



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Shattered Wisdom

When life goes to pieces | Part 8

Steve Lombardo | November 15, 2015 | 1 Samuel 28:3–25



We ask that God would be our Teacher. We ask that the Holy Spirit would speak to us, convict us of sin, draw us closer to Himself, and that He would do it as we look at His Word together. Our spiritual food is found in 1 Samuel 28. As we look at this story let me give you a heads up that there's not much to redeem out of this story. It's not something that will lift or boost our spirits apart from the Lord using it.

As we look at the Scriptures we see what some preachers call "the gospel from the air and the gospel on the ground." The gospel of the good news of God is that His salvation is available to all and it is coming to all of creation. When you look at the Scriptures from the air you see the whole picture. You see creation and that God made all things good. You see the fall when sin came into the world. And then you see redemption and reconciliation through the cross. God Himself came into the world and fixed it. He then restores a people to Himself. His Kingdom has come and it's coming in full. This is the big picture of the gospel from the air.

Then you get down on the ground and you see it from an individual perspective. You see it as our responsibility that we have sinned. *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). God then brings conviction of our sin and we see it as an affront to a holy and righteous God. We then turn from our sin—which is called repentance—and turn to God's way. We put our faith, hope and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then God, through His Holy Spirit, comes into our lives and changes us to make us His disciples. We grow in our sanctification and become more like Jesus Christ. This is every day life. This is the gospel. This is the good news on the ground.

In our series in 1 Samuel we've been on the ground. We've been in the muck and mire of everyday life. That's why we've called this series "Shattered." First Samuel is a book about shattered lives and brokenness. We've looked at a lot of tough stories. Today we're going to see the end of Saul's life. It's not a pretty picture. Proverbs 14:12 says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death."* This is what will happen to Saul.

From the beginning Saul has consistently gone his own way. When they went to anoint him king of Israel in 1 Samuel 10 he was nowhere to be found. He was hiding in the baggage area. It's strange. From the beginning Saul did what he wanted to do and not what God commanded. In chapter 13 Saul doesn't want to wait for Samuel to make the sacrifice. The men were getting restless and King Saul thought his men were going to desert him. He thought, "We haven't done the sacrifice. We haven't gotten God on our side yet. Samuel's not here so I'm going to go ahead and do what I should not do. I'm going to take matters into my own hands and make the sacrifice." He did his own thing. *"There is a way that seems right to a man..."* (Proverbs 13:12).

In chapter 15 God commanded Saul to wipe out all of the Amalekites, including their sheep and all other animals. But what did Saul do? He kept the best of the best for his men and for himself. He went against God's commands. When Samuel got there he said, "What's going on, Saul?"

Saul responded, "I've done everything that the Lord has commanded."

But Samuel said, "I hear sheep. What's that sound?"

"Well, I just wanted to worship God by sacrificing."

"That's not what God commanded!"

Time and time again King Saul did his own thing in his own way. He was jealous of David. David rose up and killed Goliath. When they came into Jerusalem the women were singing the praises of David and Saul. We remember from last week that King Saul was envious of David receiving more of the praise from the people than he did. He was envious and sought to kill David. *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death”* (Proverbs 14:12).

Wisdom, as defined by *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, is this: it comes by experience; it comes by the receiving of instruction and the exercising of correct judgment. We’re talking about shattered wisdom today. Saul will go to the world for wisdom and knowledge. In the Old Testament wisdom is not merely head knowledge. When you hear the word wisdom, it doesn’t mean just knowing a bunch of stuff. For the ancient Israelite, and for us today, true wisdom is having the knowledge but then (as that quote just said) exercising correct judgment. So it’s having the knowledge that God gives us but it’s also putting it into practice. Saul was a man who had the knowledge, he had the truth, he had Samuel helping, guiding and directing him, but he failed to put it into practice.

So now we’re ready for 1 Samuel 28:3–25:

³Now 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. ⁴The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. ⁶And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. ⁷Then 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.”

⁸So 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.” ⁹The 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?” ¹⁰But Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” ¹¹Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” He said, “Bring up Samuel for me.” ¹²When 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.” ¹³The 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.” ¹⁴He 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.

¹⁵Then 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.” ¹⁶And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷The 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. ¹⁸Because 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. ¹⁹Moreover, 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.”

²⁰Then 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. ²¹And 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. ²²Now 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.” ²³He 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. ²⁴Now 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, ²⁵and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

What an incredible story as we look at the end of the life of Saul! In Chapter 31 we read the final death notice of him and his sons.

1. We Make Bad Choices

In times of trial

Saul was in a time of terrible trial. In verses three through five we read that the Philistines were gathered together. Saul didn’t know what would happen. Samuel, the prophet of God, had just died (verse three), so he didn’t have Samuel there anymore. Yet the Philistines were raging and the battle was coming. The battle lines had been drawn. King Saul was in a world of hurt.

Many of us face trials of all different kinds. As I look over the congregation I can see and think of various trials that we face. Sometimes our trials are small. An example of a small trial is when you go to church on Sunday and everybody is fighting. The kids are yelling and not obeying. Husband and wife aren’t getting along. You’re on your way to church, you’re arguing, everybody is mad and yelling, then you pull into the church parking lot, open the door and someone says to you, “Glory, brother! Good morning. Good to see you!” All the while a trial is raging in your car. I’ve been there.

But there are serious trials as well. There are times of desperation. What are some trials that you or someone you know have experienced? Let's hear some from our church.

- "The passing of a loved one."

How many in this past year have experienced death in your family? Many of you. "Loss of job. Loss of income."

You think, "What are we going to do?"

- "Miscarriage."

You have the hope and joy of a new baby on its way and then it comes to an end. So many have experienced that.

- "Illness."

Not having the strength to do the things that you want to do or that you need to do.

- "Alzheimer's."

Losing the faculties that God has given you while your family is around witnessing it.

- "Losing sight."

These are hard things. All trials. Many times we make bad choices when we're faced with desperate times.

When God is quiet

You see in the story here that Saul turned to whatever prophets were left for answers. Samuel was already dead and the remaining prophets were quiet. The Urim wasn't telling him what to do. The Urim and Thummim were used in the Old Testament but we don't know exactly what they were. It was something that the high priest would use to discern and divine God's commands and judgment. They were kept in the breastplate, probably in some kind of pouch. Some people think they were like stones that were used to show if someone was guilty or innocent. The Urim and Thummim were one of the ways in the Old Testament that God used to reveal His will to His people (Exodus 28:30; 1 Samuel 14:41).

Also the casting of lots was used in the Old Testament. You see that in the choosing of King Saul. Do you remember the story of Jonah? Lots were cast and Jonah came up with the short straw. He was the guy causing the storm. God seemed to work through these different ways in the Old Testament. He doesn't work in those ways now. We have His Word revealed to us. We have the Holy Spirit who came in Acts 2 and now lives inside of us and bears witness with our spirits (Romans 8:16). These ways are old ways, but nonetheless Saul was trying to seek God and none of these ways worked. His dreams weren't being interpreted. Nothing was coming from God. God was quiet.

When we choose to sin

This is ultimately the place to which Saul went. In a time of trial Saul wasn't hearing from God and he didn't know what to do. So he chose to sin. He did what he himself had outlawed in all the land of Israel by going to a witch—a medium, a necromancer, a psychic, someone who could read his palm, a tarot card reader, Charlie Charlie, the Ouija Board—and he sought spiritual help from evil. We read all about this in the pages of Scripture. Leviticus 19:31 says, *"Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."*

Deuteronomy 18:9–12 says:

⁹"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. ¹⁰There 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 ¹¹or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, ¹²for 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.

Let's look at what Scripture says about these abominations:

- Second Kings 21, which is speaking of another king of Israel, King Manasseh: *"And he burned his son as an offering and used fortune-telling and omens and dealt with mediums and with necromancers. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger."*
- Leviticus 20:6 says, *"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."*

- First Chronicles 10:13 says, *“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.”*
- Leviticus 20:27 says, *“A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death.”*

So in his time of trial, when God was seemingly quiet, Saul chose to sin. What do we do in times of trial when God is quiet?

2. The Top Five Things People Turn to in Desperation

See if you can find yourself in one of these things people turn to in times of desperation:

Surrounding support

People turn to those who are around—friends, family, a spouse, the church. There are many families in our church going through trials right now who have turned to the body of Village Bible Church to support them in their time of need.

Spirituality

People don't necessarily turn to the God of heaven and earth, but they'll turn to the occult. They'll turn to finding answers in the spiritual realm, but not as God prescribes. They'll go to the church of Oprah. They'll try self-realization—“I'll find myself spiritually and discover that I, myself, am a God. I can fix my own problems.” They turn to spirituality.

Substances

People often turn to food in their times of desperation. Maybe they turn to drugs or prescription drugs when times are difficult. People turn to alcohol as well. A 2013 study showed that a quarter of all adults had engaged in binge drinking in the previous month.

Special systems

This says let's turn to a way of living that people say to try in times of desperation or need. I read about this on Facebook last week. “When you're feeling anxious, do these steps.” I can't remember exactly what the steps were but they were something like, “Identify five things that you can see. Identify four things that you can hear. Identify three things that you can feel....” “Here's a system to try.” “My money is gone. I don't know what to do. Dave Ramsey's got the Money Makeover. Let's go to Dave Ramsey.” That's a special system.

The Source

What does God say about where I am? What are God's thoughts on my situation? We have all the pages of Scripture and the witness of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit inside of believers to guide us in the godly way.

Saul looked like he was going to the Source. When he was seeking out those other ways—the Urim, the prophets, dreams—he seemed to be going to God, but he was going to God out of desperation to get him out of the predicament he was in. There's the difference. He had rejected God and God's commands his whole life, but now when he saw that the end was possibly near he said, “Now I need to hear from You, God! Now I need to hear from You.” It wasn't Saul going to the Lord in brokenness, seeking His forgiveness and restoration.

We see that in our own lives. In times of desperation, or when we get caught, then we need God. But when we're okay then we don't need Him. In times of desperation when we call out to God, it should not be just that God would deliver us from the consequences, but that God would restore us to Himself and that we would humbly come to Him seeking His forgiveness and restoration.

Where do you land on that list? We're thankful for the church. We're thankful for those around us who support us. We're thankful that we can come to the Lord.

3. Sin leads us

To disguise ourselves

We see in the story that as Saul chose to sin, his sin took him somewhere very dark. In verse eight Saul disguised himself and actually went behind enemy lines to find this witch at En-dor. He went with two other servants who were also disguised so that no one would know who they were and they could make it to this witch unrecognized.

Scholars say they were stationed at Gilboa and they could see the Philistine armies gathering. En-dor was right in the enemy lines. Some have said it was about two miles past where King Saul's kingdom was. So he had to get dressed and in the darkness of night go past enemy lines to get to the witch because all the necromancers, mediums and witches had been outlawed in Israel. Saul had taken a public stand against them.

If you're an unbeliever, you're not disguising yourself when you sin. Sin is your language. It's your common practice. Ephesians 2:1 says, *"You were dead in [your] trespasses and sins."* As an unbeliever who is not saved and hasn't experienced the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ, you're bound to sin. That's who you are. There's no disguising it.

Here's the thing: some people would like to say, "Your sin isn't that bad." No, your sin is worse than you ever imagined. It's an affront to God. "But I'm better than a lot of other people." God doesn't judge you according to your neighbor, or your friend, or your brother, or your sister, or your husband, or your wife. He judges you based on His holiness. So if you are not a believer and disciple of Christ, this is your native tongue: sin. It's not disguised.

But for the Christian and disciple of Jesus Christ, when you choose to sin, you choose to put your grave clothes back on. You choose to walk in the old ways. The Ephesians 2 passage that we just mentioned says, *"You were dead in [your] trespasses and sins."* But then in verse two it says, *"in which you once walked, following the course of this world."* You used to walk in those ways. Believer, you used to choose sin. In fact you couldn't do anything else. But Jesus Christ, Who is rich in mercy, with the great love with which He has loved you, has raised you up to the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:4-6). You are seated with Christ in the heavenlies right now as a believer of Jesus Christ. So why would you choose to walk in those old ways? Why would you disguise yourself? You're a new creation. You're not a sinner condemned by your sin. You're a sinner saved by God's grace.

Away from God

The Holy Spirit had left Saul at this point. Christian, the Holy Spirit is with you. He promises to be with you. But when you choose to sin, a number of different things happen in your relationship with God through the Holy Spirit. When you choose to sin you grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We read this in Ephesians 4:30.

When you don't do what the Holy Spirit commands you to do you quench the Spirit of God (1 Thessalonians 5:19). So you grieve God and the Holy Spirit Who lives inside you when you do the things He commands you not to do. But when you don't do the things that He asks you to do, that quenches the Spirit of God living inside of you. When you commit sin you grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and when you refuse to do that which He is calling you to do, you quench His work in your life. God might be asking you to do a number of different things and you've heard Him, but you've consistently said, "Not today. Not now." You're quenching the Holy Spirit's work in your life. Sin leads us away from God.

Saul went to the witch and you see what happens. The witch asked, "Who am I going to call up?" First she was afraid. "I could get killed for this. Something is fishy here." Then she actually called up Samuel who seemed to appear to her and had a message for Saul. What in the world is going on here? There are several different ways that you can look at this. You can say that this was just deception by the medium. The witch was just a crook and it wasn't real. She was just making stuff up. Or it was a hallucination. She was just imagining these things. But the problem with these two explanations is it really doesn't make sense, because it doesn't explain why the witch was really afraid. Did you notice that in the text? When she called up Samuel and saw him she screamed. She was afraid.

So then you can say that maybe it was just a demonic impersonation. We know that when you're playing around with the spiritual realm, demonic powers, evil spirits and evil entities are around. Maybe it was an impersonation. The problem with that is that the text says, "Samuel says..." What I would say is a good interpretation is that it is a genuine appearance of Samuel. For some reason in God's sovereignty He allowed Samuel to come and speak condemning words, which had already been spoken to King Saul. The spiritual realm is real and the witch and Saul saw it.

To harm others

So that leads us to address this: when we mess around with the spiritual realm, it's dangerous. When we visit psychics or bring palm readers to a party, it's dangerous. You may think, "It's just going to be a fun time. Tell us our future. Maybe we can talk to our loved ones." It's like the TV show with John Edwards where he can talk with ones who have gone on before. "We can talk to them and it gives me closure. It gives me satisfaction." However, you're opening yourself up to evil.

As we already mentioned, even stupid things can be dangerous, like the Ouija Board or the Charlie Charlie game that a lot of kids are talking about now where you invite a demonic entity to answer questions that you ask. Usually the game starts out with

questions like, “Can we play?” Or, “Are you here?” This is real stuff. It’s dark and evil and it was in the moments before Saul’s death.

Last May in Waukesha, Wisconsin, two twelve-year-old girls lured another girl their same age into the woods and stabbed her 19 times. They did this allegedly to impress the fictional character online called “The Slender Man.” After being stabbed the victim crawled to a road where she lay on the sidewalk—apparently having come within millimeters of her death—and was found by a person who called 911. She was hospitalized and made a full recovery. But according to investigators, the two twelve-year-old girls who did this said that Slender Man was real and the only way to win his approval was to kill someone.

In February 2015 the local police interrogated both girls who were accused of the stabbing. In their interrogations the girls said they planned the stabbing because they wanted to keep the Slender Man from harming them and their families. They believed that if they did this and carried out the murder, they could live with the Slender Man in his mansion. Evil is real. We had a whole series on the reality of spiritual warfare. Sin leads us away from God.

4. The Consequences of Shattered Wisdom

Fear

The descent into darkness continued for Saul. He heard from Samuel that the Philistines were going to win and that, *“tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me.”* You might say, “Well, Samuel would be in heaven, so Saul and his sons are going to heaven?” The point of the text is not to talk about heaven and hell. The Hebrew in the Old Testament talks about Sheol as the place of the dead. So in a general way Samuel was saying, “You’re going to be in the place of the dead tomorrow.”

So he heard this and verse 20 says, *“Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear.”* When we go to these other places for wisdom, when we turn away from God in times of desperation—either to ourselves or to other spirits—it only leads us to a place of greater fear. We may think we’re going to find the answers. Saul thought he was going to find the answer. “If I can just talk to Samuel...” But after he did, the fear took over.

Despair

In verses 21 and following, we see that Saul fell to the ground. He couldn’t get up. He couldn’t eat. He couldn’t do anything. He was filled with despair and God was not there. The Holy Spirit was gone. So what’s the rest of the story? In 1 Samuel 31 Saul and his sons die. Saul and his armor bearer were surrounded. There were a bunch of Philistines around and here’s the end of Saul. Saul said to his armor bearer, “Take this sword and kill me. They’re coming on us. Kill me!” His armor bearer couldn’t do it so King Saul, the man who was a head taller than everyone else, fell on his own sword and died. The Philistines came, took his body, cut off his head and posted his body on the city gate.

This is the end. This is the reality on the ground. You reject God’s command, you reject God’s ways, you reject God’s work, you choose to sin, and in the end it leads to death. So should we just close in prayer and go home? No, we need to pull back a little bit because we’re on the ground. Now we’re going to go back into the air. When we go back up in the air we see that that’s not the way it has to be. In the darkness and despair of the fall, God came into the evil and He redeemed a people for Himself. They are those who obey His commands, trust in His Son Jesus Christ, and don’t choose to sin but choose God’s wisdom and His ways. They live for Him. God provides salvation from the fear, the despair, the hurt and the ache through His plan in Jesus Christ.

Put yourself where Saul was for a minute. Realize that could be your end if you turn to the world for wisdom. But know that God has provided a way for you to break free, to have healing and to have true wisdom. Wisdom is knowledge put into action. It’s the exercising of knowledge. That’s what it means to be a Christian. You have the knowledge of Jesus Christ but you bear fruit in your life because you believe it to your very soul.