

STUDY 10

1 Samuel 28 - 31

The LORD Keeps His Word

Just for starters

Name a movie where the ending didn't feel quite right. What was wrong with it?

In the Hands of the Enemy

Read 1 Samuel 28-29

1. What does the news in 28.1 mean for David (28.1-2)? How do the lords of the Philistines respond? (20.1-11)

Think it through

2. What does Achish understand David to be saying (29.8)? Is this what David actually means (cf. 24.8; 26.17, 19)?

Investigate

3. What is Saul's predicament and how does he try to resolve it (28.3-8)? What light does Deuteronomy 18.9-12 shed on Saul's course of action?
4. Compare the relationship between Saul and the LORD and David and the LORD? (1 Sam 22.5; 23.4; 23.10-12; 28.6, 15; 30.8)

Grave news

Saul goes to extreme measures to extract some scrap of guidance from God, but God is completely silent. This is dramatically different to God's prompt and precise answers to David's enquiries. Just when it appears that some morsel of guidance is about to come his way, Saul instead receives grave news.

5. What does the spirit of Samuel tell Saul? (28.16-19)

Think it through

6. Do you feel any sympathy for Saul and Israel? Why or why not?

The craft of mediums and necromancers involved subtle acts of trickery. It is little wonder, therefore, that the medium is shocked when the spirit of Samuel actually appears (28.12). Her response reinforces the enormity of the message.

In confronting Saul Samuel pronounces that God is Saul's enemy (28.16). The Hebrew word here implies a persistent and ever-present enemy—a 'nemesis'. Samuel confirms that God has deliberately allied himself against Saul because he failed to wipe out Amalek. The Lord's unspent judgement on Amalek is diverted onto Saul. The armies of Israel are inevitably caught up in the fate of their leader.

'They're ba-ack!'

Read 1 Samuel 30

7. Who does David defeat? How does this victory reflect on Saul?

Day of Infamy

Read 1 Samuel 31

Investigate

8. What is particularly tragic about this battle? (31.1-6)

9. Why do the people of Jabesh recover Saul's remains? (31.8-13, cf. 11.1-11)

Loose ends

The Israelites did not ordinarily cremate their dead. This was a custom reserved for people who breached a sacred ban (cf., Josh 7.24-25). Thus, even in death we see Saul paying the price for his failure to carry out the LORD's demands against Amalek. Ironically it is an Amalekite who takes the credit for Saul's death (2 Samuel 1.1-16).

Saul's failure to fulfil his foolish vow while pursuing the Philistines (14.24-30,36-45) revisits him. His vow in the LORD's name demanded the death of Jonathan his son but it was not carried out. Tragically the vow is fulfilled by the Philistines themselves on Mount Gilboa.

King Saul, who had held court under the tamarisk tree on the height of Gibeah with spear in hand (1 Sam 22.6), is laid to rest under a tamarisk tree in Jabesh (31.13).

Throughout 1 Samuel David had numerous opportunities to cease the kingship yet refused to do so. Even now with Saul dead David holds back. Instead David mourns the deaths of Saul and Jonathan in the moving lament of 2 Samuel 1.17-27.

Investigate

10. What situation does the nation of Israel now find itself in? (31.7; Compare Genesis 17.1-8)

Think it through

11. What hope is there for Israel?

12. Re-read the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2.1-10). Where have you seen the reversal of fortunes in 1 Samuel?

13. In light of 1 Samuel, is it possible that God deliberately raises bad leaders and governments? (Consider Acts 4.24-30; 1 Peter 2.13-14).

The LORD's anointed

More to come

1 Samuel ends on a tragic note. The king is dead, Israel's land is being over-run, they have rejected God as their king and God seems very far away. David presents a ray of hope but despite his merits he still has a flawed character. We have seen how Israel's fortunes are closely tied to its king's destiny. They need a king who is not merely popular by their standards but one who obeys God. He must be favoured by God and promote the LORD as the true king. Only with such a king will the promises of God and the hopes of Israel be fulfilled.

Think it through

14. Read the following verses and note what they say about Jesus. How does Jesus compare with Saul and David as the LORD's anointed?

- a. Luke 1.26-33
- b. Luke 23.35-41
- c. Acts 10.36-43
- d. Acts 13.17-23, 32-37
- e. Romans 1.1-4
- f. Philippians 2.5-11
- g. Revelation 19.11-16

15. In light of these passages how should the kingship of Jesus affect your thinking and your actions? Are there areas in which you need to change?