

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 15: David Among the Philistines; Saul and the Medium

1 Samuel 27:1–28:25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The aim of this lesson is to lay two discouraged men side by side and let the class feel the difference between a believer's detour and a rebel's ruin. David, exhausted and afraid, stops inquiring of the Lord and slides into self-reliance and compromise among the Philistines, yet God preserves him. Saul, abandoned to the silence he earned by a lifetime of disobedience, plunges into the forbidden darkness of a medium. Help the class see how discouragement tempts us all, and how everything depends on where, and to whom, we turn in our fear.

Handle the night at Endor with great care. The text is not given to satisfy curiosity about the dead or the occult, and we must resist building speculative doctrines about mediums or the afterlife beyond what Scripture plainly teaches. Keep the weight where the text puts it: on the tragedy of a man cut off from God because he repeatedly refused God's word, and on the seriousness of seeking guidance from sources God has forbidden. Anchor the warning in Deuteronomy 18 and Isaiah 8, and let it drive sober self-examination, not morbid fascination.

Finally, turn the class toward hope. The same discouragement that ruined Saul need not ruin us, because God still speaks, fully and finally, in His Son and His word (Hebrews 1:1–2). The lesson should leave students with a renewed resolve to listen to the Lord while He may be heard, to refuse every counterfeit light, and to bring even their deepest fears back to the God who answers.

Question 1

Student Question:

What does David's reasoning, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (27:1), reveal about how discouragement can quietly crowd out faith even in a godly person?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 27 opens inside David's head: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." After years of running, two sparings of Saul, and the recent reprieve at Hachilah, David is simply worn out. Weariness has eroded his faith, and fear is now doing his thinking for him.

Notice that David does not inquire of the Lord here. Throughout the previous chapters his great habit was to ask God before acting. Now, discouraged, he reasons it out alone and concludes

that his best option is to escape to the land of the Philistines, the enemies of God's people, hoping Saul will give up the hunt. It is a decision born of exhaustion, not faith.

This is a deeply human moment, and an important one. David is not a villain here. He is a faithful man at the end of his strength, and his discouragement quietly crowds out the trust he had been living by. Even those who walk closely with God can have their faith worn thin by relentless pressure.

The warning for us is gentle but real. When we stop bringing our decisions to God and start managing our survival by our own calculations, we are usually one long season of weariness away from a costly detour. Discouragement is not a small thing; it can reroute a life. The remedy is to keep inquiring of the Lord precisely when we feel least like it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discouragement and weariness can erode faith even in a godly person like David (27:1).
- David stops inquiring of the Lord and reasons out his survival alone.
- Fear-driven calculation leads him into the land of God's enemies.
- Faithful people are not immune to having their trust worn thin by prolonged pressure.
- The safeguard is to keep seeking God especially when we feel least inclined to (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Discussion Prompts

- How can weariness quietly crowd out faith without our noticing?
- What is the difference between David's earlier inquiring of the Lord and his reasoning here?
- When you are most discouraged, how can you keep bringing your decisions to God?

Question 2

Student Question:

When fear and weariness whisper that God will not come through, where do you tend to turn for your own survival, and how can you bring that fear honestly back to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

David settles in Ziklag under the Philistine king Achish, and his situation becomes morally tangled. He raids the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites, ancient enemies of Israel, but then deceives Achish about whom he has been attacking, leaving no survivors so the truth cannot reach the king. He lives a double life.

The text reports this plainly, without applause. David is in a compromised position of his own making. Having stepped outside the path of faith into self-protection, he now must sustain his survival through deception, and the killing required to keep the secret is grim. This is what compromise tends to do: one step off the path requires the next.

It is important to read this honestly. Scripture does not airbrush its heroes. David, the man after God's own heart, here lives by deceit among the enemies of God. The Bible records it not as an example to follow but as a sober picture of what a season of prayerlessness and self-reliance can produce even in a good man.

And yet, even in this murky chapter, God's preserving hand is at work. David is not destroyed; the larger story still moves toward the throne. There is mercy here, but no endorsement. We should feel both the danger of David's drift and the grace that keeps him through it, and we should long not to need such rescue from messes of our own making.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- David's season among the Philistines involves a double life and deception (27:8–12).
- Compromise tends to compound, requiring further wrong to sustain it.
- Scripture records David's drift honestly, neither hiding nor endorsing it.
- God's preserving grace keeps David even in his compromised season.
- A season of prayerlessness and self-reliance can produce real moral entanglement.

Discussion Prompts

- How does one step of compromise tend to require the next?
- Why is it important that Scripture records David's failings honestly?
- How do we see both God's grace and David's drift in this chapter?

Question 3

Student Question:

How does David's season among the Philistines, the double life and deception (27:8–12), show that even God's servants can drift into compromise when they stop inquiring of the Lord?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the scene turns to Saul, and the mood darkens. The Philistines gather a great army against Israel, and "when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled." The once-tall king is undone by terror, and he reaches out for God.

But the answer is silence: "when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." Every ordinary channel of guidance is closed. The heavens are shut to a man who has spent a lifetime refusing to listen to what God had already said.

This silence is not arbitrary divine cruelty. It is the harvest of a long sowing. Saul disobeyed at Gilgal, spared what God said to destroy with Amalek, hunted God's anointed, and murdered God's priests. He repeatedly refused the word of the Lord when it was clear, and now, in his hour of need, that word is withdrawn. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

There is a sober principle here. There is a kind of grieving and resisting of God that, persisted in, leads to His withdrawing the guidance we spurned. This is not the gospel offer to the penitent, which never fails; it is the hardening that comes to a heart that has, again and again, said no to God. Saul stands as a warning to listen to God while He is still speaking.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul's terror drives him to inquire of God, but the Lord does not answer (28:5–6).
- God's silence is the harvest of Saul's lifetime of refusing God's word (Galatians 6:7).
- Every ordinary channel of guidance, dreams, Urim, prophets, is closed to him.
- Persistent refusal of God's word can lead to God withdrawing the guidance we spurned.
- The warning is to listen and obey while God is still speaking, not to presume on later access.

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the Lord silent toward Saul in his hour of greatest need?
- How is this silence connected to Saul's lifetime of disobedience?
- What does this teach about the danger of repeatedly refusing God's word?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where has a season of spiritual tiredness led you into small compromises, and what would it look like to come back into the light with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Faced with God's silence, Saul makes a fateful turn: "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her." He will not wait on God, and he cannot bear the silence, so he goes looking for guidance in a place God has expressly forbidden.

The bitter irony is sharp. The narrator has just reminded us that Saul himself "had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land." Saul knew the law. He had even enforced it. And now, in desperation, he tramples the very conviction he once upheld, disguising himself and going by night to consult a medium at Endor.

This is the portrait of a heart cut off from God. It will violate in private what it defended in public. Saul's hypocrisy is not mere inconsistency; it is the collapse of a man who has no living relationship with God to anchor his convictions when fear comes. Convictions held without a living trust in God do not survive a crisis.

We should feel the warning personally. It is fearfully possible to defend a truth publicly and then betray it privately when we are frightened or desperate. The safeguard is not merely knowing the right rules but walking with the living God, so that our convictions are rooted in trust rather than in mere reputation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul, who had banned mediums, now seeks one in desperation, exposing deep hypocrisy (28:3, 7–9).
- A heart cut off from God will violate in private what it defended in public.
- Convictions not rooted in a living trust in God collapse under crisis.
- Disguise and darkness mark Saul's turn to the forbidden.
- The danger of betraying our own convictions when frightened is real for anyone.

Discussion Prompts

- What does Saul's turn to a medium reveal about a heart cut off from God?
- How can someone defend a conviction publicly yet abandon it privately?
- What keeps our convictions standing firm when fear and desperation come?

Question 5

Student Question:

Why did “the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” when Saul finally inquired (28:6), and what does this teach about the consequences of a lifetime of refusing God's word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At Endor the night unfolds strangely. The woman, fearful that this disguised visitor will entrap her under Saul's own ban, is reassured by Saul's oath. When Samuel appears, she cries out in alarm and recognizes that her visitor is Saul. Then a figure described as Samuel speaks to Saul.

We must walk carefully here. The text presents Samuel as truly appearing and speaking, and the woman's own fearful reaction suggests this was not the ordinary fraud of her trade; she seems as startled as anyone. The most faithful reading is that God, in His sovereignty, permitted Samuel to appear, not because the medium had power to summon the dead, but to pronounce judgment on Saul. We should not build elaborate doctrines about the dead or the occult from this unusual scene.

What Samuel says is unrelieved judgment. He rebukes Saul for disturbing him, reminds him that the Lord has departed and become his enemy, and declares that the kingdom is torn from him and given to David, just as God had said, because Saul did not obey the voice of the Lord regarding Amalek. There is no new mercy here, only the confirmation of long-spoken judgment.

The crushing word follows: “to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me,” and Israel will be given into the hand of the Philistines. Saul came seeking comfort and guidance from the darkness, and the darkness gave him only the announcement of his doom. This is what forbidden paths finally yield: not the help we crave, but the sealing of our ruin.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The text presents Samuel as truly appearing, by God's permission, to pronounce judgment, not by the medium's power (28:11–15).
- We must not build speculative doctrines about the dead or the occult from this unusual scene.
- Samuel's message is the confirmation of judgment already spoken, rooted in Saul's Amalek disobedience (28:16–18).
- Saul sought comfort from the forbidden and received only the announcement of his doom (28:19).
- Forbidden paths yield not the help we crave but the sealing of our ruin.
- God remains sovereign even over a night a medium thought was hers to control.

Discussion Prompts

- Why should we be cautious about drawing detailed conclusions about the dead from this passage?
- What does it tell us that Saul received only judgment, not the guidance he sought?
- How does this scene show God's sovereignty even over the forbidden path Saul took?

Question 6

Student Question:

Are there areas where you have grown deaf to God's word through repeated neglect, and how can you begin to listen and obey again while He is still speaking?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Saul's physical collapse mirrors his spiritual one. Hearing Samuel's words, "straightway Saul fell all along on the earth, and was sore afraid." He has eaten nothing all day and all night; his strength is gone. The towering king lies stretched on the floor of a medium's house, empty and undone.

It is a picture of utter desolation. Here is a man who once stood head and shoulders above all Israel, on whom the Spirit of God had come, now flat on the ground in the dark, having heard from a forbidden source that tomorrow he will die. Every road he chose to avoid God has led him to this floor.

There is something almost unbearably sad in what follows. The medium and Saul's servants urge him to eat. They kill a fatted calf, bake bread, and set food before him, and he rises from the earth and eats. It is a strange, hollow kindness in a house of darkness, on the eve of a battle he now knows he will not survive.

Saul's end is a study in the misery of a life that would not listen. He had every advantage and squandered it through repeated disobedience. As we watch him eat his last meal in that dark house, the lesson is not contempt but a holy fear: this is where a heart that keeps refusing God can finally arrive. May it move us to listen while we can.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saul's physical collapse mirrors his spiritual ruin (28:20).
- The once-exalted king lies desolate on a medium's floor, the end of every road away from God.
- The hollow kindness of his last meal underscores the bleakness of his end (28:21–25).
- Saul's misery is the fruit of a life that repeatedly refused to listen to God.
- His end should move us to holy fear and renewed listening, not mere contempt.

Discussion Prompts

- How does Saul's physical collapse reflect his spiritual condition?
- What makes the scene of his last meal so sorrowful?
- How should Saul's end move us, and what should it move us to do?

Question 7

Student Question:

What is the significance of Saul, who had himself put away the mediums (28:3, 9), now turning to one in desperation, and what does that hypocrisy reveal about a heart cut off from God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Step back and compare the two men this lesson sets before us. David and Saul are both discouraged, both afraid, both at the end of their strength. But they face their fear from utterly different hearts, and they reach in utterly different directions.

David, even in his compromise, is still fundamentally a man who belongs to God; his detour is the wandering of a tired believer, and God preserves him through it and will draw him back. Saul is a man who has, over a lifetime, hardened himself against God, and his desperation drives him not back to God but deeper into the forbidden. One is a sheep who strays; the other is a heart that has refused the Shepherd.

The difference is not that David never failed. He failed badly in these very chapters. The difference is the underlying direction of the heart, whether it ultimately turns toward God or away from Him. David's failures are interruptions in a life bent toward God; Saul's are the consistent expression of a life bent away from Him.

This is a searching comparison for us. We will all face seasons of fear and discouragement. The question is not whether we will ever stumble, but which direction our hearts are fundamentally

set. When fear comes, does it eventually drive us back to God, or does it drive us toward the counterfeit comforts He has forbidden? The answer reveals whose we truly are.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Both David and Saul are discouraged, but they reach in opposite directions.
- David is a straying believer whom God preserves; Saul is a heart that has refused God.
- The difference lies not in never failing but in the heart's fundamental direction.
- Failures can be interruptions in a God-ward life or the expression of a God-rejecting one.
- Where our fear ultimately drives us, toward God or toward counterfeits, reveals whose we are.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the key difference between David's detour and Saul's ruin?
- Why is the direction of the heart more telling than any single failure?
- When fear comes, what direction does it tend to drive your heart?

Question 8

Student Question:

Where might you be tempted to violate in private a conviction you would defend in public, and how does Saul's collapse warn you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Linger on David's discouragement, because it is so relatable. "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul." That is fear masquerading as realism. David had God's promise, two miraculous deliverances, and Samuel's anointing, yet weariness told him a darker story and he believed it.

Discouragement is a master storyteller, and it almost always lies. It takes our real exhaustion and spins it into false conclusions about God's faithfulness. David's lie was, in effect, God will not finish what He started; I had better save myself. And that lie sent him into enemy territory and into compromise.

The antidote is not pretending we are not tired. David was genuinely worn out, and so are we sometimes. The antidote is refusing to let our weariness write our theology. Paul urges, "let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Galatians 6:9). God's faithfulness does not depend on our feeling strong.

So when discouragement starts narrating your life, learn to challenge its story with God's word and God's track record. Bring the fear into the open before God rather than acting on it in the dark. David's detour might have been avoided by one honest prayer that said, I am exhausted and afraid, and I do not see the way; help me to wait on You.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discouragement disguises fear as realism and almost always tells a lie about God (27:1).
- Weariness can spin our real exhaustion into false conclusions about God's faithfulness.
- The antidote is not denial but refusing to let weariness write our theology (Galatians 6:9).
- God's faithfulness does not depend on our feeling strong.
- Bringing fear honestly to God guards us from acting on it in the dark.

Discussion Prompts

- How does discouragement tell lies about God's faithfulness?
- What is the difference between admitting we are tired and letting weariness write our theology?
- How can bringing our fear honestly to God keep us from a costly detour?

Question 9

Student Question:

Why does God forbid seeking guidance from mediums and the dead (Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19–20), and what does Saul's tragic end teach about the deadly danger of turning to forbidden darkness when we have repeatedly refused the light of God's word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Now the heaviest weight of the lesson: why God forbids seeking guidance from mediums and the dead, and what Saul's end teaches about turning to forbidden darkness. God's prohibition is explicit and emphatic. In Deuteronomy 18 He commands that there be no one among His people who uses divination, consults familiar spirits, or seeks the dead, calling such things an abomination, the very practices for which He drove out the nations.

The reason is not arbitrary. These practices reject the living God who has spoken in favor of dark, deceptive sources that cannot save. Isaiah puts the question sharply: "Should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?" and then sends us back to the standard of truth: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:19–20). The forbidden path is forbidden because it leads away from the One light into darkness.

Saul's tragedy shows where that road ends. He did not arrive at the medium's house in a single night; he arrived there after a lifetime of refusing God's word, until God's voice fell silent and Saul, unable to bear the silence, sought light in the one place God had absolutely forbidden. And the darkness gave him only the confirmation of his doom. Seeking guidance from what God forbids never delivers; it seals our ruin.

We must be careful here. The text does not invite us to study mediums, the dead, or the afterlife beyond what God has revealed; it warns us away from the whole forbidden realm. The abiding lesson is twofold: take with deadly seriousness God's prohibition of every occult and forbidden source of guidance, and take with equal seriousness the danger of a life that repeatedly refuses God's word, until refusing becomes a habit too strong to break. The mercy is that, unlike Saul, we still have God's full and final word in His Son. Today, while it is called today, we can listen.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God explicitly forbids divination, mediums, and consulting the dead as abominations (Deuteronomy 18:9–14).
- Such practices reject the living God who has spoken for dark sources that cannot save (Isaiah 8:19–20).
- All claimed guidance must be tested by God's word; what does not accord with it has no light.
- Saul reached the medium only after a lifetime of refusing God's word, until God fell silent.
- Forbidden sources never deliver the help we crave; they seal our ruin.
- We must not build speculative doctrines about the dead or the occult beyond Scripture.
- The mercy is that God still speaks fully in His Son; today we can still listen (Hebrews 1:1–2).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God so firmly forbid seeking guidance from mediums and the dead?
- How did a lifetime of refusing God's word bring Saul to the medium's door?
- What modern counterfeits tempt people to seek light outside of God's revealed word, and how do we test them?

Question 10

Student Question:

Name one specific way Jesus, the light who calls us out of darkness and speaks God's final word to us, is forming in you a heart that listens to and trusts Him through this passage.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Bring the whole lesson home to Christ, who is everything Saul lacked. Saul stood in a silence he had earned; we stand under a heaven that has spoken. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Hebrews 1:1–2). We never have to grope in the dark of Endor, because God has given us His final and sufficient word.

Jesus is the light who came into the world so that those who follow Him should not walk in darkness but have the light of life (John 8:12). Where Saul sought a counterfeit light and found doom, Christ offers the true light and gives life. Every temptation to seek answers in forbidden

darkness is answered in Him, the one who calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

He also meets us in our discouragement, the very thing that tripped David. He invites the weary: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). When fear tempts us to take our survival into our own hands or to seek comfort where we should not, Christ bids us bring the weariness to Him and listen to His voice.

So examine your heart. Is there a silence in your life you are tempted to fill from a forbidden or counterfeit source rather than from God's word? Is there a discouragement writing lies about God's faithfulness? Let Jesus, the living Word and the true Light, form in you a heart that listens to Him and trusts Him. Name the one specific way you will turn from a counterfeit and toward His voice this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unlike Saul's earned silence, we have God's full and final word in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).
- Jesus is the true light; those who follow Him do not walk in darkness (John 8:12).
- Christ calls us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).
- Jesus meets the weary and discouraged with rest, the very temptation that tripped David (Matthew 11:28).
- Following Christ means turning from every counterfeit light to listen to and trust His voice.

Discussion Prompts

- How does having God's final word in Christ free us from ever needing to grope in the dark?
- How does Jesus meet the very discouragement and silence that ruined Saul?
- Name one specific way Jesus is forming in you a heart that listens to and trusts Him through this passage.