



## David's Faith Falters: Life Among the Philistines (1 Sam 27-28)

*Notes: Week Sixteen*

### New American Commentary<sup>1</sup>

#### (12) David Hides from Saul and Resumes Israel's Conquest of Canaan [27:1-12](#)

[27:1-4](#) After the confrontation with Saul had ended, David begrudgingly came to the conclusion that as long as he remained in the land, the king would continue to pursue him until he was “destroyed by the hand of Saul” (v. [1](#)). The only way to put an end to Saul’s pathological game of hide-and-seek was to move to the land of the Philistines. So he and his troops, along with their families (cf. v. [3](#); [30:2-3](#)), went to Gath, some twenty-five miles northwest of the Desert of Ziph.

David’s latest action marked the second time he had fled to Gath in order to escape Saul (cf. [21:10](#)). Yet this time both David’s circumstances and his reception were different. The first time he had entered Gath armed and alone from the royal household in Gibeah—a circumstance that appeared threatening to Achish, who knew nothing of the conflict between Saul and David.

However, this time David was entering as an infamous outlaw—a would-be usurper of Saul’s throne who was so feared by the Israelite monarch that he had repeatedly sent thousands of men into the desert to track David down. The Philistines’ awareness of this conflict is evidenced by their timing a raid on Israel to coincide with one of Saul’s forays against David (cf. [23:27-28](#)). Acting in accordance with the timeless dictum “My enemy’s enemy is my friend,” the Philistine ruler welcomed David, his men, and their families into his territory and probably considered them to be mercenaries (cf. [28:1](#)).

Family members accompanying David into Philistine territory included “his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel” (v. [3](#)). No doubt David took them along for two reasons: first, to protect them from persecution and abuse at the hands of Saul and his sympathizers and, second, to enjoy their companionship. David had learned the hard way what Saul would do to wives he left behind in Israelite territory (cf. [25:44](#)). After learning of the flight of David and his group to Gath, Saul “no longer searched for him” (v. [4](#)). David’s present plan, like all the ones before, succeeded admirably.

Achish’s commitment to grant asylum was a considerable one, since David’s entire group must have consisted of more than a thousand individuals—a large enough group to have disrupted life in Gath and created resentment among some of the city’s residents. No doubt David was aware of this and recognized the threat it posed to his ability to remain beyond Saul’s grasp in Philistia. Furthermore, David probably was uncomfortable being too near an uncircumcised king who was as much his enemy as his ally. David had not forgotten his own remarkable past or his prophetic destiny; and as the prophet-anointed, Spirit-empowered successor to Saul, he must be about his Father’s business, even in exile. That business could be conducted much more easily away from Achish’s view.

[27:5-7](#) Hiding his true reasons under a cloak of humility, David approached Achish and told him he was unworthy to “live in the royal city with” the mighty king. Instead of living in prestigious Gath, David requested that “a place be assigned” to his group of exiles “in one of the country towns” (v. [5](#)). Achish, who probably was both flattered by David’s words and relieved to have an excuse to move the group of foreigners away from his city’s food and water resources, “gave him Ziklag” (v. [6](#)). Ziklag (modern Tel

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1. Robert D. Bergen, *New American Commentary – Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 258-269.

Sera (?) was located about twenty-five miles southwest of Gath in what was technically territory assigned to both the tribes of Simeon (cf. [Josh 19:5](#)) and Judah (cf. [Josh 15:31](#)). Though the city was allotted to the Israelites, they had never conquered it. Yet David's cleverness did what previous military campaigns failed to do; it brought Ziklag into Israelite hands, "and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since." Thus David redeemed his time in exile, using it to resume Israel's conquest of Canaan.

David and his group apparently entered Gath ca. 1012 B.C. They "lived in Philistine territory a year and four months" (v. [7](#)), after which time David returned to Israel to become king.

[27:8–12](#) At his isolated base of operations in Philistine-controlled Judah, David was out from under the watchful eye of Achish. Ever the faithful servant of the Lord, David used this opportunity to pursue the Torah mandate to conquer the Promised Land. "David and his men went up and raided" (v. [8](#)) three different groups. God had given the land of "the Geshurites," located in Judah's tribal allotment, to Israel; however, Israel had failed to take control of that region (cf. [Josh 13:1–2](#)). The Lord had also commanded Israel to eliminate "the Amalekites" (cf. [Exod 17:15–16](#); [Deut 25:17–19](#)). Saul had failed to accomplish the task (cf. chap. [15](#)), but David heeded the Torah mandate. "The Girzites" are otherwise unknown, but like the Geshurites and Amalekites, "had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt" and thus were partially in territory that legitimately belonged to Judah.

As such, the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites were under the ban commanded by the Torah ([Deut 20:16–17](#)); none of them was to be spared by the Israelites in warfare. David, the man after the Lord's heart (cf. [12:24](#); [Acts 13:22](#)), was careful to follow the prescribed rules of warfare. Thus, whenever "he attacked an area" (v. [9](#)) inhabited by these peoples, "he did not leave a man or woman alive." However, he did take the booty—"sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes," part of which he presented "to Achish" on his periodic visits to Gath.

In his visits to the Philistine royal city David would have a personal audience with Achish. As the king was receiving his share of David's spoils, he would ply the Israelite warlord with questions regarding the location of his plundering activities. David's cunning and deceitful answers suggested that he was raiding territories in the Promised Land that were under Israel's control—"the Negev of Judah," "the Negev of Jerahmeel," and "the Negev of the Kenites" (v. [10](#)). The answer seemed credible to Achish, for none of David's victims survived who "might inform" the king to the contrary.

David's scheme was ingenious and effective. His conscious use of deceit was arguably the lesser of two evils: granted that lying is wrong and to be avoided (cf. [Lev 19:11](#); [Col 3:9](#)), in this case David's deception saved lives and thus fulfilled the Spirit of the Torah. Not only did it enable hundreds of Israelites to avoid a deadly confrontation with Saul, but it also helped Israel fulfill military assignments left undone since the days of Moses.

Achish was thoroughly taken in by David's skillful lies and therefore "trusted David" (v. [12](#)). The words—along with the generous gifts of plunder—made the Philistine king conclude that David had become "odious to his people" and would therefore be forced to be Achish's gift-bearing "servant forever."

Thus, David's obedience to the Torah warfare regulations caused him to prosper. In this section the writer subtly contrasts David's actions toward the Amalekites with Saul's. David's killing of all the Amalekites he encountered brought about blessing and life. On the other hand, when Saul disobeyed the Torah and consciously spared an Amalekite, he experienced a curse and loss of position.

### **(13) David Becomes Achish’s Bodyguard [28:1–2](#)**

While David was in Ziklag, “the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel” (v. [1](#)). Perhaps one of the reasons they decided to attack Israel at this time was the mistaken belief that David had weakened his own nation through the ongoing raids he conducted. Achish certainly considered David to be a valuable asset in any conflict with Israel and so ordered David and his men to “accompany” the Philistine army into battle.

David’s superlative skill in deceptive speech is demonstrated in his response to Achish’s potentially disastrous order: “You will see for yourself what your servant can do” (v. [2](#)). What exactly did David mean by these words? Would Achish see what David could do *for* Israel’s enemies or what he could do *to* Israel’s enemies? What Achish heard in these words probably is something different from what David actually meant, though this miscommunication was certainly what David intended. Achish obviously took the words to mean something favorable for the Philistines, for he offered to make David his “bodyguard [lit., “keeper for my head”] for life.” Achish’s words are ironic— David had already kept one Gathite’s head (cf. [17:54](#)), but he did so only after he removed it from Goliath’s body!

The narrative skills of the writer are on display in this section as the reader is left in suspense regarding David’s fate. Will the Lord’s anointed actually fight against the Lord’s people? Will David join forces with Achish and the Philistines? Stay tuned (cf. [29:1–11](#))!

### **(14) Saul Consults a Medium [28:3–25](#)**

This section presents what another writer considered perhaps the darkest moment in Saul’s life, his deliberate violation of one of the most serious prohibitions in the Torah (cf. [1 Chr 10:13–14](#)). By turning to a medium to receive guidance for his life, Saul committed a capital offense (cf. [Lev 20:6](#)). Less than twenty-four hours after he did so, he was dead—a sobering reminder of the swiftness and surety of the Lord’s punishment for any who violate the divine word.

[28:3–5](#) These verses review known facts and present additional background materials necessary for understanding one of the strangest and most sordid events in Saul’s life. First, the author reminds the reader that at this time “Samuel was dead” (v. [3](#); cf. [25:43](#)). Furthermore, he had been dead long enough to have been buried and have an appropriately long mourning period.

Second, the writer indicates that Saul had previously made a commendable effort to abide by the Torah in the matter of expelling “mediums and spiritists from the land.” Mediums (Hb., *’ōbōt*) and spiritists (Hb., *yiddē ’ōnîm*) were individuals who claimed the ability to contact the dead, either serving as intermediaries through whom the dead would speak (cf. [Isa 8:19](#)) or rousing the dead to speak for themselves. This note establishes Saul’s clear understanding that it was forbidden for Israelites to consult these individuals, a fact necessary for understanding the severity and speed of the punishment meted out to him.

In this section we also learn more details about the Philistine forces poised to attack Israel. At the time when Saul consulted the medium, they had “set up camp at Shunem” (v. [4](#)), a town in the tribal territory of Issachar some seventy-five miles north northeast of Gath. Shunem was located on a hill next to the Via Maris, the major trade route passing through the Promised Land. The Philistines desired to control this region, which included the Valley of Jezreel, since it would provide them with considerable revenue from caravans using the highway.

To oppose the Philistines, “Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa,” likely a mountain just south of Shunem that overlooked the Via Maris and the Valley of Jezreel through which it passed. From that vantage point Saul could view Philistine troop movements in relative safety. However, Saul was not prepared to cope with what he observed: when he saw the size of “the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart” (v. [5](#)).

[28:6–7](#) Quite properly, Saul first “inquired of the LORD” (v. [6](#)), seeking guidance in dealing with the Philistines. However, the Lord “did not answer him by dreams,” that is, through a personal revelation given directly to him. Nor did the Lord respond by means of the “Urim,” that is, with the revelatory device that could only be used with the assistance of an Aaronic priest (cf. [Exod 28:30](#); [Num 27:21](#)). This is not surprising since Saul had slain many of the Aaronic priests, and the only named surviving priest from Nob—one who possessed an ephod—had fled to David (cf. [22:18–20](#)). Furthermore, the Lord did not answer by means of “prophets.” Saul did not receive a prophetic word for two reasons: first, because Samuel was dead, and second, he had lost the support of the prophets when Samuel, the leading prophet of Israel in his generation and the leader of a group of prophets (cf. [19:20](#)), had declared Saul’s kingship had ended (cf. [15:24](#), [28–29](#)).

Having cut himself off from the Lord through personal disobedience, as well as his abuse of both the priestly and prophetic institutions in Israel, Saul turned to a non-Yahwistic alternative for guidance. He ordered “his attendants” to find “a woman who is a medium so he could “go and inquire of her” (v. [7](#)). From them he learned of just such a woman “in Endor” (modern Khirbet Safsafah) six miles away and two miles northeast of the Philistine camp.

[28:8–11](#) A measure of Saul’s desperation—and his willingness to sin against the Lord—in the present situation is seen in the fact that he went to the medium, even though he had to steal his way past the Philistine camp to get there. In order to make the journey as safe as possible, however, “Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes” (v. [8](#)). The absence of royal clothing and jewelry insulated him from scrutiny by Philistine soldiers patrolling the roads in the area and shielded his true identity from the medium. In order to reduce the journey’s risks even further, Saul waited until after the sun had set to begin the trip, and he was accompanied by two bodyguards.

Arriving at the medium’s house safely, Saul asked the woman to “consult a spirit” and to “cause the one whom I say to you to come up to me” (NIV, “bring up for me the one I name”). At first the woman refused, suspecting that these men were agents from the king who had “set a trap” (v. [9](#)) to kill her. Saul’s efforts to purge the land of those who led in banned revelatory practices (cf. [Exod 22:18](#); [19:31](#); [20:6, 27](#); [Deut 18:10–11](#)) were based in the Torah and perhaps had been inspired by Samuel (cf. [1 Sam 10:25](#)).

To calm the woman’s fears, “Saul swore to her by the LORD” that she would not be punished for her activities. Yet for the informed reader, Saul’s words to the medium are just one more manifestation of his lifelong spiritual incongruities (literally)—“By the life of Yahweh, there will not occur for you a transgression in this matter.” In fact, Saul’s oath invoked the Lord to grant immunity to one who broke the Lord’s command—it turned God against himself. Such an oath was not only foolish but actually blasphemous.

After the medium received this solemn word of assurance from Saul, she proceeded about her task. Asking the disguised king whom she should “bring up” (v. [11](#)), Saul requested the prophet “Samuel.” If it was indeed because of Samuel’s efforts that Saul had attempted to rid the land of mediums, his request here is particularly ironic. Presently she “saw Samuel” (v. [12](#)).

Questions naturally arise at this point: Did the medium actually make contact with a living spirit-being, and if so, was it really the prophet Samuel? While this matter is not likely to be settled to everyone's satisfaction, the following observations can be made. First, the plain statement of the Hebrew text is that she did in fact see Samuel. Second, the medium reacted to Samuel's appearance as though it was a genuine—and terrifying—experience: she “cried out at the top of her voice.” Her strong reaction also suggests that Samuel's appearance was unexpected; perhaps this was the first time she had ever actually succeeded in contacting the dead. Third, the speeches attributed to Samuel contained allusions to a prior interchange between the two, allusions that would have been appropriate only for the real Samuel to have made. Fourth, Samuel's role and message as a prophet, so much a part of his ministry in life, was unchanged in his encounter with Saul here.

Indeed, a straightforward reading of the biblical account suggests the possibility that mediums may possess the capacity to contact dead persons and establish lines of communication between the living and the dead. This view is not explicitly rejected elsewhere in Scripture; the Torah prohibits necromancy not because it is a hoax but because it promotes reliance on supernatural guidance from some source other than the Lord.

An alternative reading of this passage suggests that it was not the skill of the medium but rather a unique act of God that brought Saul into contact with Samuel. The medium did not possess the capacity to disturb a dead saint; but God, as “a sign of his grace,” permitted Saul to have one last encounter with the prophet who had played such a determinative role in the king's career.

[28:12–14](#) With the appearance of Samuel the medium came to understand that her customer was actually King Saul. Undaunted by the fact that his deception had been discovered, Saul asked the woman not to fear, but to continue with her task. The fact that he asked the medium what she could see suggests that Saul himself was prevented from viewing the spirit, though he was able to speak with the prophet directly. The woman claimed that she saw “gods arising from the earth” (v. [13](#); NIV, “a spirit coming up out of the ground”), perhaps from a pit in the room dug for the purpose of necromancy. The NIV's rendering of the woman's response masks the fact that the subject is *'ēlōhîm*, a word normally used to refer to a divine being and that the subject's verb is plural, a situation that regularly occurs in the **MT** when a pagan god is the referent. In the present instance it seems reasonable to conclude that the medium's words reflected a pagan belief that Samuel had become a “god”—a spirit-being possessing capabilities beyond those of mortals—following his death. The writer, wishing to demonstrate linguistically that she was speaking heretically, employed a plural verb form with the subject *'ēlōhîm*.

Saul apparently was confused by the woman's answer, so he asked her to provide additional descriptive details of what she saw: “What does he look like?” (v. [14](#)). Her imprecise answer—“an old man wearing a robe”—was nevertheless convincing to Saul. The word used to describe Samuel's garment here (**Hb.**, *mē'îl*, = “sleeveless robe”) is the same one used previously to describe the garment the prophet was wearing when Saul grabbed and tore its hem ([15:27](#)). Out of respect for the prophet who had provided guidance during previous times of confusion and crisis in Saul's life (cf. [9:19–20](#); [15:1–3](#)), “Saul bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.”

[28:15–19](#) Unmoved by Saul's show of submission and humility, Samuel asked for an explanation of why Saul “disturbed” (v. [15](#)) the prophet by causing him to come up. Saul apparently assumed that the prophet was unaware of events occurring in the land of the living, so he proceeded to explain about the Philistine threat and the fact that God had “turned away” from him. Having failed to contact the Lord “either by prophets or by dreams,” he then sought to learn “what to do” from the most insightful man he had ever known, Samuel.

Samuel did not provide Saul with the information he desired. Instead, he reassumed his role as the Lord's prophet and picked up where he had left off in his judgment of the king (cf. [15:22–25](#)). He reintroduced the topic of obedience to the Lord by probing Saul's motives: If Saul knew that the Lord had turned away from him and become his adversary, "why" (v. [16](#)) did he choose to make the Lord even angrier by violating the Torah's ban on consulting the dead (cf. [Lev 19:31](#); [20:6](#); [Deut 18:14](#))?

Without waiting for an answer, Samuel proceeded to interpret the course of events in Saul's reign from a prophetic perspective. He reminded Saul that prophetic judgments had been pronounced against him because of disobedience in the past. Now at this stage in Saul's life it was clear that "the LORD has done what he predicted" (v. [17](#); cf. [15:26–29](#)). As prophesied, "the LORD has torn the kingdom out of" Saul's hands and given it "to David"—in spite of Saul's relentless and bloody efforts to prevent it.

Saul had lost the right to rule Israel because of disobedience to the Lord's words in the Torah; the king did not "carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites" (v. [18](#); cf. [Deut 25:17–19](#)). Now Saul had repeated the same basic sin of disobedience to the Torah by consulting the dead. As a result, punishment must follow. Saul's present sin was private and concealed in darkness; however, its consequences would be public and massive. In this case "the LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines." In keeping with the seriousness of the present breach, Saul would also lose his family and his own life: "tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (v. [19](#); cf. [Lev 20:6](#)).

[28:20–25](#) The words were more than the king could bear: "immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear" (v. [20](#)). Saul's collapse was caused not only by the dead prophet's words of mortal judgment but also by the fact that "he had eaten nothing all that day and night." Apparently Saul was maintaining his foolhardy practice of fasting during times of battle (cf. [14:28](#)); Klein suggests it was because the fast was "in preparation for this conjuring session." The stress associated with confronting the Philistine threat, in addition to the efforts expended in making the risky six-mile trip to the medium's house, had sapped his body's energy and left him no reserve.

When the medium witnessed her king's collapse, she immediately tried to assist him. Referring to herself as "your maidservant" and identifying herself as one who had already risked her life to help the king, she offered to prepare him a meal so that he might "eat and have the strength to go on" (v. [22](#)).

Saul initially "refused" (v. [23](#)) the woman's offer, apparently because it would mean breaking a vow associated with his fast. However, "his men joined the woman in urging him" to take some nourishment, and eventually "he listened to them." He got up and "sat on the couch," a low piece of furniture on which one might recline while eating (cf. [Esth 7:8](#)) but which also was used regularly as a bed (cf. [19:13](#)).

When Saul agreed to the woman's offer of food, she immediately set about preparing a meal consisting of meat from a hastily butchered "fatted calf" and freshly "baked bread without yeast" (v. [24](#)). Any meal that included meat was special in ancient Israel, but one that included meat from a stall-fed animal was truly exceptional—a feast "fit for a king" (cf. [Amos 6:4](#)).

The woman's generous gift of food in behalf of the king and his men is reminiscent of Abigail's even more bounteous gift to David and his men (cf. [25:18–27](#)). The comparison of the women's gifts invites a comparison of the women: whereas Saul was nurtured by a woman under the Lord's curse (cf. [Lev 20:27](#)), David was nurtured by a woman under the Lord's blessing ([25:33](#)).

After the meal was prepared—which perhaps took a considerable amount of time—Saul and his men "ate" (v. [25](#)). Sometime before dawn, then, they left Endor to slip past Philistine lines and return to their camp on Mount Gilboa.

## Complete Biblical Library Commentary<sup>2</sup>

### Chapter 27

[27:1-7](#). Living like a fugitive in the desert and realizing in his experience that he could not trust Saul, David expressed the human fear that he would be destroyed. He calculated that the best place for him was Philistia, where Saul would not be able pursue him.

In a drastic change, David moved to Gath, some thirty miles northwest of the Desert of Ziph. Successfully making his appeal in offering his services to Achish the king of Gath, David with 600 men and their families settled among the Philistines. Like other peoples at that time, the Philistines may have hired David's band as mercenaries. (Cf. [2 Sam. 15:18-22](#); Ittai, the Gittite, had a band of 600 men with their families.) This would have solved his immediate problem of providing for his band as well as providing protection from Saul. Hearing this, Saul stopped hunting for David.

Very likely, Achish must have been keenly aware of the irreparable rift between Saul and David. Seldom since his initial engagement with them ([ch. 17](#)) had David fought against the Philistines, except in the defensive battle to aid the city of Keilah. With Judah favorably related to David, it would make it less likely that Saul could successfully fight with the Philistines.

In this climate of mutual trust, David requested that Achish, who had the feudal right to assign land, entrust him with a country town instead of living in the royal city. Achish granted him a fiefdom at Ziklag, about twenty-three miles south-southwest of Gath and twelve miles northeast of Beer-Sheba. Ziklag was a border city between Philistine and Simeonite territory, having been allocated to Simeon under Joshua ([Josh. 19:5](#)). In this location, fifteen miles southeast of Gaza, David was far removed from Saul as well as from the Philistine pentapolis.

### Chapter 28

[27:8-28:2](#). At Ziklag, David was located in the frontier of such raiding groups from the desert as Geshurites, Girzites and Amalekites. Successfully, he made raids against them, killing everyone, leaving no survivors to report to Achish what really happened and seizing livestock and clothing. Being far enough removed from Gath, David gave Achish the impression that he had raided subdistricts in the Negev in southern Judah, leading Achish to believe that Judahite hostility was increasing. David, however, gained the appreciation and loyalty of Judah (cf. [1 Sam. 30:26-31](#)), while raiding their enemies in the desert.

In the course of David's stay at Ziklag, the Philistines made plans to aggressively fight against Israel. Achish, laboring under the assumption that David was a faithful vassal, expected David to join with him in battle. Although David purported to go along with the Philistine plan, he gave an ambiguous answer. Misjudging David, Achish announced his desire to make David his bodyguard for life.

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2. *The Complete Biblical Library – Samuel*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 27 & 28".

[28:3-25](#). With a major battle with the Philistines looming, the focus in this passage is on King Saul. Noteworthy is the reminder that Samuel's death had been mourned by all Israel, indicating that he was no longer available to Saul to inquire of the Lord. In his experience, God's message to Saul was made known to him through a medium, a woman in Endor, not directly by dreams or Urim or prophets. To her

surprise, God revealed himself in the appearance of Samuel in responding to Saul's inquiry. This text provides an interesting delineation of the human and divine aspects in God's revelation in response to Saul's concern to hear from God.

Also significant in this account is the fact that Saul, by his own action of obedience, had banned mediums and spiritists from the land in accordance with Israel's laws. In [Deut. 18:9-12](#), nine detestable abominations practiced by surrounding nations are listed that are detestable to the Lord. In [Exo. 22:18](#), sorceresses are denied the right to live. Repeatedly, stern warnings are given against consulting a medium, a sorceress or anyone who practices divination in [Lev. 19:26](#); [20:6](#), [27](#). Consequently, these were not legally available to the Israelites for consultation.

[28:3-7](#). The Philistines had extended their dominance over Israel some twenty miles north of their most northerly city of Aphek into the Valley of Jezreel. There they set up camp at Shunem, nine miles east-northeast of Megiddo, undoubtedly pressing their intentions to advance eastward to the Jordan River. About ten miles south-southeast from there, Saul set up camp on Mount Gilboa from where, across the valley, he could see the movements of the Philistine army on the western slopes of the Hill of Moreh.

The sight of the Philistine army struck fear into the heart of Saul. When he inquired of the Lord, no reply was forthcoming. When he killed the priests at Nob, he deprived himself of the Urim, the priestly oracle. Samuel was no longer available. In desperation, Saul directed his attendants to find a medium, or necromancer. Nearby at Endor, about six miles north of Saul's position on Mount Gilboa and about four miles northeast of Shunem, "a woman who is a medium" (NIV) was located.

[28:8-11](#). For this illicit consultation, Saul disguised himself, wearing ordinary clothes instead of his royal robe, and went by night to Endor. Faced with the request to "consult the dead" (REB), she apprehensively raised the question about her safety—her life might be in jeopardy due to Saul's policy of killing mediums. When Saul assured her that he was not setting a trap for her life, he asked her to bring up Samuel.

[28:12-14](#). Shocked and surprised when she recognized Samuel, she screamed with feelings of fear and dismay, recognizing Saul and charging him with deception. She was frightened by the fact that things had gone beyond her control. While Saul had been terror-stricken himself ([v. 5](#)), he now told this woman not to be afraid but to tell him what she was seeing, indicating that he was not privy to the apparition itself. When she described the spirit or god-like form as an old man dressed in a robe, Saul realized that this was Samuel and fell flat to the ground. Saul, who had stood a head taller than all his colleagues ([1 Sam. 9:2](#)), now lay stretched out before the prophet to his entire length.

Samuel did not appear at the call of the king nor at the command of this Endor medium. The appearance of Samuel, whether physical or a real apparition, was authentic and beyond their control. This appearance of Samuel was limited to recognition by the medium, but not identifiable by Saul who asked her to tell him what she saw. When she described this spirit-like being in bodily form and dressed in a robe, Saul recognized this was Samuel.



**28:15-19**. In this supernatural manifestation to Saul, Samuel opened the conversation with a complaint that Saul had “disturbed” him, indicating that he had been at rest. This appearance of Samuel in the dress of a prophet was manifested in response to Saul’s inquiry ([v. 6](#))—not in the way God had formerly communicated by prophet, priest or dreams—God’s final means of bringing a word to the king. The warnings and the message now given to Saul was in full agreement with what Samuel had verbalized in previous contexts. Reflecting a desperate emotional state, Saul claimed to be in great distress. In war with the Philistines and with no reply coming to him from God, Saul now in desperation sought advice

from Samuel. Seven times he mentioned “the Lord” Who: “has turned away from you,” has “become your enemy,” “has done what he predicted through me,” “has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David,” “has done this to you today,” “will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines,” will also “hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines” because “you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites” (NIV).

**28:20-25**. Terrified by this message of doom, Saul fell to the ground. He was also depleted of strength due to lack of food all day and all night. When the woman saw that Saul was shaken and terrified, she insisted that now Saul obey her and accept nourishment to strengthen him for his return trip. In his immediate response, he refused but subsequently was persuaded by the two men with him. Fortunately, the woman had a stall-bred calf in her house, which she quickly butchered and served with unleavened cakes as side dishes. Strengthened by this nourishing meal (perhaps the last meal before his death), Saul with his two men set out that same night for the dangers of the morrow.