

Where is God's Kingdom?

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[0 : 0 0] Now I pray as we're standing. God, our Father, we pray as we turn to this section of your word that you would show us how marvelous and wonderful the Lord Jesus Christ is and that we love him and know him and live for him.

Help us as we hear your word now. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I don't know who it was who chose these five chapters of 1 Samuel for us to look at together, but he's a genius because they go together.

And I wonder, you'll need to turn to it, page 250 or so at the beginning of the Bible. I have not been sure what to call this last section of 1 Samuel, David changes sides and fights for the Philistines or is about to.

He lies through his teeth to save his skin. King Saul goes to a witch and she comes away looking better than he does. So if I have a name for this section, I'm going to call it Messiah's Acting Badly.

Two messiahs, Saul and David, both in a tight spot, both of them struggling with the silence of God, the absence of God, both dealing with darkness and forces of death and both generally making a complete mess of things.

[1 : 3 7] And the way the writer has put the text together is the two stories are held in parallel. So we go David, Saul, David, Saul. Chapter 27 is David, 28 is Saul, 29 and 30 is David, 31 is Saul.

So there are four episodes. We're going to look at the episodes and then I'll ask the question, what on earth has that got to do with us today? So number one, episode 20, episode 20, sorry, deep breath, episode 1, chapter 27, David among the Philistines.

Now if you've been with us, you'll know this is hard to imagine. For over nine chapters, David has been chased by King Saul and God has almost miraculously rescued and protected David again and again and again.

And here in chapter 27, verse 1, David gives up. Understandable in a way after years of pressure, manhunt. And we read in verse 1 of 27, David said in his heart, Now I'll perish one day by the hand of Saul.

There's nothing better for me than I should escape to the land of the Philistines. And he goes and he lives with Achish, the king of Gath. Gath, where Goliath came from.

[2 : 5 8] Philistines, the enemies of God's people, you remember? Gath was where David first escaped to when he was on the run and did the slobbering thing and barely escaped. It's bizarre.

The Messiah of God's people, his job is to defeat the Philistines, not to cuddle up and cozy up to them. It's a bad move. And lots of the commentators say he's just being cunning and clever.

It's a bad move. Despite the fact that what he learned in the cave and despite the fact that God had repeatedly delivered him from the Philistines, despite the fact that God had promised to make him king, David makes this move without consulting God, without even a second thought.

There's no reference to God in this chapter. So he takes his 600 wives, no, he takes his 600 men, I'm sorry. Let me just pause at this point and point out, David seems to have picked up two wives by now, maybe three.

And every time they're referenced, David is just called David, but his two wives get this full announcement, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.

[4 : 11] It's like David's unimportant, but these two women, and I think he's sinning just for the record's sake. I think he's acting like a king from the other nations. Where were we? Okay.

He takes his 600 men with all their wives and children and goes under the Philistines for protection. He doesn't look to God for his future or his security.

He takes things into his own hands and goes amongst God's enemies and entrusts himself to them. And you know, the last time David took things into his own hands didn't go very well, did it?

He was about to take down Nabal because Nabal had insulted him and slaughtered his whole house if it wasn't for the beautiful Abigail who talked him out of it. And another incidental, by the way, have you noticed through one Samuel that the women are all beautiful and very smart and spiritually attentive?

Very interesting. From Hannah, Samuel's mom in chapter 1, through to Phineas' wife, he gives birth to Ichabod, to Abigail, even the witch of Endor is smarter than the other.

[5 : 24] And Dan Gifford has promised to answer any questions on that later. So it's a huge gamble and it involves duplicity and deceit on a massive scale.

And it means David and his men become freelance mercenaries. To supply himself with food, he makes raids against the Amalekites. And when he comes back, he lies and he tells King Akashah, we've been raiding the Israelites and killing them.

But to keep his cover, David takes the decision to take no prisoners and he slaughters man, woman and child on each raid, everyone who lives, just to protect himself.

And, well, don't get too sympathetic about the Amalekites. Remember, you remember how they butchered the children and the women and the sick ones when Israel came into the land, the stragglers.

However, David is not acting on behalf of God. He's not executing the judgment of God. He's just doing this to cover himself for his own self-protection. It's a bad chapter.

[6 : 37] And in the first two verses of 28, which belong to chapter 27, things go from bad to worse. Achish comes to David and says, we're going to go out and fight the Philistines. You're going to come with.

And David says, fantastic. Like the Messiah of God's people going out with God's enemies to fight the people of God.

It's very bizarre. And that's episode number one. And we're sitting on the edge of our seats at the end of verse 2 in chapter 8. And so we then move to the second episode, which is chapter 28, Saul and the Witch of Endor.

And we enter into Saul's tent on the night before the big battle. Verse 5 of 28. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly.

And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim, the casting of lots by priests or by prophets. And Saul said to his servants, It's hard to imagine.

[7 : 56] King of God's people, the Messiah of God, turning to witchcraft. The very thing God had rescued his people from, from this pagan slavery and darkness, aiming to control the supernatural.

And Saul is desperate. And his desperation doesn't just come from the Philistines. It comes from God's silence. Samuel was dead.

Saul had killed all the clergy except one who'd gone off to be with David. And so he gets all the priestly levers and he pushes the buttons and he pulls the levers. But the Lord will not answer him.

And he is so frantic with worry that he asks his guards for a woman who's going to practice magic, who can summon the dead. But there's a problem.

She lives in Endor and Endor is the other side of the Philistine army. In other words, Saul and his men have to walk, have to go around and behind enemy lines to get to the witch of Endor.

[8 : 57] And he does. He disguises himself and he and the blokes go out at night. They steal through the Philistine army, which is mustering for the big battle the next morning. And he visits the witch of Endor.

If you've got your Bible open, just follow through the story in chapter 28. So in verse 8, he gets there in disguise. And he says, I want you to bring up the dead. Verse 9, she suspects a trap.

Witchcraft had after all been banned in Israel on penalty of death. She might be a pagan, but she's smart. Verse 10, Saul swears an oath by the life of God that nothing's going to happen to her.

Here he is. He can still use the name of God, the orthodox name of God. But he is dark and divided. Verse 11, okay, she says, who do you want?

Verse 12, as soon as he says Samuel, something happens which takes the witch completely by surprise. Verse 12, when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice.

[10 : 03] And the woman said to Saul, why have you deceived me? You're Saul. The king said, do not be afraid. What do you see? And the woman said to Saul, I see a God coming out of the earth. He said to her, what's his appearance?

And she said, an old man is coming up. He's wrapped in a robe. And Saul knew it was Samuel. And he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage. The reason she screams out is because she had absolutely zero expectation that anything like this could really happen.

She's used to rolling her eyes and putting on a smoky voice and saying, oh, I think I see Uncle Bill. Is it Uncle Bill? This is different.

And it terrifies her half to death. It's God's doing. I just point out, this chapter is not in the Bible as a do-it-yourself calling up the dead.

We're not told about the practice of mediums. But God, in some sort of miracle, sends Samuel to confirm the word that God had already spoken to Saul.

[11 : 02] Just as on another day, on another mountain with another Messiah, God sent Elijah and Moses on the transfiguration to reaffirm his word that he'd spoken.

The woman's powers are irrelevant to this story. And all she can see is an old man in a robe. And as soon as we hear about the robe, we're reminded of the story in chapter 15, when God had rejected Saul from being king.

And Saul grabbed Samuel's robe and he tears it. And Samuel says, the kingdom has been torn from you. And they were the last words he heard from Samuel. And Samuel is cranky.

Verse 15. Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? Saul answered, I am in great distress. The Philistines are warring against me. And God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or dreams.

Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I should do. And Samuel said, what do you ask me for then? Since the Lord has turned away from you and become your enemy, the Lord has done as he spoke by me.

[12 : 02] The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David, because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath, etc. Saul is in great distress.

God won't answer me. Sam and Samuel says, In the Hebrew, the word to hear and the word obey are the same.

And Samuel says, God spoke to you and spoke to you and spoke to you and spoke to you. You closed your ears. You did your own thing. You disobeyed. You rejected God's word. And so God has rejected you. And confronted with his defiance and disobedience, Saul collapses to the ground.

Hearing about the fact that he and his sons are going to be killed the next day, he wanted to have access to the dead. But he feels in his own body his own deadness now.

And the woman, the witch, sees his physical state and says, You've got to eat. And he won't listen to her. He never listens to the right advice.

[13 : 11] But finally he does eat and then disappears out of the darkness. It's an episode of darkness and death and despair. That's the second episode. Episode three.

We come back to David. I've called it out of the frying pan into the fire. This is two chapters, 29 and 30. We go back to the troubles of David. And it's a flashback to the day before.

The armies of the Philistines are mustering. David and his men are riding shotgun with Achish. It's just, I mean, it's unbelievable. Here is the next Messiah of God's people marching out with the Philistines against Israel.

But as they're mustering together, the combined Philistine military brains trust says, Who's that beside Achish? Isn't that the guy who's killed tens of thousands of us Philistines?

Achish, what are you thinking? And Achish protests David's innocence. But then he's forced into a wiser position. And Achish goes and says to David, David, you can't fight with us.

[14 : 18] You've got to go back to Ziklag. And weirdly, I don't understand why, verse 8, David says, What have I done? Can't I come out and fight with you? That would have been a very good time to keep your mouth closed.

But he doesn't. And Achish sends him back to Ziklag with his men. And despite David, in my view, David's stupidity, the Lord somehow delivers and rescues him despite himself, as he often does for us as well.

And when he gets back to Ziklag in chapter 30, things go from terrible to disaster. There's a smell of smoke. Everything's been burnt to the ground. There's not one person there.

All the wives and all the children, all the possessions are gone. It's the dastardly Amalekites again. The very ones who David has been slaughtering on his raids, they've stolen everything, all his wives and all their children.

And this creates a different sort of crisis for David in verse 6 of 30. Just notice in verse 5, we get both full names of the wives of David again.

[15 : 23] Verse 6, David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him. Because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters, I would have been too.

But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. I think the men of David begin to eye him a little differently. They say, look David, we joined you in the caves.

We joined you when we went to Moab. We came back and we were nearly killed in En Gedi. We even joined you in coming to Achish. We even joined you in those stupid raids against the Amalekites.

We even joined you in that harebrained idea of going out and fighting with the Philistines. You know what it's done? We've lost our families. We might as well just kill you now and be done with it.

And it's a moment of great distress. And finally, in verse 6, David turns to God and strengthens himself in his God.

[16 : 25] And if you read verse 7 and verse 8, the way he does that is he turns to the priest and he asks for the word of God. He prays to God and asks for the word. In verse 9, he obeys what God says and he leads his men after the Amalekites and he rescues the women and the children.

And at the end of verse 30, he begins to act something like a king again and he shares his spoils of war, not because they're his, but because they belong to God. That's the third episode. And the final episode in verse 31 is Saul again on a hill far away, I've called this.

It's a savage and it's a brutal chapter. And again, the focus is death. And it takes place at the same time as David is defeating the Amalekites. Saul, his sons and the army of Israel are overrun by the Philistines.

Jonathan is the first to die. Jonathan, lovely Jonathan. He's the first to die. And there is Saul with his sons lying dead at his feet, with the Philistines pressing in on him and God not answering.

He says to his armour bearer, take your sword and run me through. I don't particularly want to be captured. And the armour bearer will not lift his hand against the Lord's anointed. And so Saul falls on his own sword.

[17 : 40] And the next day when the Philistines come across the battlefield, they chop off Saul's head and they take his body and the body of his sons and they nail them to the city walls of Beth-shan. And then they conduct a kind of a pagan mission with a new gospel of good news.

Saul has been killed and that the gods of the Philistines, old Dagan, he gets a look in again. Dagan's beaten the Lord God of Israel. And then there's this little, there's a tender finish to the book where the men of Jabesh, the Israelite city, steal by night at great danger to themselves.

They take the bodies off the wall, they cremate them and bury them and so ends the book of 1 Samuel. So ends the life and reign of the first Messiah, the Messiah whom Israel chose to be like the nations around about them and where has it got them?

They're in a worse position than they were when the book started. They are now occupied by the Philistines, their army has been decimated, they are scattered like sheep without a shepherd.

And I think the question we ask ourselves is what is God saying to us? What does this have to do with us today? And I think there are many things we could say but I want to draw together three things that this section teaches us and I think it draws together the strands of 1 Samuel.

[19 : 05] And the first is a warning. There's a warning, there's an encouragement and I want to talk about longing. These are all things for our hearts. And the warning has to do with the silence of God.

Now I know my job is to be a preacher but I want to warn you that it is not safe to listen to the teaching of God's word.

It's a dangerous thing. The most dangerous thing in these chapters, the worst thing is not the dysfunction or disobedience of David and Saul but the silence of God.

It's the worst thing that can ever happen to a person. Worse than the Philistines, worse than their own personal issues is the silence of God's word which is where the book began.

You remember in chapter 3 the word of God was rare in those days. The whole reason God sent the Samuel prophet in the first place but the trouble for Israel is they wouldn't listen to God.

[20 : 05] And in the first of the four episodes today in chapter 27 when David takes refuge amongst the Philistines he does not consult God.

And it's very interesting, it is the only chapter in all of 1 Samuel where there is zero reference to God or to the Lord. David's just deciding on his own.

He's not referring to God and his actions show it. But here's the obvious question. Well then why doesn't God answer Saul when Saul does ask him?

Isn't that what God wants? And it's here we come to a key issue for this whole book and it's how we listen to God's voice. You've got to see that your attitude to God is exactly the same as your attitude to his word.

The place the word of God plays in your life is exactly the place that God plays in your life. 1 Samuel is not just a big national tragedy it's very personal and very human where we see the first Messiah gradually and increasingly harden his heart against the word of God.

[21 : 15] It's the disease that Israel has and it's a disease that continues in our own hearts today. In chapter 8 when they said we want a king like all the nations let me just spin over one Samuel quickly.

Chapter 8 Samuel says that if he starts defying God and you come back to God and say help us God is not going to listen to you. And then in chapter 13 when Saul gets a chance God gives Saul specific instructions about what to do.

The only problem with God's word to Saul that it's difficult and he has to wait he has to wait for God to act before he attacks the Philistines. He has to wait for Samuel to come and do the sacrifice but he doesn't.

He takes things into his own hands because the word of God is never easy. It's always hard to trust what God says always hard to trust that he's going to come and do what he says he's going to do.

It's a great mistake to think it's an easy thing. And Saul gives in to the circumstances and just makes a pragmatic decision and Samuel comes to him and says you've acted like a fool. A fool is someone who won't listen.

[22 : 24] You've not kept the command of the Lord your God which he commanded you. This is the tragedy Samuel says then the Lord would have established your kingdom forever but now your kingdom shall not continue because you haven't kept what the Lord commanded.

This is how it works. When God speaks to you depending on whether we listen or whether we close our ears the next time is different.

So with Saul the next time God spoke to him it was harder for him to hear. We close our ears to God's word if you push him away he's not going to force himself on us because all the time we're either moving toward God or moving away from him.

And I think this is most clearly seen in chapter 15. If you want to just turn back there if you've got your Bible open the key word in this chapter which comes I think eight times is the word hear same as obey.

In verse 1 Samuel said to Saul the Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people now therefore what's the job of the Messiah? Listen. Listen to the words of the Lord literally listen to the voice of the words of the Lord and then Samuel gives him a clear instruction from God.

[23 : 50] God says don't take the spoils of war but Saul takes the spoils of war they just they look too good and he brings them back and he says well I'll offer them as a sacrifice to God you know I'll make this dirty deal but I'll give some money to the church.

Well verse 19 why did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Verse 22 we have these very important words these are key words in 1 Samuel Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?

Behold to obey is better than sacrifice to listen than the fat of rams for rebellion is the same thing is as the sin of witchcraft divination and presumption is the same thing as iniquity the dirty sin and idolatry because you've rejected the word of the Lord he has rejected you from being king God God doesn't want great ceremony and ritual God wants us to listen the heart of the biblical faith is how we hear the voice of God and respond to him I'll put it the other way around at root our rejection of God is rejecting his word it's not a failure to understand these words are very important you see presumption or rebellion not obeying God is thinking we know better and it is the same sort of sin as idolatry and witchcraft because we set up our own God that way so here is the warning brothers and sisters if you despise

God's word if you think you know better if you refuse to do what God says God will take his word away I'm not talking about the ongoing struggle of the Christian life where we you know we claw our ways to church or we claw our way to the word of God we're aware of our own sin and we repent and turn to the Lord we pray for strength we go out we fail again and we come back and repent we sin all the time you sin all the time you can quote me on that if you don't sin all the time come and talk to me what I do mean is this is there something that you know God wants you to do and you've known for some time but you haven't done it you just don't do it or is there something you're doing that you know displeases God it's against God's word but you rationalize it somehow or is there something taught in the word of God that just doesn't sit well with you and you trust your own judgment more than God's word I warn you if you continue in that direction you'll gradually lose your appetite for the word of God and God will stop speaking to you this is the warning today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts secondly I think there's a massive encouragement as well because did you notice in chapter 30

God does speak to David why does he speak to David and not Saul it can't be because David is morally superior to Saul he's not if we've learned anything in these last chapters it's that David is made of exactly the same stuff as Saul David's not morally superior to Saul just as Christians are not morally superior to non-Christians we're all made of the same stuff it's the stuff God has to work with there's nothing random or fickle about what God is doing let me put it this way at rock bottom David and Saul are building their lives on two different foundations and the writer draws our attention to this brilliantly by using the same phrase of the two of them in their moment of deepest deepest trouble the writer says they are in great distress in 2815 these are the first words Saul says to Samuel recently come up from the ground he says

[27 : 58] I am in great distress and he was Philistines were pressing God was not answering here's the thing in the moment of his deepest distress instead of repenting instead of turning to God and asking for his forgiveness he still wants to use God for his own purposes in verse 15 he says to Samuel I haven't called you up to turn back to God listen I've summoned you to tell me what I should do he's not really concerned with the presence of God or the breach in his communion with God he wants military intelligence he wants to know how to win the battle he's not seeking the face of God he just wants to win and it's very interesting when he's there with Samuel he conveniently leaves out his own defiance and his own refusal to obey he doesn't mention that he's repeatedly tried to kill David he doesn't mention the fact that he's executed completely unjustly all the clergy except one nor that he's in the house of a witch practicing necromancy because at root Saul does not long for intimacy and fellowship with God he just wants to save his own skin and he uses all the orthodox language as well as the next person but he's in it for himself and David is in a bit of a mess as well isn't he

David has not heard the voice of God since chapter 26 but the difference comes and this is the major turning point in chapter 30 verse 6 when the men are about to stone him we read David strengthened himself in the Lord his God and that's the difference I mean David's outward circumstances were catastrophic he had taken refuge amongst the Philistines and not in God he'd been slaughtering the Amalekites to save his own skin and to cover his tracks now he'd lost the women and the children and his men were ready to stone him and we read he was greatly distressed the same words as Saul but you see for David there's something worse than losing the battle losing his family losing his men there's something worse than death itself and it is being cut off from God and so

David strengthens himself in his God he turns to God in repentance and he seeks God and his word and he repairs the relationship it's exactly what Saul could have done I'm not talking about a quick fix a quick prayer and a superficial easy way out I'm talking about turning to God and drawing near to God and that's why this is the turning point in these chapters David strengthens himself he goes back to the word of God and he prays and when he hears what the word of God says in verse 9 he instantly obeys no matter the cost Saul's deep distress is about himself David's deep distress is about God Saul does not seek the face of God he doesn't he's not after he doesn't want to recover God's presence he wants the results of God's favour not God's favour he wants what God can give him not God himself that David seeks the

Lord not for what God will give him but for God and this is what we do this is what we must do if you're experiencing great distress if you're experiencing the absence of the silence of God you take that to God you take your own guilt or whatever it is we have nowhere else to turn but we deal with God we direct our hearts to him we draw near to him because the deepest concern of our lives is not the blessings we're going to get from him but the blessing of being in him and God's promise is that when we turn to him he'll be found by us come to me he says and I will give you rest and I think that's a big encouragement that's the warning that's the encouragement and thirdly and briefly the section of the Bible gives us longing I don't know about you but these chapters make me long for a better

Messiah yes I mean after watching these two messiahs act so badly I think what we really need is we need a messiah what would be best we need a messiah who really loves the word of God and does the word of God but who's tempted like we are yet without sin better would be a messiah who actually reveals the word of God and speaks the word of God what we need is a perfect combination of prophet and priest and messiah and best of all would be God in human form who was the eternal word of God so that if we looked at him we could see the face of God wouldn't that be great most of all don't you think we need a messiah who can deal with death for us and I don't mean who can make us feel better about death or who can you know go through death and give us a good example or some good advice I mean a messiah who can take on death and defeat it we need a messiah who can defeat death in a way that he can rise from the dead again who can experience all the darkness of death which seems to come from our sin in himself we need a messiah who can experience the absence of God so that we can have the presence of

[33 : 50] God we need a messiah who can take away the shroud of death that covers humanity who can rise again and show us the new life of God who can deliver us from the power of death and the shadow of death I'm talking about Jesus our wisdom our righteousness our sanctification our redemption and since we have such a great messiah who's passed through the heavens Jesus the son of God let's hold our confession we don't have a messiah who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every way was tempted as we are yet without sin so let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need amen please kneel to pray father god we come before you this morning and we seek your face we acknowledge that we often seek our own ways we often want simple solutions we often want you to provide what we think our needs are but this morning lord we want to come before you and we want to seek your face we pray that you would enable us to turn our hearts to you to worship you to draw near to you we thank you that you have given us a true messiah jesus christ and this morning we want to praise and glorify and honor his holy name lord in your mercy father god in the quietness of our own hearts we want to come before you acknowledging where we are in our lives today acknowledging where we have fallen from you where we have sought our own ways and lord we spend a few moments privately reaching out to you and seeking your face knowing that you will hear us lord in your mercy

lord we thank you that when we turn to you that when we turn to you you hear us we thank you that that we can hear your word and not harden our hearts but that your holy spirit draws us to yourself and this morning lord we want to pray for those in our parish who are in a special need of your help we pray for those who are weary lord that you would give refreshment for those who are afraid that you would give comfort for those who are low that you would give your joy we pray for your kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven we pray especially for this morning for Catherine Gwinnett with the North American indigenous missions in Campbell River lord we pray that you would continue to enable her as she ministers to the native peoples of that community lord in your mercy we also pray this morning lord for the people of Newfoundland and we especially lift before you our brothers and sisters in St. John's at the church of the Good Samaritan and at the church of St. Stephen the Martyr lord in your mercy father god we pray for the spread of your gospel people in the lands around the world we lift before you Sharon Thompson as she ministers with Wycliffe both here in Furlow and in Burkino Faso we pray for Brian McConaghy as he reaches out to those in deep darkness and need in Cambodia we pray for the ministry of Ratanac that they would be a light in that community a light for your gospel lord in your mercy and father god in the world today we pray for renewed strength and hope for all who call on your name we pray for the people in those places where there is persecution violence and hardship we pray for the people of the Middle East as many countries there are in uncertainty and turmoil we pray for the Christians of those countries lord we pray that your strength might be seen through their present weakness and that you would guard them from all danger lord in your mercy now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord be glory majesty dominion and authority before all time now

and forever amen