

## 1 CHRONICLES 10:13, 14 NOT EVEN A KING DARE DISOBEY!

“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. He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore, the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.”<sup>1</sup>

“**T**herefore, the LORD put him to death.” This is the divine rationale provided for the death of Israel’s first king—it wasn’t so much that he died in battle, it was that God did not permit him to continue living. Saul had been chosen by the LORD, and he was put to death by the LORD. It is not as though God struck Saul dead; but, the hand of the LORD was against him. Thus, it is quite legitimate to say that the LORD put him to death.

Almost from the start, Saul created trouble for himself. In this respect, he was somewhat like so many of God’s people to this day. They believe the message of grace, but they want to be “hands on” Christians. If God fails to come through according to their idea of “coming through,” they will take control of life. The problem with that approach to life is that the cost is always far greater than we imagine. Saul discovered that with great blessing went great responsibility. However, he was incapable of accepting the great responsibility that his position imposed.

**SEARCHING FOR DONKEYS, FINDING A KINGDOM** — Let’s begin at the beginning. We meet Saul, the son of Kish, for the first time in the Book of First Samuel. “There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

“Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father, were lost. So, Kish said to Saul his son, ‘Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys.’ And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them” [1 SAMUEL 9:1-4].

It was a morning much like any other morning. The young man busied himself with the responsibilities of the day until his father, Kish, told him that the donkeys were missing. Sometime during the night the donkeys had wandered off; perhaps they had been frightened by a wild beast and rushed headlong away from their familiar home; whatever the cause, the donkeys were missing. Kish told Saul to take one of the hired hands and go look for the donkeys. For the next three days, Saul and the hired hand would travel over sixty miles looking for those donkeys!

They passed through Ephraim and the land of Shalishah, but did not find the donkeys. Following the donkeys, they drew near to Ramathaim-Zophim in Zuph. Samuel lived in this town situated about seven or eight kilometers north-west of Jerusalem. Saul, worried that his father would be concerned because they were gone so long, was prepared to give up the search; however, the servant suggested that since they were near the place where Samuel lived, perhaps they should consult him. Saul readily agreed to this suggestion and so they hurried into town.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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It so happened that Samuel was home; in fact, he was scheduled to officiate at a sacrificial meal that very day. Saul, having never met the man of God, had no idea who he was looking for. As he approached the city gate, an older man was exiting the city and Saul asked the old man, “Where is the house of the seer?” The meeting was strange, to say the least; it was as if Samuel had been looking for Saul. Samuel responded to the query, “I am the seer.” However, it was the instructions which followed that stunned the young man, for Samuel continued without pausing, “Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning, I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind” [1 SAMUEL 9:19].

Of course, none of that addressed the concern about the donkeys. This is where it becomes downright spooky! Samuel then said, “As for the donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found” [1 SAMUEL 9:20a]. Saul likely stood there, his mouth agape, but Samuel wasn’t finished. He continued with what can only be said to be an enigmatic statement, “And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s house” [1 SAMUEL 9:20b]?

Things were just weird; there was no other way to describe all that was happening. Despite his rather mild protests, Saul did go to the festival. When it was time for the meal, he and his servant were seated at the head of the table. The cook brought him a leg that had been set aside just for Saul. After the meal, he went home with Samuel to discover that a bed had been prepared on the roof. As he lay down that night, a thousand questions must have stampeded through his mind. It must have felt as though he had only fallen asleep when Samuel called him, but it was the dawn of the new day. Samuel walked him to the outskirts of the city where he asked that the servant be sent ahead.

When the servant was out of earshot, “Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on [Saul’s] head and kissed him and said, ‘Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies’” [1 SAMUEL 10:1]. Samuel continued by describing in some detail how the LORD would prepare Saul for the great task of ruling His people. Saul would witness several specific signs confirming that God was guiding through this matter. As he turned to leave Samuel, we read that “God gave [Saul] another heart” [1 SAMUEL 10:9b].

All the signs that Samuel had foretold came to pass, and God did one other thing in preparing Saul to rule over the people of Israel—He sent His good Spirit to equip Saul. It is an interesting observation that Christians are baptised in the Holy Spirit when they believe. Paul instructs us by writing, “In one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” [1 CORINTHIANS 12:13]. The Apostle writes, “all”; no Christian is excluded. This is the fulfilment of Jesus’ promise to His disciples when He promised, “John baptised in water; you will be baptised in the Holy Spirit. And soon” [ACTS 1:5, THE MESSAGE].

Having been baptised in the Spirit when we came to faith in Christ Jesus the Lord, we Christians are commanded to be “filled with the Spirit” [see EPHESIANS 18b]. The Christian in this present Church Age, lives in the knowledge of one baptism in the Spirit and many fillings with the Spirit. Each Christian is baptised in the Spirit at the point of salvation. Having been saved, each of us is now commanded to be filled with the Spirit. How often are we to be filled with the Spirit? As often as we are drained of the Holy Spirit’s presence! Someone has commented that the child of God requires multiple fillings with the Spirit because we are such leaky vessels! How true! Overwhelmed by “self,” we are drained of the Spirit and must be filled again and again. Let’s address this matter so that we may benefit from what is expected of us.

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I must briefly divert down a rabbit trail. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? This is a critical matter that is tragically ignored in this day. Too many professed saints of God are seeking something that is never promised. If one is filled with the Spirit, do we lose control of our speech? Of our thoughts? Of our ability to control our actions? There are good Christian people who are convinced that if only they can speak in a language that no one other than they themselves understand and if they experience ecstasy while doing so, they must be filled with the Spirit. The Apostle Paul didn't seem to be of that opinion, however. Listen to him as he instructs a church in which many imagined that ecstasy was the mark of spirituality. The passage under consideration will be found in [1 CORINTHIANS 14:3-17].

Paul begins by observing, "One who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation. The one who speaks in a tongue builds up himself, but the one who prophesies builds up the church. Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. The one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless someone interprets, so that the church may be built up" [1 CORINTHIANS 14:3-5]. Obviously, whether one is building the congregation or not is central to the Apostle's thought. Building up the church, encouraging and consoling the saints, reveals a mature saint. This is the mark of being filled with the Spirit.

The Apostle continues by observing, "Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? And if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church" [1 CORINTHIANS 14:6-12]. The Spirit of God is a gentleman; He does not compel the child of God to lose all control.

What follows is essential for understanding the mind of God as revealed through Paul. "Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful." Understanding is critical; if we don't understand what is said, our speech is mere noise to those who hear us. Therefore, the Apostle demonstrates his practise as a model for us when we are filled with the Spirit. "What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but ***I will pray with my mind*** also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but ***I will sing with my mind*** also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say 'Amen' to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up" [1 CORINTHIANS 14:13-17].

More particularly, note what the Apostle has written in the Ephesian encyclical. "Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" [EPHESIANS 5:17-21]. To be filled with the Spirit is to be focused on pleasing Christ, to have a heart filled with gratitude and to be submissive to others. Above all else, it is to seek to please Christ the Lord.

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The Forerunner, John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” [LUKE 1:15]. What was the evidence that he was filled with the Holy Spirit? Was it not that he was powerfully used by God to turn “many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God” [LUKE 1:16]?

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s voice, we are told that she was “filled with the Holy Spirit” [LUKE 1:41]. Did she lose control of herself and swoon? Was she unable to speak? Did she suddenly find herself lost in ecstasy? No! She praised God and glorified Him for what He was doing [see LUKE 1:42-45]!

Likewise, when Zechariah at last regained his speech as his newborn son was given his name, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” [LUKE 1:67 ff.]. Suddenly, this man who had been speechless for nine months prophesied! He glorified God and praised Him for what He was doing [see LUKE 1:68-79].

When the disciples in the New Beginnings Baptist Church of Jerusalem were instructed to select those who would serve as deacons for the congregation, among the qualifications they were to look for was that those chosen would be “full of the Spirit” [see ACTS 6:3]. Among the marks of Spirit-filled men would be that they were of good repute, especially recognised as good men in the eyes of the watching world, and they would be filled with wisdom. The wisdom that was sought was intimately related to faith in the Risen Son of God [see ACTS 6:5].

On the great Day of Pentecost following the resurrection and ascension, *all* the disciples were “filled with the Holy Spirit” [ACTS 2:4]. What followed was not a loss of control and an exaggerated sense of ecstasy, but rather bold speech and with power as evidenced by Peter’s words [see ACTS 2:14-36]. All alike were communicating “the mighty works of God” [ACTS 2:11].

Haled before the Jewish Council, Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” and testified, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” [ACTS 4:8-12]. Filled with the Spirit, Peter spoke boldly of Christ and His salvation!

Stephen, even as he faced death, was “full of the Holy Spirit.” This godly man, the first martyr, testified with boldness, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God” [ACTS 7:55, 56].

After Paul was saved, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” [ACTS 9:17]; the evidence that he was Spirit-filled was that “immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’” [ACTS 9:18].

Sent by the congregation in Jerusalem to see the work of God in Antioch, Barnabas found a thriving assembly there. Focus on two verses in this account of the establishment of the first congregation composed primarily of Gentiles and the impact of one godly man, Barnabas. “When [Barnabas] came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” [ACTS 11:23, 24].

On the first missionary journey, Saul, now known as Paul, was preaching to the Roman Proconsul in the city of Salamis. As he spoke of the Faith, he was opposed by a magician known as Elymas. Then, Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” condemned this magician and boldly exhibited the power of God with the result that the Proconsul believed and God was glorified.

In every instance cited, those filled with the Spirit spoke boldly of the things of God. When a Christian is filled with the Spirit, that believer will be used by God to glorify Christ, convicting the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement [see **JOHN 16:8-11**]. Underscore in your mind that Spirit-filled Christians are bold—not brash, but bold, and they speak of the truths of God. Spirit-filled Christians are equipped to glorify God.

Now, all this talk about being filled with the Spirit is to contrast the difference under the Old Covenant. Note the precise language that is used in the Word—“the Spirit of God rushed upon [Saul]” [**1 SAMUEL 10:10b**]. The concept presented throughout the Old Testament is that the Spirit of God cloaks, clothes or enfolds those whom He energises. The Spirit of God did not fill all under that Covenant; selected individuals were cloaked and only for a brief while.

Reading further, the Spirit of God rushing upon Saul was preparing him to rule the people of God. Soon after the Spirit rushed upon Saul for the first time, Saul came out of the field with the oxen to find the people in great distress. The elders of Jabesh-gilead brought a plea to Israel, asking for help in delivering them from Nahash and the Ammonites who were besieging the city. Listen, then, to the Word of God. “The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of the messengers, saying, ‘Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!’ Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man” [**1 SAMUEL 11:6, 7**]. Saul was equipped to lead the people, giving them a victory over the enemies of the LORD. Tragically, this was to be the high point of Saul’s leadership. The story grows much darker after this.

**RULING A KINGDOM, RUINING A KING** — After some time, it is uncertain how long Saul had been king, the Philistines mustered to fight Israel. The man once cloaked with the Spirit of God now trembled at the thought of fighting the Philistines. His son Jonathan had precipitated a fight with the Philistines, and the Philistines had responded with a massive army fully equipped with implements of war that could not be matched by Israel. Faced with this mighty army, the Israelites began to melt into the hills. Many hid in caves. Others were so frightened at the prospect of war with the Philistines that they hid in holes, in cisterns and even in tombs. Some of the erstwhile warriors even fled across the Jordan.

Samuel would come to give Saul guidance before the battle, but Samuel was not operating on Saul’s schedule. Therefore, we read, “[Saul] waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him. So, Saul said, ‘Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.’ And he offered the burnt offering. As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. Samuel said, ‘What have you done?’ And Saul said, ‘When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, “Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.” So, I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.’ And Samuel said to Saul, ‘You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.’ And Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal. The rest of the people went up after Saul to meet the army; they went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin” [**1 SAMUEL 13:8-15**].

The king, once cloaked with the Holy Spirit, had become just another cowardly lion. Surveying the enemy, he decided he must take matters into his own hands. Confronted by God's prophet, the king stammered out excuses for his disobedience. "I saw the people were scattering. You weren't here on time. The enemy is nearby." It all seemed so logical, so reasonable. In his mind, if Saul did not take control, the kingdom would be jeopardised. However, the king was not to offer sacrifices—that was the responsibility of the prophet. The king was responsible to wait for God to act. Fear had displaced faith, and Saul decided to take control of the situation.

Saul had forgotten a truth that must never be forgotten: "Victory belongs to the LORD" [PROVERBS 21:31b]. Christians forget this truth to their own detriment. Just as pastors often forget, so the king had forgotten, "The battle is the Lord's" [1 SAMUEL 17:39]. Did God direct Saul to wait? Then he must wait. Has God called His people to wait on the Lord? Then His people must rest in Him, trusting that He makes no mistake.

Disobedience would characterise Saul's life from this point forward; and with each act of disobedience, the king would excuse his actions, blaming others as the cause for disobedience. Like too many modern churchmen, like boards that presume to direct the affairs of a church according to the wisdom of this dying world, Saul took matters into his own hands and all he had to offer was that man could give.

Confronting the king, Samuel pronounced the dread sentence, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you" [1 SAMUEL 13:13, 14].

Later, preparing for a battle against the Amalekites, God commanded Saul to utterly destroy the city and all who were within.<sup>2</sup> Even the livestock was to be "devoted to destruction." However, Saul spared Agag, king of the Amalekites. He also spared the best of the livestock and gold, silver, jewels, tapestries—all that was pleasing in his eye. He compounded his disobedience by erecting a monument for himself at Carmel. God was displeased. When Samuel came to Saul, the king greeted the old prophet, "Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD."

Samuel responded with the curt question, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?"

Reverting to form, Saul excused his disobedience by blaming his warriors. "[The warriors] have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction."

Samuel cut the king short with a stern command, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night."

Though Samuel's fierce glare and the stern tone of his voice left no doubt in Saul's mind that he really did not want to hear what God said, he nevertheless meekly agreed, "Speak."

This was Samuel's message. "Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, 'Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?"

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<sup>2</sup> The account and the events that followed the battle are recorded in 1 SAMUEL 15:1-33

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Again, Saul excused his disobedience, becoming even more pointed in blaming the people. “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” This became one excuse too many for the LORD. From this point forward, God actively opposed Saul.

Samuel uttered the awesome words that serve to warn all who imagine they can follow God while acting according to their own wishes:

“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,  
and to listen than the fat of rams.  
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,  
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,  
he has also rejected you from being king.”

In the following chapter are found dreadful words that should give pause to any who imagine they can disobey God without consequence. “The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the LORD tormented him” [1 SAMUEL 16:14]. I have no idea what is entailed in such judgement; neither do I wish to discover what is meant.

The people genuinely loved Saul; he was the answer to their request for a king—handsome, kingly in his bearing, tall, adept at leading the army in war. However, Saul could never be content with the admiration of the people if he imagined that another enjoyed similar admiration and love. He had to be the sole object of adoration; anyone who threatened his position had to be removed. You recall the remainder of this account. Following the leading of the LORD, Samuel sought out a shepherd boy, anointing him to be king. That boy was introduced to Saul, quite by accident during a very tense period of conflict with the Philistines. God used that young shepherd boy to kill a Philistine champion, precipitating chaos in the enemy lines and bringing about a great victory for Israel.

That shepherd boy, David, though rightfully anointed to be king, served Saul, leading the armies of Israel into battle and winning repeated victories against the foe. His fame grew in Israel until one day, “As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

‘Saul has struck down his thousands,  
and David his ten thousands.’

And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?’ And Saul eyed David from that day on” [1 SAMUEL 18:6-9]. He could not tolerate sharing the praise of the people. He was much like many supposed leaders among the churches; their position as overseer shall brook no praise for another. Know that such pride is sin.

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The following day, something snapped in Saul and the king began acting like a madman. The text reads, “A harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, ‘I will pin David to the wall.’ But David evaded him twice” [1 SAMUEL 18:10, 11]. Notice a statement that gives some understanding of what was happening. You will recall that when Saul had been anointed by Samuel, “God gave him another heart” [1 SAMUEL 10:9] and “the Spirit of God rushed upon him” [1 SAMUEL 10:10]. Now, it is “a harmful spirit from God” that “rushed upon Saul” [1 SAMUEL 18:10]. And whereas he had once prophesied, now he raved.

From this incident forward, Saul expended his efforts in pursuing David in a vain attempt to kill him; he was determined to remove one whom he saw as a threat to his throne. Even if it cost him a loss against the Philistines, Saul pursued David, seeking to kill him. However, the increasingly demented king was fighting a futile battle, for he was fighting against the LORD. I well remember the words with which a black brother began a sermon warning against fighting against God, “Little man, your arms are too short to box with God.”

**FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL, LOSING THE BATTLE** — There would be one final battle for Saul. The Word states, “In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel” [1 SAMUEL 28:1]. As had so often been the case, Saul was worried, not trusting that God would deliver him. Only this time, the LORD was not with him; he had brought the kingdom to the brink of disaster.

Knowing the prophecy of Samuel, and knowing that he had fritted away multiple opportunities because he was pursuing David, Saul was desperate. And now Samuel was dead; Saul was left to his own devices. There would be no divine guidance for the self-centred king. The Word of God describes his increasingly desperate attempts to obtain God’s guidance. “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, or by prophets” [1 SAMUEL 28:5, 6]. Maybe, just maybe, there was a way to compel the LORD to help. He would make one final effort to gain God’s guidance, even if he had to resort to evil.

Saul was much like some politicians who sell themselves as honourable and trustworthy in this day. He had done a few things right, though his heart was dark and his mind was consumed with illusions of his own grandeur. He had ridded the land of mediums and necromancers; those that had not been removed quickly learned that they must go to ground. However, now that the LORD would not give him guidance, Saul was desperate. Surely, as king, he could do whatever he wanted, even when it was evil. So, Saul instructed his servants, “Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her” [1 SAMUEL 28:7].

Shortly, Saul stood in the presence of a medium who lived at En-dor. The king, in disguise and in the company of two other men, went to the woman to ask her to bring up one from the dead. The woman was cautious, as we would expect her to be. However, Saul allayed her fear by swearing by the LORD! How incongruous! He promotes evil by swearing by the Righteous Judge of all! The woman’s concerns are allayed at last, so she asks who she should bring up. The king commanded, “Bring up Samuel for me” [1 SAMUEL 28:11].

The woman is startled when, in fact, Samuel actually appeared. Perhaps she had employed deceit in the past, but she is not deceiving anyone this time and this is not some familiar spirit. She now knows the truth; it is Saul who has asked her to bring up the prophet of God. Somehow, the Prophet Samuel had risen and now stands before this terrified woman.



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What is more, Samuel does not need a medium to speak to Saul. He shall do so with his own voice, directly. “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” the prophet asked.<sup>3</sup>

The king stammered as, no doubt, the two companions and the medium cowered in a darkened corner, “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”

The words that Samuel spoke were cutting, decisive, final, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy? The 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. Because 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. Moreover, 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.”

Did the others in that room hear the words that Saul heard? I can only guess that this was the case. They knew at this point that they were serving a dead man, and that he had brought the kingdom to ruin. They knew they had cast their lot with the wrong man. They knew that God intended to destroy them.

The next day the armies met in combat. It didn’t take long until Israel fled before the Philistines. Many homes in Israel would mourn that night because a grandfather, a father, a son would not be coming home. Throughout the land, many people would know neighbours who had lost a member of the family; undoubtedly, some would know families in which multiple sons were killed, or even in which father and son had been killed.

Saul’s sons fought near him, and each of them was struck down—Jonathan, Abinadab and Malchi-shua. At last, the battle pressed against Saul. He was recognised by the archers, and several arrows at last pierced his armour. The account of the death of Saul is brief and to the point. “Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, ‘Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and mistreat me.’ But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore, Saul took his own sword and fell upon it” [1 CHRONICLES 10:4]. Israel fled in fear, deserting their cities, and the Philistines came and lived in them.

The divine text simply states, “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. He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore, the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse” [1 CHRONICLES 10:13, 14]. The coroner would conclude that Saul committed suicide; but it was the LORD who put him to death. God put Saul to death because he was disobedient and because he turned to a medium for guidance. Either sin, and make no mistake, either is a terrible sin, was sufficient to bring divine condemnation. However, as is so often the case when we choose to sin, we compound the sin by committing other sins in order to rectify the first, until at last God says, “That is enough!”

If we are to serve God, we must obey Him. We must seek His will and we must do His will. We cannot have divided hearts, now pursuing our own desire and again seeking personal pleasure, all the while declaring that we are serving the Lord our God. Instructing the people, Moses had warned, “It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve... You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you” [DEUTERONOMY 6:13, 14].

As you are no doubt aware, this was an iteration of the First and Second of the Ten Words which God had given. “You shall have no other gods before me.

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<sup>3</sup> The discourse is recorded in 1 SAMUEL 28:15-19.

**1 CHRONICLES 10:13, 14**  
**MEN WHOM GOD KILLED: NOT EVEN A KING CAN DISOBEY!**

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” [EXODUS 20:3-5],

Elijah challenged those gathered on Mount Carmel one fateful day, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” [1 KINGS 18:21].

If, somehow, a Christian should attempt to shrug this off by arguing that it does not reflect the teaching of the Saviour, listen to the stern words He delivered on two of occasions. “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” [MATTHEW 6:24].

At another time, the Master spoke pointedly to those who would follow Him, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters” [MATTHEW 12:30].

There is no room for half-hearted service to Him whom we call Master. There must never be divided loyalties. The history of Israel is the story of stumbling from loyalty to the Living God to embracing other gods of their own making. Looking on contemporary Christendom, it is a repeat of identical proportions. For too many of the professed people of God, church is where we go, giving our presence for an hour or so whenever we decide to do so. When we began services as a community of faith, we adopted a covenant. We ask all who unite to join in reciting that covenant in reaffirmation of the truths presented therein. The recitation is a reminder of the responsibilities we accepted when we united with the assembly. It is obvious that for many, these are just words without meaning.

Among other promises we make each time we recite the covenant, we unite in promising to advance this congregation in knowledge and holiness, pledging to support its worship, ordinances and doctrines. We promise to avoid all gossip, malicious talk and excessive anger. We pledge to watch over one another, including not allowing ourselves to be easily offended and to be eager to forgive and to settle differences. As I think of those who have taken offence, forsaking their repeated promises before God, I must conclude that too often the covenant is just words, too difficult to keep in our modern world. Or perhaps we are simply superior to any of those ancient concepts; we no longer need to bind ourselves to them.

But what of God? What of His will? Is there nothing gathered in that one document that is supported by the Word of God and by His will? Each promise is drawn from what is written in His Word. Perhaps the issue is our heart. Perhaps we have more in common with Saul than we could ever believe. Perhaps we need to invest time in contemplation of how to please the Lord. Perhaps we would be well advised to think carefully of the admonition that Paul has given, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” [EPHESIANS 4:1-7].

We who are redeemed are called to no longer live in order to fulfil our human passions; rather, we are called to live “for the will of God” [1 PETER 4:2]. Obedience is paramount. Perhaps it is time to ensure that we obey the will of the Lord. Amen.