

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Who Ya Gonna Call?

### I Samuel 28:3-25

**Intro:** I'm afraid someone has pulled a fast 1 on us. Our study last week brought us to 28:2; here, David appears 2/b caught in his own web of deceit. David's got so much deception going on, even his lies have lies of their own. Now king Achish has unwittingly told him 2 "put up or shut up" & David is faced w/ the prospect of losing the throne. How will David ever get out of this mess? What's he going 2 do? We won't know today b/c the author doesn't tell us here. He immediately shifts gears & twists chronology. The next event that happens after 28:2 is actually recorded in ch29.

The remainder of 28 is an episode dealing w/ Saul that really belongs btwn ch30 & 31. Is this a deliberate attempt 2 build drama? Well, *it is deliberate* but the author has a greater purpose in mind than just keeping us in suspense.

I believe the author does this in order 2 place David's dilemma & Saul's dilemma side by side. It's as if he's saying 2 us, "Don't worry 2 much about David, there's something far more critical happening w/ Saul. He interrupts the flow of the story 2 show us that there's something far worse than being caught among the Philistines which is: being cut off from all communication from God. There's nothing more devastating than at the time of the greatest need in your life you realize you have put yourself beyond the sound of God's voice & that you are now totally alone. David's problems don't look so bad when we discover that Saul is completely w/o the presence, direction & word of YHWH.

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**3-** Samuel's death = flashback (25:1) mentioned here 2 emphasize the spiritual vacuum left by his departure. Israel was in trouble & Samuel wasn't there 2 rescue her as he had done b/4 (7:7) & Saul is in trouble & Samuel isn't there 2 give him YHWH's counsel. When Samuel was a live he had told Saul & Israel what they needed 2 do 2 defeat the Philistines but their faith in God had gradually eroded under Saul's leadership & they were hopeless b/4 the enemy.

2 his credit, Saul **had** obeyed the commands of the Law in that he ran off all those who practiced the occultic arts. God had said that **mediums & spiritist** (those who claim 2/b contact the dead & spirit beings) have no place among His people. Saul probably did this in his early days while he was still being influenced by Samuel's godly leadership.

**4a-** "I got a bad feeling about this." Shunem is some 20 miles north & east

beyond Philistine territory. This was no skirmish; the fact that the Philistine penetrated so far into Israel shows they meant business. Shunem had level ground so their chariots could maneuver 2 advantage. They wanted 2 control the trade route thru the Plain of Esdraelon & they wanted 2 cut off Saul from his northern tribes. They were using *divide & conquer* 2 smash Israel.

**4b-6-** these circumstances would give anyone ulcers but even more so 4 someone in Saul's position. Of course, the 1<sup>st</sup> & best thing 2 do is ask **YHWH** 4 direction. "Oh please, God; what do we do?" But, no matter what means Saul tried, God doesn't answer him. Now, during most of his life, Saul didn't heed God's word, didn't want God's will b/c he wanted 2 do things his own way. Is it any wonder that here at the end of his sad career, God deserted him?

"What, should only righteous people pray?" Not at all! It doesn't matter who you are, when tragedy strike – pray & seek the Lord! God is both a great & gracious God; mighty 2 save, powerful 2 deliver. But, just b/c He's great & gracious doesn't mean He's *obligated* 2 answer your fervent prayer. It's kind of presumptuous 2 think you can live your entire life solely 4 yourself & then expect God 2 fix it when it all falls apart. He certainly can, but why should He? So you can just continue 2 go on living 4 yourself? I don't think so. If God is gracious enough 4 us 2 pray 2, wouldn't that make Him gracious enough 2 live 4? His divine love, grace & power should prompt us 2 submit our lives 2 Him. 2 many people (even believers) fail 2 make that connection: they only want God around when they really need Him.

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**7-10-** **YHWH**'s silence didn't silence Saul's terror. It got so bad that he wrongly turned 2 what he had rightly banned. He asked his officers 2 find him a **medium**, a *necromancer* (*contacts the dead*). Maybe a word from the dead would help ease his terror(?)! Oddly enough, they already have someone in mind so they cart Saul off 2 En Dor. A little geography lesson will reveal his desperation. En Dor was only about 10 ml from Mt. Gilboa but guess what lay between Saul & his medium? The entire Philistine army. Saul had 2 skirt their picket lines danger close 2 reach his destination. What people will put themselves thru just 2 have their own way! It boggles the mind.

Now, the spooky lady's no dummy, she suspect this might be a ruse or worse, a govt. sting operation but Saul assures her of safety. In fact, he has 2 swear an oath of immunity 2 give her reassurance. Did you notice the irony? He swears an oath *by the life of YHWH*, all the while seeking help from a **source** that **YHWH** has *condemned!* 4 all his moral degeneration, Saul is orthodox 2 the last. That's the way of the religious, ignore all the important spiritual principles &

responsibilities but at least keep up appearances. It reminds me of that ridiculous situation in **Mt 27:6**. Judas returned the 30 pcs of silver that they paid him 2 betray Jesus 4 & the priest were at a loss as 2 what 2 do w/ the money b/c it was unlawful 2 put it back in the treasury b/c it was the price of blood. They didn't seem 2/b bothered by the fact that they were the ones who paid Judas the money, they were colluding 2 have Jesus executed, they were conspiring 2 bring false witnesses in order 2 shed that innocent blood but God forbid if we put that money back into the general fund. They were true 2 their religious character of straining out gnats & swallowing camels.

That's the tragedy of religion. It teaches people that they can regularly & flagrantly mock God's word & revealed will so long as they genuflect when they pass the church, or show up 4 church & put money in the plate, or perform some ritual or religious activity – all w/b well. When in truth, they are headed 4 an eternal disaster!

**11-14-** Now they get down 2 business, but as it turns out, it's not the kind of business she's used to! How can a medium, who calls up the dead, be terrified when the dead appear? What actually is going on in this spooky scene?

Some suggest this was either a hallucination of the medium or a deception by her. But that fails 2 explain why she was so terrified, how she learned the truth of Saul's identity or how her hallucination communicated w/ Saul. Some say this was a demonic impersonation of Samuel (**familiar spirit**). They hold that it is impossible 4 Samuel 2 come back from the dead based on **II Cor 5:8**, **absent from the body = present w/ the Lord**. But this only applies after the resurrection of Jesus. B/4 that, OT saint went 2 "Abraham's bosom" (Sheol). In Jesus' story of the rich man & Lazarus, Abraham told the rich man that Lazarus couldn't cross over 2 him & he couldn't return 2 the living 2 warn them about the suffering. But, Abe's answer was in response 2 the rich man's request 2 ease his own suffering. Besides, what would Satan have 2 gain by telling Saul the truth of his destiny? No, the only realistic option is 2 take this the way the passage presents it – as a truly genuine (& **completely weird**) appearance of Samuel. Samuel didn't appear b/c the medium called him, he appears only by the power & permission of God 2 fulfill a divine purpose. 4 His own reasons, God must've permitted Samuel 2 "come up" in order 2 speak his word of truth & doom 2 Saul. If you still don't see it, remember Moses & Elijah both came back from Sheol when they appeared at **J's** Transfiguration. The point is: **YHWH's** word was spoken 2 Saul even if it came by illegitimate means.

**15-19-** What purpose could God have in allowing Samuel 2 come up from Sheol? If nothing else, 2 reconfirm the coming judgment on King Saul in a

dramatic way. This was also an act of mercy in that **YHWH** was giving Saul 1 last chance 2 *make peace w/ His maker*. You see, when we close our ears 2 God, He will find *unusual* (& maybe even *uncomfortable*) ways 2 speak 2 us. Just ask Balaam or Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar; God got their attention!

Saul only had 1 question 4 Samuel: “*What should I do?*” But, Samuel never answers his question. In fact, the info Saul wants from **YHWH**, he doesn’t get. The info he gets from **YHWH**, he doesn’t want. In his brief response, Samuel used the word “Lord” 7Xs as a reminder 2 Saul that God had departed from him b/c he refused 2 obey God’s will. Samuel reminds him of his rebellion in the Amalekite episode, explicitly told him David would have his throne & last but not least, “*You & your boys w/b w/ me tomorrow!*” All of that had 2/b hard 2 hear but it was all true (or w/b). Samuel never told Saul what 2 do b/c it was too late 4 him 2 do anything! He had made his decision years b/4 & had been unwilling 2 repent of the sin of self-reliance & bring himself under the submission of **YHWH**’s rightful authority over him. B/4 this time, Saul had plenty of opportunity 2 repent but now the time 4 repentance had run out.

We can never assume that we’ll have as much time as we want 2 repent. The desire 2 repent, the opportunity 2 repent are gifts from God. If we have the desire & the opportunity 2 repent today, we must seize it b/c there’s no guarantee that it w/b there tomorrow. It’s not that God would have refused Saul’s repentance but the fact that he has spurned repentance 4 so long, his heart & mind are dead set against it. When God’s grace no longer has any effect on an individual (thru constant rejection) it can be & most likely will be withdrawn.

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But isn’t Saul desperately seeking the Lord? Saul’s spiritual desperation is clearly evident, the problem is that it’s misdirected. Samuel’s initial response points out that Saul’s barking up the wrong tree (16). If anything, Saul’s desperation should have compelled him 2 continue 2 seek **YHWH**, not Samuel. Saul’s problems all stem from his faulty desires concerning God: he wants *communication* but not *communion*; he wants *direction* but not *devotion*; he wants *information* but not *intimacy*; he wants the *blessing of God’s wisdom* w/o any *submission 2 God’s will*. Saul’s core problem is that he’s more concerned w/ receiving guidance than in knowing the Guide. Saul wants 2 lean on his own understanding & just *use* God when the need arises but that is nothing more than a recipe 4 spiritual disaster.

What we learn from this passage is that *the most hopeless misery in all of human life is 2/b abandoned by God*. As king over **YHWH**’s people, Saul should have had the privilege of **YHWH**’s direction 4 battle & assurance 4 victory.

However, Saul can hear the shouts of the Philistines but not the voice of **YHWH**. Here at the worst crisis of his life, God has nothing to say to Saul. Why is **YHWH** mute? B/c of Saul's rebellion, his refusal to obey the Word of God. To put it succinctly, Saul did not listen – that's the real explanation for **YHWH**'s absence. If you despise God's word, He will take it from you. If you continually refuse to obey God's speech, you will eventually endure God's silence. The most hopeless misery of all is to be abandoned by God.

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**20-25-** Saul's last meal & exit into the dark of night reminds us of another "last supper." It brings to mind another religious person; 1 who preached Christ & had done miracles in His name. How we wince when we read **Jn 13:30**, Judas' exit. John's not just telling us the time, he wants us to know it was night, as if he was entering outer darkness.

There was another 1 who endured the darkness of God's absence, the darkness & agony of God-forsakenness. **Mark 15:34** – doesn't that sound similar to **28:15**? On the cross, Jesus walked out into outer darkness so that you & I might walk in the light of life. The only question is: have you been seeking this 1 who has endured the darkness for you? The world is a dark place but there is a light that shines in the darkness. Have you received that light into your life? Are you regularly seeking the wisdom & direction of the Light of the world into your heart & life?

