

## When Things Are Not As They Appear

### 1 Samuel 28:1-6

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 3-11-2012

#### Introduction

One of the things that I discovered in my side reading last year was that of the 42 assassination attempts made upon Hitler, several were made by Nazi officers who weren't really Nazis. In fact, there was a whole network of magistrates, judges, and military officers who worked with the underground resistance. They gave the resistance supplies, intelligence, arms, and were on occasion even personally involved in trying to overthrow Hitler. It's was pretty risky stuff. But even beyond that, those magistrates and officers had twice the stress of the rest of the underground, because everybody except for a few in the underground thought *they* were the enemy and part of the Nazi tyranny. So they had the stress of needing to give every appearance of being loyal to Hitler (which made them anathema in the eyes of the very people they were protecting), while strategizing with a few in the underground to resist Hitler's advances. And they illustrate so well that appearances can sometimes be deceiving.

The writer of Samuel wants the readers to know that things were not quite what they may have appeared to be. David appeared to be on the wrong side, and most people assume that when Achish asked David to join the Philistine army, that everyone in David's army was thinking, "Awkward! What do we do now? Boy are we in trouble!" Not so. I'm sure it was tense for David, and it was risky, but I believe he was following a well worked out plan that probably had two or three contingencies in place. And he was willing to endure misunderstanding for the sake of God's kingdom.

#### **I. Awkward! David appears to be on the wrong side (vv. 1-2)**

##### ***A. David is a legitimate civil magistrate to engage in and authorize full-fledged interposition (chapter 27)***

And the first thing that I want to remind you of is that David's underground resistance to the Philistines and his willingness to fight against Saul in chapter 29 was biblically justified because he was now a civil magistrate. He was the king of Ziklag. Earlier David was not willing to raise his sword against Saul – even when he had the chance. The one exception was in chapter 23 when it looked like the ruler of Keilah was willing to give him such legitimacy. But in chapter 24 and again in chapter 26 David proved that he was not a revolutionary. Well now, in the remaining chapters of this

book and in the first two chapters of 2 Samuel David was quite willing to resist the tyranny of Saul and later of Saul's son. And he did it with the full approval of God. Because David was now a king, he was freed up to engage in forms of interposition that perhaps earlier had not been an option.

***B. Interposition stage 1 - The developing underground resistance from Israel (1 Chron. 12:1-22)***

The first stage of his interposition was to receive a growing army of defectors, and give them refuge, and with his growing credibility as the king of Ziklag, to convince the nobles of Judah to crown him as king over that whole territory. I want you to turn to 1 Chronicles 12 to see what has been happening between chapter 27 and chapter 28. There has been a lot going on in the sixteen months that occur between these two chapters. David does two things during this period: 1) he won the hearts of nobles by dialoguing with them, protecting them, and sending them gifts of the plunder that he got from the Amalekites, and 2) he received huge numbers of defectors from Saul's army, which was the growing underground resistance. Let's begin reading at verse 1:

**1Chronicles 12:1 Now these *were* the men who came to David at Ziklag while he was still a fugitive from Saul the son of Kish; and they *were* among the mighty men, helpers in the war,**

**1Chronicles 12:2 armed with bows, using both the right hand and the left in *hurling* stones and *shooting* arrows with the bow. *They were* of Benjamin, Saul's brethren.**

That last sentence is a very interesting statement. Saul had lost credibility with even his own relatives. Even they were defecting to David. He didn't know whom he could trust anymore, which in part explains his fear in our chapter. Saul didn't know what to do. Anyway, 1 Chronicles 12 gives a long list of captains in verses 3-7, who came with their troops intact. But I particularly like these rough and tough Gadites in verse 8:

**1Chronicles 12:8 *Some* Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces *were like* the faces of lions, and *were* as swift as gazelles on the mountains:**

Last week I read about the defection of Amasai and his prophecy of God's blessing on David in verses 16-18. That was a huge blessing. Then came the men of Manasseh who defected to David right at the time we will be looking at in 1 Samuel 28. That history is recorded in verses 19-21. And let me just read verses 21-22

**1Chronicles 12:21** And they helped David against the bands of raiders, for they were all mighty men of valor, and they were captains in the army.

**1Chronicles 12:22** For at that time they came to David day by day to help him, until it was a great army, like the army of God.

So this first stage of interposition was a time of building for David. He was developing an underground resistance that could be used not only to defend himself if needed from the Philistines, but also to resist Saul when the timing was right. And the rest of this chapter shows what happened in the seven days that followed 1 Samuel 28. So the first 22 verses cover sixteen months, and the last verses cover a period of about a week.

### ***C. Interposition stage 2 – Letting your enemies duke it out (v. 1a)***

Back to 1 Samuel 28, we see interposition stage 2 in verse 1.

**Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel.**

David's plan may have initially involved letting the two armies duke it out, and see what God would open up. This would probably be the preferable way, because it wouldn't be very good PR to fight against Israel, though he ends up having to do so in the first chapters of 2 Samuel. But with the huge numbers of defectors from Saul's army, the Philistines could very well overcome Saul, and then David could come in to sweep against the Philistines and save the day. Of course, that is reading between the lines, so we don't know for sure what his plan was. But it certainly works out that way in chapter 31. It is a resounding defeat of Saul, and the cities of Judah are devastated. They are going to be looking for someone who can lead them effectively, and perhaps David hopes that someone will be him. He has certainly been preparing the way for it.

### ***D. Interposition stage 3 – The invitation (v. 1b)***

But the second half of verse 1 records a rather surprising development. Unlike some commentators, I doubt that David was blindsided by this. Achish invited David to join him in the battle. It makes sense. He came to David as a mercenary. Verse 1 continues: "**And Achish said to David, 'You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men.'**" By this time David had gained such trust by bringing at least portions of the pillage to Achish, that Achish invited him to join the army. I think this was second contingency that David had planned for, and he was prepared to look for further opportunities that God might open up.

***E. Interposition stage 4 – Disinformation (v. 2a)***

So David immediately agrees. **“So David said to Achish, ‘Surely you know what your servant can do.’”** He may have had some braggadocio body language mixed in. But he assures Achish that he is up to the job. Of course, the way David words this, could go either way – “You will find out what I can do to Saul” or “You will find out what I can do to you.” But either way, this disinformation was a part of his plan. A lot of legalists are opposed to countries using disinformation with the enemy, but the resistance against Hitler in Germany would not have been as successful as it was if it had not been for sympathizers who used disinformation to gain Hitler’s trust. They had a lot of setbacks, just like David did in the next chapters, but they just kept plugging away.

***F. Interposition stage 5 – Getting into the inner circle (v. 2b)***

And in a similar way, David’s disinformation looked like it would help him gain access to Achish’s inner circle. Verse 2 continues: **“And Achish said to David, ‘Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever.’”** The reason Achish trusted David was because he thought that David had been fighting against Israel during the last sixteen months, and that David would never again be welcome in Israel. To all intents and purposes it looked like loyalty to Achish was David’s only hope of survival. Of course, not everything is as it appears to be, right? And so Achish trusted him to be (the literal Hebrew says) the “keeper of my head.” And that’s a fun play on words in the Hebrew, because the Jewish readers knew that David might take his head and keep it in a different way. Being that close to Achish gave him opportunities he wouldn’t otherwise have had.

***G. While giving every appearance of being traitors to freedom, David’s men show the boldness, courage, reserve, self-control, and faith that comes from walking with God (Psalms).***

I haven’t spent much time on this first point because we don’t live in a time like Hitler’s when such resistance is even lawful. But the author of 1 Samuel has more than warfare strategies in mind. He is deliberately juxtaposing the character of David against the character of Saul. And I want to spend more time looking at that. When things get dicey and stressful like they did in this chapter, your real character issues start bubbling to the surface. And what bubbled to the surface in David was quite different from what bubbled to the surface in Saul.

David showed bold decisiveness where Saul didn't know what to do. David showed courage where Saul showed fear. David showed self-control where Saul lost self-control. David showed faith in God where Saul desperately grasped at a straw when he went to the witch of Endor. The Psalms make clear that stress drove David to the Lord, whereas stress tended to drive Saul to trust in things other than the Lord.

## II. **Awkward! Should we really be following Saul? (vv. 3-6)**

### *A. Saul didn't start where he ended (v. 3)*

So let's look at verses 3-6. Verse 3 says

**1Samuel 28:3** Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.

Why even mention Samuel? He hasn't been around for a long time. And liberals love to poke fun at this, as if an editor has poorly cobbled together a story from different sources. No. That's ridiculous. Conservatives believe that the author starts with Samuel to indicate why it was that Saul had put the mediums and spiritists out of the land in the first place. It was because of Samuel's influence. So Saul started off well, giving every appearance that he would be a good king. But here is the problem - if the actions you take are driven only by the expectations of others and not by your *own* character, and done for God, they won't last. You can see this with some of the children in our church. When the parents are around, they behave, but when the parents are not around and they know they can get away with disobedience to an adult who tells them, "Oh, please don't put food on the computer, or don't be jumping on the couch," they look at you defiantly as if to say, "You're not my mommy, and I don't think that you can make me." That reveals a heart. That reveals that the parents have only bothered to develop mere outward conformity to a parent's rod; it is not development of heart character. It is not being done as unto the Lord. And parents should develop tests to see if you children will do the right thing whether you are present or not. We should evaluate, "How do my kids do when my influence is no longer present?" Once Samuel died, his influence on Saul had zero effect. I think that's what the verse is saying. Saul's opposition to spiritism was not a principled opposition, as the rest of this chapter will make clear. What's the old expression? "A mule dressed in a tuxedo is still a mule." Well, Saul put on the tuxedo that Samuel had handed him, but over time, his true character began to come out. And if you want to

know how to develop this right in your children, review the leadership conference CDs that Rodney recorded.

***B. While making a show of fighting pagans (v. 4), Saul actually consults a pagan medium (v. 7a) six miles inside of pagan territory (v. 7b)***

The second downward step can be seen when you contrast verses 4 and 7:

**1Samuel 28:4** Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa.

He's the king, so he still has the responsibility to fight the Philistines. In fact, he really felt the pressure to fight because if he didn't, Israel will be cut in half by the Philistines, and he will lose half his kingdom. But Saul has a hard time doing so *because his heart looked more Philistine than it did Israelite*. Why do we know that? Because of verse 7 (which we will look at next week, Lord willing). But let's read it for now, because it shows where he has to go to find this medium.

**1Samuel 28:7** Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, *there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor.*"

The Hebrew word of medium is *נִיִּס*, which refers to a woman who has a familiar spirit – a demon who can prophesy through you. So this would be like a woman who conducts a séance. They claimed to be able to communicate with the dead, but it was really demons that were working through them. And we will look at that whole subject of the occult next week. It's a fascinating subject. But here is the question I have for now: why did those who surrounded Saul know where this medium was? Was it because they themselves had used her? Her address appears to be right at the top of their address book. They don't have to go off and investigate. As soon as he asks them they are able to say, "Well, as a matter of fact, we happen to know where one is." So Saul's heart desires a medium, and those who surround him appear to have already used such a medium. And so thematically it seems quite appropriate that he has to go six miles into Philistine territory, dressed up like a Philistine, so that he can get her demonic wisdom in En Dor.

So the writer is painting a stark contrast between David and Saul. Though David lives in a foreign land, he seeks guidance from the God of Israel and longs to be in the land of Israel. The picture is completely

reversed with Saul. Saul lives in Israel, but he seeks guidance from the witch of En Dor, a city in the hands of the Philistines, and he even dresses like a Philistine. Again, it is painting a picture that appearances can be deceiving. So that's verses 4 and 7.

***C. While making a show of courage, Saul lacks David's faith and courage (v. 5)***

Now take a look at verse 5:

**1Samuel 28:5** When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

Any of us can fear when we see danger. That is very natural. But it is difficult to fight that fear when you have a guilty conscience and have walked far from God. David was able to calm his fears during this time by going to God in the Psalms. Though David said during this time, "**Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head; they are mighty who would destroy me,**" yet he was still able to cast his cares upon the Lord and find peace and courage. Saul did not have that option. He tried in the next point, but God wouldn't answer.

And fear is a terrible thing to face alone. It demoralizes you and saps you of energy. David's answer was to say, "**Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.**" He didn't deny that he had fear, but his fear drove him to the Lord. Faith gives us a God-ward focus, and when we have God and we are comforted with His presence, then we do not fear losing things or even losing life itself.

Let me illustrate that. Chrysostom was a church father in the fourth and fifth centuries who had learned how to conquer his fears by giving his life to God every day and trusting his all to God every. In A.D. 398 he was appointed the head pastor of Constantinople, where his zeal for reform antagonized the Empress Eudoxia, who told him to shut up. He refused, saying that he was accountable to God to preach the whole counsel of Scripture. So she had him exiled; kicked him out of the country. Later he was allowed to return for a short time, but he was preaching reform once again, and that ticked her off, and she exiled him a second time. When threatened with even more dire dangers, he responded,

What can I fear? Will it be death? But you know that Christ is my life, and that I shall gain by death. Will it be exile? But the earth and all its fullness are the Lord's. Poverty I do not fear; riches I do not sigh for; and from death I do not shrink.

He could say that because he daily gave back to God his life, his health, and all that he owned. He in effect said, "Lord, it is yours. If you want to take it, that's fine." I love the similar prayer of St. Ignatius that I pray quite frequently. He prayed, "Take, Lord, and receive, all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, all that I have and possess. You have given all to me. To You, O Lord, I return it. All is yours. Dispose of it wholly according to your will. Give me your love and your grace, for this is sufficient for me." If you make that prayer a habit of your life, it will be much harder for the fear of losing things to grip you. You've already taken the preventive medicine. How can you fear that God will take something away, when you have willingly given it to God every day of your life?

Saul did the reverse. When God asked him to step down from the throne, he clung to it tighter. "No, God, You can't have this throne." When David took his daughter's heart, he took her back. When things were at stake, he would lash out. He didn't treat it as something God could take. When his life was in danger, he clung to it in desperation. It is precisely in such dicey situations as Chrysostom, David, and Saul faced that the depth of our Christianity is tested. Courage is not the absence of fear, but doing the right thing and trusting God despite the fear. Because of Saul's backslidden condition, he had cancelled out the ability to do that.

***D. While making a show of being faithful to God (v. 6) he shows a heart that has abandoned Him (v. 7)***

Verse 6 says that he tried to return to God.

**1Samuel 28:6 And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.**

Saul had consistently rejected God's guidance in the past, but suddenly when things get bad, he hopes God will bail him out. It's a foxhole Christianity, and our relationship with God doesn't work that way. As one commentator said, he had made his bed, but he didn't want to sleep in it.

We live in a society that sees no relationship between their sinful decisions (making your bed) and the consequences (sleeping in it). Of course there is forgiveness, but there are still the laws of harvest. There is forgiveness for sexual sin, but Romans says that you will suffer the consequences in your flesh. Of course there can be forgiveness for a nation that violates God's economic laws, but it may suffer the consequences for the next generation. Of course there is forgiveness that an abusive father or a drunkard mother can receive, but that does not erase the enormous

psychological harm and scars on their children. They have been sowing bad seeds into their children, and they will receive a harvest. God can minimize the harvest, but he never completely takes it away. Ben and I watched the movie, *Warrior*, and I think it showed how hard it is to recover from the effects of sin and rebellion within the family. But too many parents are like Saul – they only think about the consequences when the consequences hit them.

Saul had killed the prophets, so why should God speak through them to help him now. He had killed the priests, and the one priest who managed to escape, fled to David with the Urim. That was some kind of a piece that the priests got supernatural guidance with. When he asked someone if he could inquire of the Urim, he was told that it wasn't there. The only dreams he had were nightmares, not guidance from God. And it was stupid for him to think that God would guide him without repentance.

Christianity is just as stupid as Saul when it violates God's laws and thinks that it can escape from the consequences of such rebellion. The New Testament tells us, "**Do not be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap**" (Gal. 6:7). This was lived out in the life of professing believer Saul in this book, and it will be lived out in the life of David in 2 Samuel even though he is a man after God's own heart.

### **Conclusion – the circumstances, the men, and the God of this crisis**

In conclusion I want to pull together just three more thoughts from this passage. First of all a thought related to the circumstances. The Hebrew expression that is translated "**Now it happened,**" in verse 1, does not speak of randomness or chance. It's the exact opposite. *The New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (a long name, and it is an even longer multi-volume Hebrew Dictionary) points out that this word is at the root of God's name Yahweh, and it speaks not of random occurrences, but of providential historical sequence. And Genesis 1 defines how God wants us to understand this term. That first chapter of Genesis says that God spoke, and it happened; God spoke again, and it happened. And you see that pattern throughout the chapter. The dictionary says, "This intentional pattern echoes the affirmation by the psalmist that what Yahweh commands and brings to pass perfectly correspond," and then it cites Isaiah 14:24, where God says, "Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, and as I have purposed, so it shall stand."

What does this mean? It means that the circumstances in this chapter were all orchestrated by God. They were all planned out. They were not accidental. God brought these providences to pass to expose sin, to elevate David, and to prepare Israel to truly glorify God when He brought good out of this disaster later. It would not have been good to elevate David to the status of king before this time because he was not ready and Israel was not ready.

Now, I am convinced that Psalm 69 was written three days after this, during the first few verses of 1 Samuel chapter 30. And there are internal evidences to indicate that. The cities of Judah were devastated by the Philistines, the Amalekites had captured everyone and everything in the city of Ziklag while David's men were away, and his own men were ready to stone him. It was a dark, dark time for David and for Judah. But in hindsight we can see that David, his men, and Judah itself were prepared by God to give Him the glory when things were turned around. The circumstances that seemed so chaotic in that chapter were all working together for God's glory and for their good. And in the midst of his Psalm of lamentation, David caught a glimpse of that, saying,

**Let heaven and earth praise Him, the seas and everything that moves in them. For God will save Zion and build the cities of Judah, that they may dwell there and possess it. Also, the descendants of His servants shall inherit it, and those who love His name shall dwell in it.**

What a statement of faith concerning his future kingship over Judah and the rebuilding of these cities that had been destroyed. But it was only after this devastating judgment on Judah that Judah would be in a position to appreciate David, and to appreciate God, to appreciate God's law, and to give Him the glory. There is an expression that “\_\_\_\_\_ happens.” And I say, no, things don't just happen. 1 Corinthians 10:13 guarantees that your circumstances are so controlled by God that you are never in a box where you have to sin. There is always a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Saul didn't have to sin. He didn't have to go to that medium. David didn't have to sin. Don't ever look at your circumstances fatalistically. God is orchestrating them for your good. No matter what happens in this upcoming election, God is moving American history forward for the judgment of Satan, the discipline of His people (which also means the good of His people), and the glory of His name. It may not look like it. Modern history can sometimes look as backwards as these verses do. But things are not always what they appear. That's the theme of these verses. Things are

not always what they appear. And it takes eyes of faith to look at our circumstances like David did in Psalm 69.

Secondly, think of the men – think of the players in this drama: David, Achish, and Saul. Each one was quite different, and each one played a critical role in making sure that David survived, that David grew in his leadership, and that his kingdom would be established. Is God in control of the God-hating leaders in America? Yes He is – just as much so now as He was in control of Achish. Self-serving Achish ended up serving God’s purposes and losing. Self-serving Saul ended up serving God’s purposes and losing. God-serving David ended up serving God’s purposes and winning. And what I learn from this is that everyone serves God’s purposes. Some do it willingly and others do it while fighting against God. It’s much better to submit to God’s purposes willingly and to come out the winner. All of life has tests of your character, tests of the degree to which you will follow God, tests of your leadership, vision, faith, and integrity. The greater the tests that you pass with flying colors, the more God can trust you with. Do you want God to expand your borders? Ask Him to expand your faith. God could trust David now with added responsibility of being king of Judah because he responded to God’s tests by clinging to Him and clinging to His Word. And I would urge you to do the same when things do not appear to be like His Word says that they really are. It’s a call to faith to believe what God says about the players in America (whether believing or unbelieving).

And of course, the last player in this drama is God Himself. Verse 6 shows that God is sovereign and that He cannot be manipulated. He doesn’t give guidance to help rebels continue in their rebellion. He doesn’t bless disobedience. His love is not a love that sweeps sin under a carpet. His grace is not an antinomian grace that undermines His purposes. No. Paul says that He cannot deny Himself, and that means that He does not contradict Himself or any of His attributes. God is sovereign in His love, His grace, His providence, and in the expression of every attribute. He is holy in His love, His grace, His providence, and in the expression of every attribute. He cannot deny Himself. You don’t fight with a Sovereign God. And what David learned is that you don’t *need* to fight against our Sovereign God because He is working all things together for your good. It didn’t look like God was working together for David’s good in this chapter. But by faith, David believed it. Let each one of us do so as well. Amen.

Charge: Children of God; things are not always as they appear to be,  
so I charge you to walk by faith.

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