Illustration at verse 7 on how if you have to change your wardrobe to become unrecognizable, you probably shouldn't do it

Truth #2: *The Desperation without God. (vv. 8-14)*

Illustration at verse 8 on how sin clouds our vision

Truth #3: *The Judgement faced without God. (vv. 15-25)*

Illustration at some point here are without God, we have nothing

Points of application:

If you try to live your life without God, you will constantly live in fear.

Don't try to stoop down to non-God Honoring tactics to get an answer you want from God just because you aren't patient to listen to Him.

There are consequences to every action that we take, including the actions we take that go directly against God.

Bibliography

Andrews, Stephen J and Robert D. Bergen. 'Holman Old Testament Commentary: I&II Samuel. Nashville, TN. B&H Publishing Group, 2009.

Berge, Robert D. The New American Commentary: 1, 2 Samuel. B&H Publishing Group, 1996.

Davis, Dale Raph. I Samuel: Looking on the Heart, Focus on the Bible Commentary Series. Christian Focus Publications, 2021.

Longman III, Tremper and David E. Garland. The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel-2 Kings. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2009.

The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments: The Esv Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2009.

Wiersbe, Warren. The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: The Complete Old Testament. David C. Cook Publishing, 2007.

Woodhouse, John. 1 Samuel: Preaching the Word Commentary Series. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2008.