

# Living According to God's Design

## 1 Samuel 28-31

### Key Bible Texts

1 Samuel 28-31

### Key Bible Verse(s)

“And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.” (1 Samuel 30:6)

## Background to the Study

The Philistine army that gathered at Shunem in the broad valley of Jezreel to fight with Israel, was an awesome spectacle for the much smaller Israelite army that had assembled just south of them in Gilboa. The sight of the Philistine army caused Israel's King Saul to fear and “his heart greatly trembled” (vs. 5). King Saul had no one he could turn to for help and direction. The prophet Samuel, his primary adviser in matters relating to God, was dead. David, once the protector of the king, had escaped to the land of the Philistines, leaving Saul to his own devices. Vs. 6 tells us that Saul sought the Lord for direction. However, God did not answer him. In that day, divine instruction was generally received in three ways: dreams, Urim, and the prophets. With a dream, individuals prayed for instruction and asked that God would answer with a significant dream. These dreams were either revelations received while the individuals slept, or were dreams received by prophets. The Urim was an oracular answer given to the high priest when he was clothed with the ephod and breastplate, which had a pouch that held the Urim and Thummim. These were two small objects that the priests used to determine God's will when simple yes or no answers were needed. God used them to guide His people. The prophets were specifically asked by an individual to consult God regarding the subject in question and to report back to God's answer. At this point in history, the prophets may have been those from the schools of the prophets, which were established by Samuel in Naioth and Gibeah. Endor, mentioned in vs. 7, was located north of Shunem. The woman of Endor with a “familiar spirit” has posed questions for countless theologians through the centuries. Necromancy is the term for the conjuring of the dead alluded to in vs. 11 by the question, “Whom shall I bring up unto thee?” Necromancers typically personified the individual the seeker desired to see. They also were known to assume the form and character of the person and provide information related to the seeking individual. This information was often scanty, vague, and uncertain. Necromancers were among a list of individuals whom God told the Israelites to drive out as they were an abomination to Him (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). However, it seems that God allowed Samuel to appear to accomplish His purpose with Saul. Credence is given to this theory due to the medium's reaction of crying “with a loud voice” when she saw Samuel (vs. 12). This was not customary for

her because Samuel appeared before she did any incantations. In no way does this incident justify the practice of witchcraft, mediums, spiritualists, etc. God is against all such practices (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27).

David's battle with the Amalekites was a direct result of Saul's disobedience. God commanded Saul to destroy all of the Amalekites, but Saul chose not to complete his mission. As a result, the people of Ziklag suffered and David was forced into another battle. David and his men destroyed the Amalekites. While David was fighting the Amalekites, Saul and his army were fighting the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. After being mortally wounded, Saul requested that his armour bearer take his life. The Philistines had a well-earned reputation for torturing their captives. One of the first priorities of combat was to capture the king. Once captured, the king was often tortured and mutilated if still alive. Saul knew he was going to die, and when his armour bearer refused to kill him, he fell upon his sword. The men of Jabesh-Gilead heard about Saul and his sons being slain, and risked their lives, travelling 10 to 20 miles to rescue the bodies and carry them back across the Jordan River. The flesh was then burned off the bodies, following the tradition of the day, when it was not possible to give a proper burial to the bodies in their current state.

## A TESTIMONY FROM OUR DAY

*"Discouragement is of the devil," my mother used to say emphatically when I would get into one of my teenage mood swings. I was not sure I believed her then. I rather enjoyed a little pity party occasionally! However, the longer I lived, the more certain I became that she was right. Discouragement – that feeling of gloom, and oppression, like nothing will ever work out right again – spiritually disables us as long as we allow it to remain. Madame Guyon lived a wonderful Christian life in the early 1700s. She was persecuted and imprisoned for her faith. This is what she had to say about discouragement: "I entreat you, give no place to despondency. This is a dangerous temptation – a refined, not a gross temptation of the adversary. Melancholy contracts and withers the heart, and renders it unfit to receive the impressions of grace. It magnifies and gives a false colouring to objects, and thus renders your burdens too heavy to bear. God's designs regarding you, and the methods of bringing about those designs, are infinitely wise." You might respond, "But my problems are real, not just a teenage girl's mood swings." David's problems were real too! His family and the families of all his men had been kidnapped, and now his men were talking, not of banding together to rescue the captives, but of stoning David! "And David was greatly distressed." Sometimes things happen that will be distressing. When they do, we must follow David's example. First, "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." The Bible does not say exactly how he did this. Maybe he pulled out his harp and sang one of his psalms. One great way to encourage ourselves is to sing a song of praise. Perhaps David rehearsed how the Lord had delivered the giant, Goliath, into his hand when all of the armies of Israel thought the situation was impossible. Remembering how the Lord helped us through a hard time, or helped someone else when they faced a problem similar to ours, is another great way to encourage ourselves in the Lord. After David had encouraged himself, he asked the Lord what he should do about his problem.*

# A Closer Look

## Question 1

For whom did David become the captain of the guard? I Samuel 28:1-2. Why was David later sent back from going to battle? I Samuel 29:3-7

## Question 2

The news that Saul received was not what he wanted to hear. What do you think Saul hoped would be said? I Samuel 28:15-20

## Question 3

What are some possible consequences if we insist on our ways despite what God tells us?

## Question 4

How did God use the Egyptian slave, which the Amalekites had left behind, to assist David? I Samuel 30:9-11

## Question 5

Why did David send some of the battle plunder to the tribe of Judah? I Samuel 30:26

## Question 6

How can we apply the provisions and guidance God provided for David to our situation in life? What example of David can we follow to ensure we have God's guidance?

# Take Home

Saul experienced the ultimate refusal – rejection by God. Given his history of disobedience and arrogance, we know that Saul caused his own downfall. Through Saul's mistakes, we can learn to follow God in obedience and enjoy the blessings that come to one who is wholeheartedly doing God's will. We would do well to heed God's voice and instructions when He speaks to us, and not take matters into our own hands. The ultimate rejection will occur if we refuse God and His plans. Our success, now and eternally, rests in our acceptance of God's will and plan for our lives.

Are you tempted to feel discouraged by life's dilemmas? Encourage yourself in the Lord like David did, and trust God to guide and help you overcome!