



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Conscience Is a Treasure (I Samuel 28)

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Capitol Commission state directors are missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and as a matter of first importance, to pray for their salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our desire is witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

Introduction

First Samuel 28 begins with David being called unexpectedly to accompany the Philistines in a battle against the Israelites (28:1). David's anxiety and doubt had resulted in a grave dilemma. It was in that anguish that he spoke arrogant but meaningless words (28:2). Nevertheless, they were accepted as a declaration of loyalty and David became the bodyguard for Achish. Although David's agony was severe, the situation for Saul was far greater (28:3-25).

WHEN THE CONSCIENCE IS NO MORE

(28:1-25) Chapter 28 records the final decisions of Saul. His seeking guidance through spiritism in chapter 28 and his suicide in chapter 31 are tragic commentaries upon a life that had much initial opportunity but ended in tragedy as the result of rebellion to God. Saul's encounter with the spirit medium at Endor was the result of desperation. His actions, however, violated God's law (cf. Lev 20:6; Deut 18:9-22; Isa 8:19-20).

Hoping to obtain authoritative advice for the battle against the Philistines (28:1-4), Saul initially sought God's guidance (28:5-6), but it would not be easy to have God answer since Samuel was dead and Saul already alienated himself from the Lord's priests (22:6-19). Saul ignored God's command with regard to spiritism, and traveled in disguise to Endor in the middle of the night, hoping to obtain advice from a woman who was a medium (28:7-19). It is ironic that the medium refused Saul's request initially because he (as king) had previously forbidden such practices. Nevertheless, he assured the medium that she would not experience any punishment for conjuring Samuel from the dead. The irony is that Saul swore a promise by God for a practice that He has already condemned.

It is not certain what the medium expected would happen but she certainly did not think that Samuel would actually appear. When Samuel did appear immediately this posed a rather significant problem with regard to the power of the spirit medium. Even Saul was overwhelmed by the experience and fell prostrate "with his face to the ground" (28:14). Saul will fall to the ground again, but it will be in terror at the words of Samuel (28:20-25).

GOD'S CONFIRMATION OF SAUL'S LEADERSHIP WOULD REQUIRE THE KING TO PROVE HIMSELF FAITHFUL.

There are several notable factors in this account. It is obvious that the spirit medium was not in control of the experience. When the medium saw Samuel, she was terrified and felt deceived (28:12). The power that called Samuel from the dead did not belong to the medium. There are two possible explanations for what occurred. Either a demonic spirit was impersonating Samuel, or God allowed Samuel's appearance for a highly unique reason. According to verses 14-15, it was Samuel who actually spoke; therefore, it would be best to understand the situation as an extraordinary one. Moreover, the fact that Samuel's message of judgment came true would further substantiate that God caused the situation to occur. Since the experience occurred through the superintendence of God, the moment that Samuel was granted the opportunity to speak, his message was directly toward Saul.

CONTROLLING OUR CONSCIENCE

Chapter 28 ends with Saul and his men returning to the Israelite military camp in preparation for battle the following

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES ~ GEORGIA

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day. God already revealed to Saul that he and his sons would face tragedy on the battlefield. We should ponder the many opportunities that God has given to convict Saul's conscience.

When God chose Saul as king, he was humble initially (9:21). Chapter 10 records the hesitancy of Saul to be anointed by Samuel, and the following chapter describes his victory over the Ammonites, which gave the people confidence in his kingship. Saul would encounter more crises and other tests would arise; therefore, God's confirmation of Saul's leadership would require the king to prove himself faithful. The message to those who have been called to any degree of leadership is to demonstrate consistency by asking God for the grace to humble yourself, and trust Him to confirm your calling, and not to seek the approval of others unduly (1 Pet 5:6).

SAUL WAS CONSISTENTLY DEMONSTRATING FAILED LEADERSHIP . . . BY NOT SUBMITTING TO THE COMMANDS AND WISDOM OF GOD.

The first indication of Saul's disobedience was at Gilgal when he became impatient with Samuel, and failed to submit to the word of the Lord through the prophet (13:8-15). His next failure was failing to accomplish the Lord's commands with regard to the Amalekites (15:1-35). Although he enjoyed some military success, Saul was consistently demonstrating failed leadership in the first 100 days of his reign by not submitting to the commands and wisdom of God. In response to Saul's insubordination, God rejected him as king of Israel. At this point, Saul could have submitted to the will of God through repentance and by seeking to honor the new king.

God rejected Saul's leadership because he rejected the word of the Lord (15:23). Saul demonstrated his insubordination further by seeking to murder David (18:11; 19:10) and his own son, Jonathan (20:30-34). The fact that he missed the target with his spear still gave him opportunity for repentance, as opposed to being condemned for murder. Saul's own daughter, Michal, who became David's wife, even recognized the evil plot of her father (19:8-17).

When Saul learned that David had fled to Naioth in Ramah, he sent messengers to take him captive, but "when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying . . . they also prophesied" (19:20). Saul "sent other messengers, and they also prophesied" (19:21). Thinking that only he could accomplish the task properly, Saul traveled to Ramah but then "he went along prophesying continually" (19:23). Being there "all that day and all that night" allowed David to flee from Naioth in Ramah, and to put some distance between himself and Saul. God had provided another opportunity for Saul to

repent, but the prophetic experience soon dissipated and he resumed his pursuit of David.

Eventually Saul was able to track David into the wilderness of Maon (23:24-25), and was able to pursue him on one side of the mountain while David was on the other side attempting to avoid capture. Saul's goal to capture David was very near. God, however, would not allow Saul to capture David. A report that the Philistines were attacking and raiding the land forced Saul to abandon his pursuit. God not only delivered David, but also he provided another opportunity for Saul to consider his actions, and acknowledge that he was acting in defiance to God's choice for the new king.

God delivered Saul to David on two occasions as a test, but David would not harm Saul, choosing instead to follow God's guidance and to receive His vindication (24:10, 12). Saul even confessed, "the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me" (24:18). It was readily apparent that David would "surely be king" (24:20), yet Saul still pursued him obstinately (26:1-2).

Why did Saul not repent? Why did he remain unconvicted by his conscience? God certainly would not excuse his actions. It should cause us to tremble to see that Saul's conscience was seared, his heart was stone, and his mind darkened to the authority of God (cf. Ezek 36:26-27; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 4:18; 2 Pet 1:19). First Timothy 4:1-2 mentions some who give "attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron." Saul experienced this branding. Our conscience controls our actions, and our thoughts are controlled by our conscience. It is vital to consider who or what controls our conscience. We all need a conscience void of guilt through "the blood of Christ . . . to serve the living God" (Heb 9:14).

Charles Spurgeon ("the prince of preachers") recounted an experience with a man who, in his lifetime, jeered at him and often denounced him as a hypocrite. Facing death, however, this man sought Spurgeon's counsel and presence.

He had, when in health, wickedly refused Christ, yet in his death agony, he had superstitiously sent for me. Too late, he sighed for the ministry of reconciliation, and sought to enter in at the closed door, but he was not able. There was no space left him then for repentance, for he had wasted the opportunities which God had long granted to him [C. H. Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, 4 vols. (Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 1898) 1:373].

How somber to know that repentance is necessary and vital in one's life, but to be unable to do so (cf. Heb 12:17). The most hopeless of experiences is to be abandoned by God. "Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near" (Isa 55:6).