**Final Days of King Saul**

**1 Samuel 28:1-25 & 31:1-13**

**Key verse: 28:18-19 “**Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today. The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

Today’s passage is about Saul’s death. People die every day by diseases, accidents, homicides or suicides. Indeed, last year and this year a great number of people have died globally because of coronavirus. There are many different kinds of death. Some deaths are honorable and sacrificial, while other deaths are shameful and miserable. Have you thought about your final day? Although it is not pleasant to think about our final day, the truth is that we will all face the final curtain of our life someday when God calls us. Today, we are going to learn about the death of King Saul, the first king of Israel. I pray that we may learn many good spiritual lessons from King Saul’s life and death.

1. **Saul and the Medium**

In the last passage, David feared Saul’s attack and escaped to the land of the Philistines. King Achish began to trust David and asked him to join the military campaign to fight against Israel. King Achish firmly believed that David would join his army because David was lying to him.

Read the verse 3, “Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.

The great spiritual leader, Samuel died and all Israel mourned for him and buried him in Ramah. After his death, Saul enforced the Mosaic law to remove the mediums and spiritists from Israel. Mediums and spiritists are the people who communicate between spirits of the dead and living human beings. God forbade the Israelites from consulting the mediums and spiritists because of their bad spiritual influence. Leviticus 19:31 states, “Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God”.

It is uncertain whether Saul’s action was motivated by his spiritual awakening after the death of Samuel or it was a political gesture to improve his approval rating among the people who were commemorating Samuel. Based on what happened later, I believe that Saul’s action was not driven by his sincere repentance or spiritual desire.

When the Philistines assembled and set up camp at Shunem, Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. Look at verse 5. When Saul saw the Philistine army, his heart was filled with terror. Once Saul was a man of courage when the Spirit of God was with him in chapter 11. However, he became a man of fear after God’s spirit departed from him. He desperately needed a spiritual mentor like Samuel, but Samuel was already dead. King Saul inquired of the Lord, but God did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Why did God not respond to King Saul’s prayer?

Usually, God is pleased to hear our prayers. Matthew 7:7 and 8 read, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” However, it is also important to understand that we must come to God with humble and repenting heart and pray according to his will. 2 Chronicles 7:14 states, “if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land”. 1 John 5:14 reads, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us”.

While King Saul inquired of God when he was in a serious trouble, he did not have humble and repenting heart, but he was pursuing his own will rather than God’s will. In the past, God gave Saul many chances to repent through Samuel and David. In 1 Samuel chapters 13 and 15, Samuel rebuked King Saul for his disobedience to God’s words, and delivered the message of God’s judgement. In chapters 24 and 26, David spared the life of King Saul two times. Every time during these events, it seemed that Saul was repenting of his sin and accepting God’s will. However, Saul’s repentance was not sincere or truthful. He was like the Pharaoh who acknowledged God and repented shortly after plagues, but hardened his heart afterwards and did not let the Hebrews leave the land of Egypt. God had been patient with King Saul despite his sins and waited for him to repent. King Saul could have humbled himself and accepted God’s will and honorably turned over the kingdom to David. However, King Saul stubbornly refused to repent and kept going against God’s will.

Please read verse 7, “Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.” When Saul was not able to hear any response from God, he wanted to turn to a medium, which he banned among the Israelites. King Saul was such a hypocrite who broke the law that he himself enforced. His attendants suggested a female medium in Endor.

Please look at the verses 8-10. Saul disguised himself and went to the medium at night. Saul asked the medium to consult a spirit for him, but the medium was afraid of punishment for violating the law enforced by King Saul. However, Saul assured her that she would not be punished for this. When the medium asked Saul whom he shall bring up for him, his answer was Samuel.

Look at verse 12. When the medium saw Samuel, she was totally shocked because she realized that the person in front of her was King Saul. She cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” How did the medium discover the identify of King Saul? Verse 12 reminds me of Luke 8:27 and 28, “27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” Although it was the first meeting with Jesus, the evil spirits immediately recognized Jesus as the Son of God. Therefore, it appears that the medium was able to identify King Saul through spiritual communication.

When our spiritual eyes and ears are closed, we cannot see or hear anything in the spiritual world. Although we are living in a physical world, there are invisible spiritual realms and spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6:12 reads, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”. Unlike mediums and spiritists who communicate with evil spirits that lead people to destruction, we Christians should communicate with the Holy Spirit who guides us to salvation through Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14 state, “12 What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. 14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

Look at verses 13 and 14. When the medium described the ghostly figure who appeared to be an old man wearing a robe, Saul was convinced that it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. In verse 15, Saul explained to Samuel why he called him out through the medium. “I am in great distress. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”

King Saul was eager to hear some positive suggestion from Samuel, but it was already too late for him. Let’s read verses 16-18, “16 Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has departed from you and become your enemy? 17 The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. 18 Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today.”

This was essentially the same message delivered to King Saul by Samuel many years ago in chapter 15. After King Saul disobeyed and failed to carry out God’s command to totally destroy the Amalekites, Samuel delivered God’s message of judgement to Saul, “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.” Because of Saul’s repeated sin of disobedience, God rejected Saul as king, but raised up David as the new king of Israel. Even after hearing God’s message, Saul remained stubborn and still refused to accept God’s words, and he continued to struggle to keep his kingship against God’s will. In verse 19, Samuel delivered his final message of judgement to Saul. Let’s read verse 19, “The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

It was the final death sentence to King Saul and his kingdom. How did Saul react to the final message? Look at verses 20 to 25. Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear. Saul lost all his strength for he ate nothing a whole day. The medium offered food to Saul but he refused to eat. But after his men joined the woman in urging Saul, Saul and his men ate the food served by the medium and then left on the same night.

Saul went to a medium to find a quick solution when he was in a fearful situation although he knew it was detestable to God according to the Mosaic law. During the pandemic, the fortune-telling business is booming because of growing uncertainty and fear. People want to find comfort, peace of mind, and spiritual connection through fortune-tellers. However, fortune-tellers and mediums are deceiving and will eventually guide us to destruction. We must come to God and depend on him when we are in troubles and distress instead of seeking worldly solutions. Even though we are sinners, when we earnestly seek God and his help with humble and repenting heart, he will surely answer our prayers in his time.

1. **Saul’s death**

Please read 31:1-3, “1 Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. 2 The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. 3 The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

The Israel army was miserably defeated by the Philistine army. The Philistines pursued Saul and his sons in the battlefield. Saul’s three sons including Jonathan were killed by the Philistines and Saul was also wounded critically. Look at verse 4. Saul asked his armor-bearer to kill him because he did not want to be abused and killed by the Philistines. However, the armor-bearer refused to do it, so Saul killed himself and then the armor-bearer followed Saul. Saul and his three sons as well as his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day. It was such a tragic and dishonorable day for King Saul and his kingdom, which was the consequence of his disobedience to God. The Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan abandoned their towns and fled. Their towns were then occupied by the Philistines.

When the Philistines found the dead body of Saul, they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, which was later located in the temple of the Ashtoreths. Saul’s dead body was fastened to the wall of Beth Shan. Please read verses 11-13, “11 When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, 12 all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. 13 Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

Why did the people of Jabesh Gilead showed their respect to the dead King Saul even risking their lives? It was because Saul rescued the city of Jabesh from the hand of Nahash the Ammonites in chapter 11. At that time, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul, and he destroyed the Ammonites. The people of Jabesh Gilead still remembered Saul as a godly warrior who saved them from their enemy 40 years ago. After his first victory, the doubt and skepticism about Saul went away and his kingship was confirmed at Gilgal in the presence of God. When Saul became the first king of Israel, he was a humble, courageous and generous young man, but unfortunately, he became obsessive with his kingship later and repeatedly disobeyed God. As a result, the Spirit of God had departed from Saul, and then he was tormented by an evil spirit. 1 Samuel 15:11 shows God’s painful heart toward King Saul, “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Saul was God’s anointed and the chosen one, but how did he fail in such a miserable way? Saul failed because he stood against God’s will. Even though Saul learned from Samuel that God rejected him as king because he had rejected the word of God, he continued to rebel against God to keep his own kingdom. Saul wanted to be honored as the king of Israel, but he did not recognize or serve God as his king. Perhaps, King Saul’s prayer was like this: My kingdom come, my will be done on earth forever and ever. However, no matter who we are, we must acknowledge that God is our true king and we are his unworthy servants. Psalm 47:6-7 reads, “Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise”. No one can win against the will of God who is our almighty king.

When we find that our will is different from God’s will, what should we do? If we stubbornly reject God’s will, we will eventually face God’s judgement. What we have to do is humbly accepting and obeying God’s will even if it is contrary to our will. The great example of full obedience to God’s will is Jesus Christ. When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, he struggled hard to obey God’s will. Jesus fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” As Jesus prayed more earnestly, his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus fully obeyed God’s will and sacrificed himself on the cross to save all mankind. Through the full obedience of Jesus, God’s salvation came down to this sinful world. Romans 5:19 reads, “for just as through the disobedience of one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.”

Because of Saul’s disobedience to God, not only he but also his three sons and many Israelites had fallen. However, God saved many people and revealed his glory through the full obedience of many men and women of faith in the Bible. Noah obeyed God’s command to build an ark by faith. Abraham obeyed God’s calling and moved to the land of promise even though he did not know where he was going. Moses obeyed God’s command to lead his people out of Egypt. Mary obeyed God’s divine calling to be the mother of Messiah although she was a virgin. Many people disobey God with many different excuses, but God will bless us greatly when we obey his will and his words. May God give us humble, contrite and repenting heart, so that we may be able to obey his words absolutely. May God create a pure heart in us and renew a steadfast spirit within us every day, so that we may serve God as our true king until the end.