

1 Samuel 27:1-12

Detours and Delays

Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and say, 'So David has done.'" Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."— 1 Samuel 27:1-12 ESV

David was human. He was a flesh-and-blood man who had a sin nature like everyone else and constantly struggled with his own inner fears, feelings of doubt, and the nagging questions regarding his fate. He loved God and wanted to be obedient to the will of God, but he was also driven by an innate desire to stay alive. And the longer his feud with Saul continued, the more he must have struggled with believing God would one day make him king.

This chapter provides a glimpse into one of David's weaker moments. Nowhere in the chapter is God mentioned. At no point do we see David seeking God's will. In fact, it would appear that David's decision to find refuge in the land of the Philistines was made without any input from God at all. He might have received well-meaning advice from his men, but his choice to return to the very place where he had resorted to saving his life by acting like a madman was not something God told him to do. But thankfully, God was still in control.

Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.
– Proverbs 19:21 ESV

David's last journey into Philistine territory, recorded in chapter 21, nearly got him killed. To escape the pursuit of Saul, David had shown up in Gath, seeking refuge from Achish, the king of the Philistines. It just so happened that David was carrying the sword of Goliath, the Philistine champion he had defeated in battle. When the Philistine officers questioned the wisdom of providing sanctuary to David and hinted to the king that he would be better off dead, David feigned madness and "pretended to be insane, scratching on doors and drooling down his beard" (1 Samuel 21:13 NLT). Unwilling to kill a lunatic, Achish let David escape with his life.

Now, here was David seeking refuge among the Philistines again. His doubts and fears clouded his thinking and, evidently, erased his memory of what had happened the last time he attempted to use this questionable strategy.

This time, David was welcomed by Achish with open arms and even given his own city, Ziklag, within the territory of the Philistines. David relocated his 600 men, along with their families, to their new base, complete with houses, walls, and protection from Saul. This would have been a welcome upgrade from the caves in which they had been hiding for so long.

While living in the land of the Philistines, David employed a strategy that allowed him to go out and attack the enemies of Israel, of which there were many. The text mentions the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. All of these nations occupied the land of Canaan and were part of the people groups that God had commanded Joshua and the people of Israel to completely remove from the land when they occupied it. But they had failed to do so. The Israelites' failure to fully obey the command of God is repeated throughout the Book of Joshua.

But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out, so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day. – Joshua 15:63
ESV

However, they did not drive out the Canaanites who lived in Gezer, so the Canaanites have lived in the midst of Ephraim to this day but have been made to do forced labor. – Joshua 16:10
ESV

Yet the people of Manasseh could not take possession of those cities, but the Canaanites persisted in dwelling in that land. – Joshua 17:12
ESV

Their unwillingness or inability to drive out the inhabitants of the land left them with a constant threat of war and the risk of committing idolatry. These nations proved to be a constant source of temptation and trouble. So, David used his new headquarters in Ziklag as an outpost from which he sent raiding parties against the enemies of Israel. His strategy included the complete annihilation of every man, woman, and child, so no one could tell Achish what he was up to. In

fact, David left Achish with the impression that he was fighting the Philistines' enemies, falsely reporting the locations of his raids.

When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." – 1 Samuel 27:10 ESV

So, what are we to make of all this? David appears to have gone to the land of the Philistines without God's permission. Yet, while he was there, he continued to fight the enemies of Israel, clearing the Promised Land of the nations that Joshua and the people of Israel had failed to remove. However, to do what he did, David had to lie to King Achish. Everything he did while living in Ziklag was based on subterfuge and deception. So, was he in God's will? Was he doing what God would have him do? The text doesn't provide an answer, but in the next chapter, it will become clear that David's plan eventually placed him in a very difficult position. It would seem that David's decision to seek refuge among the Philistines was not the will of God, but it did not thwart or derail God's plan. The Proverbs have much to say about the relationship between the plans of man and the plans of God.

We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps. – Proverbs 16:9 NLT

The Lord directs our steps, so why try to understand everything along the way? – Proverbs 20:24 NLT

The prophet, Jeremiah, prayed these powerful, self-disclosing words to the Lord:

*I know, O Lord, that the way of man is not in himself,
that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.
Correct me, O Lord, but in justice;
not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. – Jeremiah 10:23-24 ESV*

Years later, even David would pen the following words:

*The Lord directs the steps of the godly.
He delights in every detail of their lives.
Though they stumble, they will never fall,
for the Lord holds them by the hand. – Psalm 37:23-24 NLT*

We can't thwart God's plan, but we can certainly cause ourselves a great deal of pain and suffering when we attempt to replace his plan with our own. We can complicate our lives by introducing detours into His divine will for our lives. Abraham and Sarah came up with the great idea to use Hagar as a means to fulfill God's promise to give them a child. But in doing so, they tried to do God's will man's way. Saul sought God's aid by offering sacrifices to Him, but he failed to do it God's way. Instead, he took on the role of the priest himself and brought down God's wrath rather than His blessing. Peter tried to dissuade Jesus from fulfilling God's will

concerning His death. He forbade Jesus from carrying out the Father's command. But Jesus accused him of siding with the enemy and seeking the will of Satan rather than that of God.

We must be very careful to keep our wills from taking precedence over God's will. It is not that we can stop what He has planned, but we can certainly make the path He has laid out for us more difficult. Like a driver who refuses to use their GPS, we can wander off the path and find ourselves seemingly lost and delayed in our journey. Still, God continues to recalibrate our way, providing us with another route to reach the destination He has in store for us. Thankfully, many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.

1 Samuel 28:1-7

Truth or Consequences

In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor." – 1 Samuel 28:1-7 ESV

The last few chapters have presented a repetitive, back-and-forth treatment of the lives of the two main characters in this story: David and Saul. One minute, the emphasis is on David, and then the scene shifts to Saul. Sandwiched in the middle were two face-to-face encounters between the two men, where David confronted Saul after sparing his life. Now, in chapter 28, the two men appear together, but not physically. The opening verses of the chapter offer a brief, yet sobering, glimpse into what happens when anyone decides to disobey God and takes matters into their own hands. While the author has gone out of his way to contrast David and Saul, in these opening lines, it is as if he is trying to show that both men have created unnecessary and uncomfortable circumstances for themselves because they have chosen to disobey God.

David is living with the Philistines. Granted, he and his men, along with their families, occupy the city of Ziklag, located in a more remote area within Philistia, but they are still considered vassals or servants of King Achish. In fact, King Achish was under the false impression that David and his 600 men were fighting against Israel on his behalf. Where would he have gotten such an idea? From David himself. Each time David and his troops went on a raid, they would attack the enemies of Israel. But when they returned, they would report to Achish that they had been raiding areas within Judah. So Achish believed that David had switched his loyalties and was now a faithful servant of the Philistines.

David must have considered himself a genius. By moving to Philistia, he had escaped the Saul's relentless pursuit and had a safe haven from which he could continue his attacks against the enemies of Israel. What a brilliant idea. But his ingenious deception was about to blow up in his face when the inevitable happened. The Israelites declared war on the Philistines, and King Achish turned to David, demanding that he join forces with him.

King Achish told David, "You and your men will be expected to join me in battle." – 1 Samuel 28:1 NLT

The dream scenario David had created was about to turn into a nightmare. If he refused to attack the Israelites, King Achish would realize that it had all been a ruse and that David had tricked him. If David agreed to fight with the Philistines, he would be attacking his own people and forfeiting his right to be their next king. He would be a traitor. So, in the heat of the moment, David gave Achish an ambiguous commitment.

"Very well!" David agreed. "Now you will see for yourself what we can do." – 1 Samuel 28:2a NLT

David is compelled to continue deceiving King Achish, thereby delaying the inevitable decision he must make. And the king, unaware of what David is up to, wrongly assumes that he has the full support of David and his men, putting David in a rather awkward predicament.

Then Achish told David, "I will make you my personal bodyguard for life." – 1 Samuel 28:2b NLT

David, who once served as the personal bodyguard of the king of Israel, was now the bodyguard for the king of the Philistines (1 Samuel 22:14). Imagine David's embarrassment at having to try and explain this promotion to his men. This was a predicament to end all predicaments. He found himself between a rock and a hard place, and it was all his doing. He had no one to blame but himself.

What about Saul? He found himself facing a war against the Philistines, without one of his best warriors and 600 of his most battle-hardened soldiers, all because he had chosen to make David and his men outlaws. His incessant and obsessive attempt to take David's life had forced David to switch sides (or so Saul had concluded). Not only that, but Samuel, the prophet of God, was dead, and God had removed His Spirit from Saul, leaving him without divine direction. He was a king without a Sovereign to whom he could turn for help and guidance. So, he assembled his men for battle.

When Saul saw the vast Philistine army, he became frantic with fear. He asked the LORD what he should do, but the LORD refused to answer him, either by dreams or by sacred lots or by the prophets. – 1 Samuel 28:5-6 NLT

God wasn't talking, the prophet was dead, David was AWOL, the Israelites were vastly outnumbered, and Saul was scared out of his wits. But this desperate situation had been of his own making. He was the one who had disobeyed God and failed to wipe out the Amalekites. He was the one who refused to wait for the prophet and offered sacrifices to God in direct disobedience to the law of God. He was the one who refused to accept God's decree that David was to be the next king of Israel and, instead, had repeatedly attempted to take David's life. Now, David had sided with the enemy, and Saul was facing consequences that were a direct

result of his disobedience and poor decision-making. Finding himself between a rock and a hard place, Saul made one more ungodly decision, turning to a witch for help.

God had made it very clear that this kind of activity was forbidden for the Israelites.

“If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.” – Leviticus 20:6 ESV

“There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord.” – Deuteronomy 18:10-12 ESV

Two men. Two different circumstances. However, both found themselves in their own particular predicament due to disobedience to God. Rather than seek and submit to the will of God, they had determined to take matters into their own hands. Now they both were faced with the consequences of their God-less decision-making. Thomas L. Constable provides a sobering summary of what is going on here.

“This whole pericope illustrates that, when opposition from ungodly people persists, God’s people should continue to pray and trust Him for protection rather than taking matters into their own hands. If we initiate a plan without seeking God’s guidance, we may remove one source of aggravation and danger only to find ourselves in another. Such plans may result in some good, but they may also put us in situations where we find it even more tempting to disobey God (cf. Jacob). We should, instead, remember God’s promises (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:3-9; 2 Pet. 1:2-4) and pray for His guidance (cf. Phil. 4:6-7).” – Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on 1 Samuel, 2009 Edition*

1 Samuel 28:8-25

Too Little, Too Late

So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" But Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines."

Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, "Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me. Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it, and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night. — 1 Samuel 28:8-25 ESV

The scene that unfolds in this chapter is both fascinating and challenging to comprehend. Saul had long since lost access to God's guidance due to his disobedience. God had removed His Spirit from Saul.

Now the Spirit of the LORD had left Saul, and the LORD sent a tormenting spirit that filled him with depression and fear. – 1 Samuel 16:14 NLT

Now, when Saul finds himself facing the threat of war with a vastly superior Philistine army, he is at a loss as to what to do and decides to seek God's advice and help. But God was not talking. Not only that, but Samuel, the prophet of God, was dead. To make things even worse for Saul, Abiathar, the sole remaining priest who had escaped Saul's massacre of all the priests of Nob, had taken the high priest's ephod with him and was now residing with David. The ephod contained the Urim and Thummim, which were used to seek God's will (1 Samuel 23:6-12). So, Saul was out of luck and out of options. Which led him to do the unthinkable and unholy. He sought out a medium or a witch. While Samuel had been alive, he had ordered Saul to remove from the land all those who practiced witchcraft, divination, and sorcery. God had given the people of Israel very clear orders concerning these matters before they entered the land of promise:

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out before you. – Deuteronomy 18:9-12 ESV

God knew the danger of these practices and had forbidden them among His people. He had other plans for them; He was to be their only source of wisdom and direction.

"You shall be blameless before the Lord your God, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this.

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen..." – Deuteronomy 18:13-15 ESV

But once again, Saul disobeyed God. He sought out a medium in an attempt to get divine help in his time of need. He was desperate and allowed his fear to get the best of him. But not wanting anyone to know what he was doing, Saul disguised himself and went to visit the medium at night. He attempted to cover his actions through deceit and subterfuge. When the medium was reticent to assist him out of fear for her life, Saul assured her that nothing would be done to her, in direct defiance of God's command.

What is fascinating about this story is that the woman was actually able to conjure up Samuel from the dead, or so it would appear. This passage does not validate the practice of necromancy or communication with the dead, so it would be wrong to use this story as proof that seances really do work. What this woman and those like her were really doing was

conjuring up evil spirits. Their practice was demonic. But in this case, God supernaturally intervened and allowed the spirit of Samuel to appear. Even the woman was shocked at what she saw. “When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed” (1 Samuel 28:12 NLT). Whatever appeared before her was unexpected and disturbing. Even she couldn’t believe her eyes. That the vision she saw was Samuel, the dead prophet, was clear to her and Saul. And the message Samuel gave was clearly from God.

What Samuel had to say to Saul was not good news. If this had been an evil spirit, it would have lied to Saul, telling him what he wanted to hear and giving him false counsel. But Samuel told Saul exactly what was going to happen, and it was anything but comforting.

“Why ask me, since the Lord has left you and has become your enemy? The Lord has done just as he said he would. He has torn the kingdom from you and given it to your rival, David. The Lord has done this to you today because you refused to carry out his fierce anger against the Amalekites. What’s more, the Lord will hand you and the army of Israel over to the Philistines tomorrow, and you and your sons will be here with me. The Lord will bring down the entire army of Israel in defeat.” – 1 Samuel 28:16-19 NLT

This was clearly a case of too little, too late. While Samuel had been alive, Saul had ignored his counsel. He had repeatedly refused to accept the prophet’s advice, choosing instead to disagree with God’s word concerning David and stubbornly attempting to derail what God had ordained. It is vital to note that Saul never demonstrates any remorse or repentance. When he found himself faced with the overwhelming threat of annihilation at the hands of the Philistines, he did not call out to God in repentance. He never confessed his sins. He did fall on his face, but only out of fear over what he had heard the prophet say. At no point does Saul admit his wrong and beg God to forgive him. He is stubborn to the end. He wanted God’s guidance and protection, but remained unwilling to live his life according to God’s will.

How often do we find ourselves in difficult circumstances and forced to call out to God? The very one whom we have refused to show proper honor and respect in the good times becomes our go-to source in the bad times. We get in trouble, and suddenly our prayer lives take on a whole new significance. We cry out and beg God to save us. There is nothing wrong with crying out to God. In fact, we are commanded to call on God in times of trouble. However, it is essential to remember that God desires us to come to Him humbly and with a heart of repentance. Saul knew that. He had heard those very words from the mouth of the prophet years earlier.

“What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.” – 1 Samuel 15:22 NLT

Years later, when David had become king and had committed adultery with Bathsheba, he would write the following words:

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one.

You do not want a burnt offering.

The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit.

You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God. – Psalm 51:16-17 NLT

Saul would find himself face down in the dirt, but his prideful heart would remain unrepentant and stubbornly unwilling to confess his disobedience toward God. Sorrow over sin is not the same as repentance. Fear of the circumstances we face for our sins is not the same as a reverent fear of God. Saul wasn't seeking a relationship with God; he simply wanted God to deliver him from the problems he had created.

1 Samuel 29:1-11

Saved by the Bell

Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day." But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,

*'Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands'?"*

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines." And David said to Achish, "But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" And Achish answered David and said, "I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light." So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel. – 1 Samuel 29:1-11 ESV

While Saul was busy consulting with a witch, David was consorting with the enemy. According to 1 Samuel 27:7, David had been living in the land of Philistia for 16 months. And he had pulled it off by living a lie. He had deceived King Achish into believing that he had turned his back on Israel and had chosen to join forces with the Philistines. And he had been convincing. If there had been an Academy Awards that year, David would have won an Oscar for best actor in a drama. He completely fooled Achish into believing that he was a faithful friend and ally. Just look at what Achish had to say about him:

"This is David, the servant of King Saul of Israel. He's been with me for years, and I've never found a single fault in him from the day he arrived until today." – 1 Samuel 29:3 NLT

“I swear by the Lord that you have been a trustworthy ally. I think you should go with me into battle, for I’ve never found a single flaw in you from the day you arrived until today”
– 1 Samuel 29:6 NLT

“As far as I’m concerned, you’re as perfect as an angel of God.” – 1 Samuel 29:9 NLT

But David’s performance, while convincing, was also costly. The longer he stayed in Philistia, and the more he kept up his ruse, the more dangerous his predicament would become. It was only a matter of time before David found himself in the awkward and inevitable spot of having to display his true colors. He couldn’t keep up this charade forever. In time, the nations of Israel and Philistia would find themselves at war, and David would be caught in the middle. And that is precisely the event recorded for in Chapter 29.

The Philistines had gathered all their troops to do battle with the Israelites. King Achish and his men arrived at the Aphek, on Philistia’s northern border with Israel. Bringing up the rear of his column was none other than David and his 600 men. Don’t let the significance of this moment escape you. Here was David, the God-appointed, Spirit-anointed future king of Israel, riding among the forces of the Philistines, one of the fiercest enemies of the people of God. This was no longer one of David’s cleverly disguised raids against Israelite enemies that he could cover up (see 1 Samuel 27:8-12). This was going to be an all-out war between the Israelites and the Philistines, and David was going to have to make a decision. Would he fight with the Philistines and risk the wrath of God? Would he go into battle and then turn against the Philistines, revealing to Achish and his men his true colors? If he did, he would find himself facing two foes: Achish and Saul. For the last 16 months, Saul had given up his hunt for David, but he had not given up his hatred for him. He most likely saw David as a turncoat, having switched alliances to the Philistines. Saul believed David had joined the Philistines to defeat him and take his crown. So, if Saul met David on the battlefield, he would see him as an enemy, no matter which side he chose to fight for.

David was in a predicament. His little plan to escape Saul’s wrath by living among the Philistines had seemed the right thing to do at the time, but he had made his decision without input from God. There is no indication that God ordained David’s actions or commanded his escape into Philistine territory. Now, David was faced with the inevitable consequences of his God/ess decision. But while David had left God out of his planning, God had not left David. The Almighty may not have approved of David’s strategy, but He had His hands on David. He knew David’s heart. David had been trying to do the right thing. He was still a faithful servant, and throughout his life in Philistia, he had continued to fight against Israel’s enemies. However, his self-inspired attempt at self-preservation had left him in a very precarious situation. And it was going to take the sovereign hand of God to rescue him.

As David and his men arrived at the Philistine camp at Aphek, the other Philistine lords were furious with King Achish at having brought this former Israeli commander and his men into battle with them. What was he thinking? How stupid could he be? This was the same David

who had killed the Philistine champion, Goliath, and who had songs written about his military exploits.

“Send him back to the town you’ve given him!” they demanded. “He can’t go into the battle with us. What if he turns against us in battle and becomes our adversary? Is there any better way for him to reconcile himself with his master than by handing our heads over to him?” – 1 Samuel 29:4 NLT

They saw David as a threat and Achish as a fool. To them, everything about this scenario was wrong. David had to go, and their anger convinced Achish to reluctantly give in to their demands. Always the actor, David feigned surprise, doing everything in his power to appear hurt and a bit offended at the news.

“What have I done to deserve this treatment?” David demanded. “What have you ever found in your servant, that I can’t go and fight the enemies of my lord the king?” – 1 Samuel 29:8 NLT

But in reality, this was the best thing that could have happened to David and his men. God had intervened and spared them from having to go into battle. At the very last minute, God stepped in and providentially protected David from the mess he had created. However, as will become evident in the next chapter, God protected David but would allow him to reap the results of his determination to plan his life apart from divine input. David would escape having to go into battle with the Philistines, but he would not escape the discipline of God.

God had plans for David. He had chosen him to be the next king of Israel, and part of those plans included the years that David spent hiding and wandering in the wilderness. God could have put David on the throne the very day Samuel anointed him, but David was not yet ready to be king. He had to be prepared for the role. He needed to learn the lessons God had for him. A big part of God’s preparation for David was to bolster his faith. His tendency to make decisions without God’s input would teach him the danger of autonomy in the life of the servant of God. Decisions made apart from God will never result in the blessings of God. Trying to do God’s will our way will never produce God’s results. This phase of David’s life would provide yet another valuable lesson in learning to trust God, rather than himself.

1 Samuel 30:1-6

Oh, What Tangled Webs...

Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. – 1 Samuel 30:1-6 ESV

It was in his epic poem, *Marmion*, that Sir Walter Scott first penned the now-famous words: “Oh! What a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive.” And no story proves the veracity of those words quite like the one concerning David as he returned to Ziklag after being dismissed by Achish. No doubt, David was feeling a bit relieved after narrowly escaping having to go to war with the Philistines and risk exposing the subterfuge behind his whole scheme. He had deceived Achish into believing that he was on his side. He had convinced the Philistine king that he and his men had been occupying their time attacking the enemies of Philistines, when in reality, they had been raiding the enemies of Israel. David never should have been in Philistia in the first place. He had received no direction from God to take his two wives along with all his men and their families and seek refuge among the enemies of Israel. But he had. And now, his life of deception was going to result in a less-than-happy reception when he returned home.

David and his men discovered that Amalekites had raided their town while they were away. Believing that their wives and children would be safe, they had mustered for battle under the pretense that they were going to aid the Philistines in their war against the Israelites. It is doubtful that David would have ever raised his sword against Saul or his kindred. More than likely, he and his men would have turned against the Philistines as soon as the battle started, but he would still have had to deal with Saul, his mortal enemy. David's rejection by the Philistines was a godsend. He was blessed to have been given a reprieve by God and been allowed to go home. However, what he found upon arrival was devastating. Ziklag had been burned to the ground, and every person in it had been taken captive by the Amalekites, including David's two wives.

We don't have to imagine how David's men reacted to the scene. They blamed David. It was all his fault, they claimed. No doubt, they had questioned David's sanity when he first came up with his plan to hide among the Philistines. They had probably grumbled and complained as they made their way to the front lines, facing the prospect of fighting against their own people. But now, their sorrow and frustration overflowed. We're told, “they wept until they could weep no more” (1 Samuel 30:4 NLT). Then their sadness turned to anger.

David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. – 1 Samuel 30:6 NLT

David had been in difficult circumstances before, but nothing quite like this. His wives were gone, and his men wanted to stone him. Things could not have gotten much worse, and all of it was David's doing. He had been the architect behind this fiasco. He had decided to seek refuge among the Philistines, and it had been his idea to use the base in Ziklag to launch raids against the enemies of Israel. He may have fooled King Achish, but he had not fooled the Amalekites, who made a point to raid and sack the very town in which David and his men lived. Chapter 27 provides some context to the Amalekite raid.

Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. – 1 Samuel 27:8-9 ESV

In attacking the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites, David had been doing the very thing God commanded the Israelites to do when He gave them the land of Canaan. He had ordered them to completely destroy all the inhabitants of the land. Why? Because if they didn't, He knew the Israelites would find themselves negatively influenced by their presence. In a way, these pagan nations represented sin and ungodliness. They practiced idolatry, and their societies were marked by immorality and godless behavior. God's command to remove them was in to keep the Israelites from mirroring their ways. But the Israelites failed to do what God had commanded them to do. So, David's attacks against the Amalekites had been in obedience to God's professed will for the people of Israel. Still, there is no indication that God commanded David to carry out his raids from the safety of his headquarters in Ziklag. David was attempting to do God's will *his* way. He had been trying to remain faithful to God while, at the same time, failing to trust God to keep him safe in the land of Judah. Like Abraham seeking relief from a famine by seeking refuge to Egypt, David discovered that his plans, made apart from God's input, resulted in some very unsatisfactory and uncomfortable consequences.

But David found strength in the Lord his God. – 1 Samuel 30:6 NLT

This is a pivotal moment in David's life. In the midst of one of the most challenging moments of his life, David turned to God. The Hebrew word translated "strength" is *chazaq* and it carries the idea of encouragement or finding courage. At a very weak moment in his life, David found courage by turning to God. He had made a mess of his life, but he knew that He could turn to God for strength, support, and the boldness he would need to handle the situation. With his men seeking to stone him, David sought solace and strength in God. And he would learn a valuable, life-changing lesson from this moment. He would later use the very same Hebrew word when penning the words of his psalms.

*Wait for the Lord;
be **strong** [chazaq], and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord! – Psalm 27:14 ESV*

*Be **strong** [chazaq], and let your heart take courage,
all you who wait for the Lord! – Psalm 31:24 ESV*

We can weave some very tangled webs in our lives. Like David, we have the unique capacity to get ourselves in all kinds of predicaments, through disobedience or our stubborn self-sufficiency. It is so easy to leave God out of our decision-making and then wonder how things got so screwed up. But in those moments of confusion and weakness, we need to do what David did: Turn to God and seek strength, comfort, encouragement, and courage in Him. David could have easily followed up one bad decision with yet another one. He could have begun scheming and planning, trying to figure out how to extricate himself from the jam he had created. But instead, he turned to God. He found strength in the Lord his God. And despite all that had happened and all that David had done, God came through. He proved faithful yet again. God would untangle the web that David had woven and graciously clean up the mess David created by choosing to rely on deceit rather than divine guidance.

1 Samuel 30:7-15

There When You Need Him

And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.

They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, "Will you take me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band." – 1 Samuel 30:7-15 ESV

David had returned home to Ziklag to find it had been plundered and all the women and children taken captive by the Amalekites. His men, fed up with all that had happened over the last few days, rejected David's leadership and threatened to stone him. But we're told, "David drew strength from the Lord his God" (1 Samuel 30:7 NET). With his wives missing and his life threatened by his men, David turned to God for help. This was not a novel response for David, but lately, he had been inclined to make decisions without consulting God. That's how he and his men ended up living in Ziklag, a city smack-dab in the middle of Philistine territory. David had fled to Philistia to escape the ongoing pursuit of Saul. But there is no indication that David had sought or received God's direction or approval to live among the enemies of Israel.

Yet, when David found himself between a rock and a hard place, he cried out, and God heard him. When he ran out of options and had no more tricks up his sleeve, he decided to turn to God and found his heavenly Father to have a receptive ear and a heart willing to step into the mess David had made. All David had to do was reach the end of himself and cry out to the one who was willing and capable of doing something about his predicament.

There is something about despair that makes us more dependent upon God. Our moments of helplessness and hopelessness often drive us to God and play a significant role in releasing His faithfulness. He is always ready, willing, and able to save His people, but it requires that we call out to Him. We are reminded of this very fact in the story of God's intervention on behalf of the people of Israel when they were living as slaves in Egypt.

*Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. **God heard** their groaning, and **he remembered** his covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He looked down on the people of Israel and **knew it was time to act**. – Exodus 2:23-25 NLT*

***I have certainly seen** the oppression of my people in Egypt. **I have heard** their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, **I am aware** of their suffering. – Exodus 3:7 NLT*

I have seen. I have heard. I am aware. Those three statements from God should produce a sense of relief and calm as we recognize His care and concern for His people. There is nothing that happens in or to our lives that God does not see. When we cry out, He always hears. And there is nothing we can tell Him of which He is not already fully aware. Our prayers are not meant to *inform* God of our predicament, but to *invite* His involvement. God knew full well what David was facing. He was up to speed on the problem David had created for himself and He knew what needed to be done to fix it. So, when David sought God's guidance, he received it. Using the Urim and Thummim, which were kept in the high priest's ephod, David sought God's input by asking two questions:

"Should I chase after this band of raiders? Will I catch them?" – 1 Samuel 30:8 NLT

David wanted to know if he should pursue the Amalekites, and, if he did, whether he would be successful in catching them. And God gave him the green light.

"Yes, go after them. You will surely recover everything that was taken from you!" – 1 Samuel 30:8 NLT

Not only would David catch them, he would recover everything they had taken, including all the women and children, as well as the livestock and plunder had carried away. God was going to bless David – despite David. God was going to rescue David out of the pit he had dug for himself and assuage the anger and resentment of David's men. All David had to do was draw strength from the Lord. He had to place his hope *in* and seek his help *from* the Lord. This would be yet another valuable life lesson for David, contributing to his ongoing education in the power and presence of God. He would later turn what he had learned in moments like this into beautiful words of praise.

*But in my distress I cried out to the Lord;
yes, I prayed to my God for help.
He heard me from his sanctuary;
my cry to him reached his ears. – Psalm 18:6 NLT*

He went on to write these words, which could have been penned as a direct result of this very occasion in David's life.

*I chased my enemies and caught them;
I did not stop until they were conquered.
I struck them down so they could not get up;
they fell beneath my feet.
You have armed me with strength for the battle;
you have subdued my enemies under my feet. – Psalm 18:37-39 NLT*

God is always there when we call. The problem is that we don't call on Him enough. We tend to try and solve our problems on our own. We either doubt that God *can* or *will* intervene on our behalf, or we convince ourselves that our solution will be just as effective as anything He comes up with. But when we finally reach the point where our circumstances cause us to give up and cry out, God hears and answers.

*The Lord lives! Praise to my Rock!
May the God of my salvation be exalted! – Psalm 18:46 NLT*

1 Samuel 30:16-31

A Turning Point

And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, "This is David's spoil."

Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart." But David said, "You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike." And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.

When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord." It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed. – 1 Samuel 30:16-31 ESV

This chapter appears to mark a turning point in David's life. He had been through a lot since his early days as a young shepherd boy, tending his father's flocks. There had been his surprising anointing by the prophet, Samuel. That had been followed by his unimaginable defeat of the Philistine champion, Goliath. Not long after that, he found himself serving as the court musician for Saul, the first king of Israel. Then he was promoted to be Saul's bodyguard and eventually to the role of a commander in the Israelite army.

However, everything went south when Saul's suspicions of David caused him to seek his death. That led to David's flight and the subsequent years of hiding in the wilderness and, eventually, to him seeking refuge in the land of Philistia. He spent 16 months living a lie among the Philistines. But with the sack and plunder of his home base of Ziklag, and the capture of his wives, along with the wives and children of all of his men, David hit an all-time low point in his life. With his city burned, his wives taken captive by the Amalekites, and his men threatening to stone him, David faced with one of the most difficult decisions of his entire life. It was at this

critical juncture of his life that David turned to God, rather than letting his emotions get the better of him and making an unwise decision. He sought the Lord's help and received it. God told him to pursue the Amalekites and assured him of success in the endeavor.

With the help of a captured Amalekite servant, David learned the whereabouts of the Amalekite raiding party. As the Amalekites were busy celebrating the success of their raids, David and his men launched an attack. While 400 of the Amalekites were able to escape, the passage tells us that David was able to retrieve all that had been taken.

David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, and he rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing: small or great, son or daughter, nor anything else that had been taken. David brought everything back. He also recovered all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock. – 1 Samuel 30:18-20 NLT

God gave him victory. He and his men were able to free every woman and child, and recover every item that had been stolen, along with an abundance of livestock and loot that the Amalekites had taken from other plundered cities. By seeking God's will and doing things God's way, David experienced God's blessing. No deception was necessary. Complete, not partial, success had been the outcome. And David's men went from threatening to stone him to offering him all of the plunder as his reward for saving their wives and children.

However, what David does next reveals the life-transformative nature of this moment in his life. He returns to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to join him in the fight, and shares the plunder with them. He did this against the wishes of a group of "wicked and worthless fellows" who greedily advised that these men get nothing back except their wives and children. But David recognized that the victory had been God-given, and that everyone, even those who stayed back and protected the baggage, were to enjoy the blessing God provided. David knew that this whole affair had been God's doing. He had given them success over their enemies, despite them. David knew he did not deserve what God had just done. This entire mess had been of his own making, yet God had graciously responded in mercy and provided victory. So, he told his men:

"No, my brothers! Don't be selfish with what the Lord has given us. He has kept us safe and helped us defeat the band of raiders that attacked us. Who will listen when you talk like this? We share and share alike—those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment." – 1 Samuel 30:23-24 NLT

David wanted everyone to share in the joy of the moment and experience the material blessings that God had provided. So, he not only shared the plunder with his men, but had portions of what had been taken from the Amalekites sent to the elders of Judah. As far as he was concerned, this had been God's victory, and it was only right to share it with all of God's people.

This passage is a turning point in the life of David, and provides an essential transition in the story. Yes, he is still persona non grata in Israel. He remains a fugitive, living on the run. Saul has not withdrawn the bounty on David's head. But his transformation from shepherd boy to king was rapidly coming to an end. Saul was still on the throne, but God's preparation of David to take his place was almost done. Saul's demise and David's rise were much nearer than either man knew.

It is sometimes at the lowest points of our lives that God chooses to step in and reveal His grace and mercy in abundance. It is at our moments of greatest need that God appears, because it is in those moments that we tend to call out to Him. When our capacity to solve our problems diminishes and our resources for self-preservation finally run out, we typically call out to God. And He hears, answers, and rescues. It is the very same principle that applies to our salvation. Paul reminds us that, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us **while we were still sinners**" (Romans 5:8 NLT). At the point of our greatest need – amid our sin-saturated, self-centered, death-deserving hopelessness – God stepped in and did what only He could do. He saved us. He gave us victory over sin and death. He blessed us beyond our wildest dreams. And we are to share those blessings with others. We are to share His unmerited love and favor with all those we meet.

Jesus told His disciples: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35 ESV). Our salvation marks a turning point in our lives, when we transition from selfishness and self-centeredness to selflessness and a love for others.

In many ways, the words of Paul, found in his letter to the Corinthians, fit perfectly with what we see displayed in the life of David in this passage. But they also apply to us.

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. – 2 Corinthians 5:17-19 NLT

Like David, we have been reconciled to God. We have been given a second chance, a new lease on life. We have been spared from a fate worse than death: eternal separation from God. a result, we are to share the joys and blessings of our reconciliation with God with others.

1 Samuel 31:1-7

An Ending Point

Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me." But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them. – 1 Samuel 31:1-7 ESV

While David and his men were pursuing and defeating the Amalikites, Saul and the Israelites were doing battle with the Philistines. David had sought God's help and found success. Saul had sought the help of a witch and would die in battle, along with his three sons. While David was busy distributing the spoil of his victory among his men and the elders of Judah, Saul's defeat and death resulted in the mass evacuation of the cities near the battle and the occupation of those cities by the Philistines. Two men. Two completely different outcomes. And both took place simultaneously.

When reading this passage, one can overlook the easy-to-miss reference to King Saul's armor bearer. Verse six reads: "Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and **his armor-bearer**, and all his men, on the same day together." What makes this verse interesting is the fact that, at one time, David had been Saul's armor bearer.

And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. – 1 Samuel 16:21 ESV

While just a passing reference in the text of 1 Samuel 31, it is significant to realize that David's somewhat difficult-to-understand exile from Saul's palace had been a literal godsend. God had ordained David's dissociation from Saul to spare David the same fate as Saul. All those close to Saul, including his son, Jonathan, would die as a result of his stubborn rebellion against the will of God. Had God not removed His Spirit from Saul and allowed an evil spirit to torment him, David could have remained in his service. David could have been a part of that very same battle with the Philistines. But God's plan all along was to separate David from Saul, so that he might be spared and prepared to be Saul's eventual replacement.

This entire scenario had been the work of God. He had even warned Saul that it was going to happen. When Saul sought out the aid of the witch of Endor and asked her to conjure up the

departed spirit of Samuel the prophet, God intervened. Much to her surprise and shock, she called up Samuel, and the deceased prophet gave Saul a chilling prediction:

“Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines.” – 1 Samuel 28:18-19 ESV

The end to Saul’s reign was at hand. As part of His divine plan, God determined that the time had come for Saul to step down and for David to take over. This time, when Saul faced the Philistines in battle, there would be no young shepherd boy to save him. There would be no defeat of the Philistine champion. Saul would be forced to go into battle, without the aid of the Lord, and witness the complete destruction of his army by the enemies of God.

It should not escape our attention that Saul, while wounded in battle, was not killed as part of the battle. He lived long enough to watch his sons die. He had to remain alive to the very last, witnessing the slaughter of his kinsmen. Many died before his eyes, while others deserted the battlefield in fright. When all was lost, Saul was not allowed the dignity of falling in battle at the hands of his enemies. He was forced to end his life by falling on his sword. With his suicide, Saul’s nearly 40-year reign over Israel (1 Samuel 13:1) came to an abrupt and ignominious end. Even in the moments before his death, Saul feared man more than he feared God. He was more worried about being captured by the Philistines and facing mistreatment and death at their hands than with having to stand before God Almighty. Perhaps Saul had deluded himself into believing that he had been a faithful king and obedient servant of God. Maybe he had convinced himself that he was a man of integrity. But whatever the case, Saul was facing a judgment far worse than anything the Philistines could do to him. It was Jesus who warned, “Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28 NLT).

Saul died, just as the prophet had foretold. Israel was defeated, and the Philistines were victorious. But God was still sovereign. He was not surprised at the outcome. He was not panicked by what had happened or suddenly forced to come up with a new plan to deal with this significant setback. It had all been part of His divine plan and sovereign will. God had given the people what they demanded: A king. But they didn’t want just any king; they wanted a king like all the other nations. And that is exactly what God gave them. He had clearly told, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Samuel 8:7 ESV).

The people’s 40-year experience with the worldly brand of leadership was coming to an abrupt end, and God was preparing to replace their kind of king with one His own—a man after His own heart. David was not a perfect man. He was not a sinless man. But he *was* a man whose heart had been trained to rely upon and rest in the will of God. He was a man who had learned the invaluable lesson of trusting God rather than relying on himself. He was a man who had

experienced firsthand the futility of self-preservation and the preferable choice of relying on God's salvation.

Saul was done, but God was not. Israel was down, but not out. Their best days were out ahead. The king they wanted was dead but the king they needed was alive, well, and closer than they could have ever imagined. And it was all part of God's perfect plan.

1 Samuel 31:8-13

An Epic Fail

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroath, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days. – 1 Samuel 31:8-13 ESV

What Saul feared in life actually took place in death. Right before he took his own life, he had begged his armor bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me” (1 Samuel 31:4 ESV). He feared being mocked and ridiculed by the Philistines. The Hebrew word he used is *`alal* and it can mean “to act severely, deal with severely, make a fool of someone” (“H5953 – *`alal* – Strong’s Hebrew Lexicon (KJV).” Blue Letter Bible. Web. 12 Feb, 2017). It carries the idea of mocking, as well as defilement. And that is exactly what happened. Saul’s death did not stop the inevitable. They stripped his body of its armor, then cut off his head; and the book of Chronicles says, “they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon” (1 Chronicles 10:10 ESV). The book of Chronicles goes on to provide important insight into the cause behind Saul’s death:

So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. He did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse. – 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 ESV

This was the only time Saul failed to keep faith with God. He had personally offered sacrifices to God in direct violation of the law of God (1 Samuel 13). He had also failed to wipe out the Amalekites and to destroy all the spoil from battle, disobeying a direct order from God (1 Samuel 15). And Saul had continually ignored God’s clear announcement that he was going to be replaced as king by a better man. In fact, he had actually tried to stop it from happening by seeking to take the life of the very man God had chosen as his replacement: David.

So, there were many reasons for Saul’s abandonment by God. In many ways, he had left God by choosing to live his life and rule his kingdom according to his own standards and based on his own wisdom. He had been rash, impulsive, prone to placing blame, and reticent to repent, even when proven guilty. He was prideful, arrogant, self-absorbed, and unwilling to humble himself before God. His eventual humiliation at the hands of the Philistines was his own doing; he had brought it on himself. And as his world came to a crashing end on the field of battle, he found

himself severely wounded, his sons dead, his army fleeing, and the Philistine troops closing in for the kill.

Saul's decapitated body was hung on the walls of the city of Beth-shan. They displayed his head in the temple of their god, Dagon and placed his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth—all as a public display of his defeat and to humiliate Saul and the God of the people of Israel. It was all very similar to when the Philistines placed the captured Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon (1 Samuel 5). The Ark, a symbol of the Israelite God, was little more than an idol to the Philistines, so they placed it at the feet of their god to honor his superiority over Yahweh. In the same way, by placing Saul's head in the temple of Dagon was a way to show that their god was greater than the God of Israel. In their minds, Dagon had prevailed over Yahweh. They had won; Saul and the Israelites had lost.

But the story doesn't end there. When the residents of Jabesh-gilead heard what had been done to Saul and his sons, they did something about it. At great risk to their lives, they planned a nighttime raid and took the bodies of Saul and his sons from the walls of Beth-shan and gave them a proper burial. The text doesn't explain why their bodies were burned. Perhaps it was because they had been so mutilated by the Philistines that they were beyond recognition. Or it could have simply been an attempt to prevent the spread of disease. Whatever the case, their bones were buried, and a fast was held for seven days. There would be no great monument erected to Saul. Note the difference between the death of Saul and that of a king like Asa.

And Asa slept with his fathers, dying in the forty-first year of his reign. They buried him in the tomb that he had cut for himself in the city of David. They laid him on a bier that had been filled with various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art, and they made a very great fire in his honor. – 2 Chronicles 16:13-14 ESV

It would become customary for the deceased kings of Israel to have elaborate burials and expensive tombs built in their honor. Such was not the case for Saul. He and his sons were buried under a tree in an undisclosed spot. No pomp. No elaborate ceremony. No monument to mark their memory. Just like that, Saul was gone, his memory wiped from the minds of his people, but his legacy of faithlessness and disobedience left behind in the captured cities of Israel, the lost lives of hundreds of soldiers, and the demoralized remnants of the Jews who no longer had a king. But God was not done.

This was not an end, but a new beginning. While all looked lost and the future looked dim, God had things right where He wanted them. The Israelites would not be without a king for long, and this time, they would find themselves with a king who was a man after God's own heart.