

# I Samuel – Part 9

## Death of an Era – I Samuel 27-31

The Bible is unique in that we can read it over and over, study it in depth, and still find another way to glean what God has for us on its pages. Last time, we looked at a chiasmic literary tool that is used in Scripture more than you might suspect. They are not easy to find unless you are looking for them. But when we make our reading intentional and learn to see the passages from a focused viewpoint, we will find our reading opens up a whole new perspective of what God is telling us.

Chiasms, or inverted parallelisms, are used by both writers and speakers to emphasize and reiterate key ideas. Dr. Seuss uses this to connect with young readers. In his book, *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish*, he shows us a chiasmic pattern. “My hat is old. My teeth are gold. I have a bird I like to hold. My shoe is off. My foot is cold.” Now we see the repetition on the next page. “My shoe is off. My foot is cold. I have a bird I like to hold. My hat is old. My teeth are gold. And now my story is all told.”

Obviously, Scripture has much deeper thought patterns, but you get the idea. Patterns make it easier for people to understand, absorb, and even memorize large blocks of text. These patterns can be just as important as the words themselves because they help us understand and absorb the ideas and themes. Most of the early Bible was spoken or sung orally to present ideas. Today, song lyrics still use this technique.

Placing a key concept or message in a chiasmus is one way to help guarantee that it is heard and remembered. There are hundreds of chiasms in the Old Testament; more than one hundred exist in the book of Isaiah alone. They vary in size from a couple of lines to entire chapters. Smaller ones naturally stand out because of their sound pattern and symmetry. When they are laid out in an easy-to-see format, the focus becomes even clearer.

### **I. Chiasmic Thoughts**

In I Samuel 24-26, the final records of Saul chasing David are recorded. He has been on the run for about four years and now takes up an offensive position while Saul is asleep. Today, we will quickly look at the final two chiasms in I Samuel 26. In verses 18-20, we see David’s thoughts on Saul’s continuous chasing of him. We could put it into our format as follows:

- A Why are you pursuing your servant?
- B Now therefore, let the king listen to me
  - C If the Lord is doing this, let me present a sacrifice to Him
  - C’ If man is doing this, let them be cursed (Notice that this contains an opposite thought in the reflection)
- B’ Now therefore, let not my blood be shed
- A’ Why are you seeking a flea or hunting a partridge (Don’t you have more important things to do?)

In a short “chiastic thought,” we could say, “If God is judging David and causing him to be pursued, he will repent; but let the man be cursed before the Lord if it is not Him.” David is more than willing to get right with God if this is all his fault, are we?

The final chiasm of chapter 26:21-25 shows us Saul’s bouts of schizophrenia as he goes from chasing him in his hatred to admitting his sin and calling David “my son.”

- A Saul calls “my son, David”
- B Saul says, “My soul was precious to you” in sparing his life
- C “Behold, the king’s spear” I could have killed you, but I didn’t.
- D “The Lord will judge each according to his righteousness and faithfulness”
- C’ “I would not stretch forth my hand”
- B’ David says, “Thy life was much set (important) in mine eyes, so let my life be in the eyes of the Lord”
- A’ Saul calls “my son, David”

In a short “chiastic thought,” we could say, “You called me your son, but yet, you sought to kill me, but your son refrained from killing you.” Vengeance is for God. David believed the Lord had delivered Saul to him that day, but he had spared Saul’s life because Saul was the Lord’s anointed. He hoped his life would be held in equal esteem and that the Lord would deliver him out of all his tribulation.

## **II. *Delivered but Discouraged***

While it may seem difficult to understand how David could speak so confidently to Saul about the Lord’s sovereignty and then drop immediately into a state of despair, we know that this can easily happen. In the secret places of his heart, David talked himself into believing that Saul would kill him. He removed his focus from the Lord and placed it on his troubles. Gath looked like the greener grass on the other side of the fence, so David and his followers went to Philistia to seek asylum. (I Sam. 27-28).

This time, Achish welcomed him. Instead of a solitary, insane young man, David is a proven warrior with 600 trained fighters and an apparent grudge against King Saul. Since he seemed willing to oblige him, David asked for a town of his own. David was given the city of Ziklag, far to the south and in a remote area. Perfect for his needs!

As payment for his hospitality, David carried out secret missions for the next sixteen months against some of Israel’s long-standing enemies: the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. He left no man or woman alive, took all the spoils of animals and clothing, and returned to Achish, leading him to believe that he was raiding Israelite lands. Since no one in these nations had been left alive, there were none to say differently. Achish thought it was great that David was causing his own people to hate him.

But there came a time when Achish decided to go to war against Israel himself since David was having such amazing success. He would take David with him as his protector. When Saul saw that Achish had gathered his armies for warfare against him, he panicked. Samuel was dead and buried, and there was no one to tell him what

to do. He was so afraid. With no one to consult the Lord for him, and receiving no answer from Him in dreams, or the Urim and Thummim, or prophets. What was he to do?

Even though Saul knew that God had departed from him, he felt desperate to determine the mind of the Lord. God had forbidden witchcraft, but Saul felt that his only option was to find a witch who could summon Samuel from the dead to help him. His servants found a witch in Endor. That night, Saul put on different apparel to disguise himself and took two men with him to see if she could help him. When Saul requested her to bring up Samuel from the dead, she became afraid for herself. She knew that Saul had banned familiar spirits and wizards from the land and suspected this man was trying to trap her, but he swore that nothing bad would happen to her.

The witch seems to have performed her trade in the past only through trickery, and she would give this man the same experience. She had not expected any results, but God overruled her plans and sent the spirit of Samuel. When she saw him, she was even more frightened. When Samuel appeared, he must have spoken Saul's name because she now knew who Saul was. Saul asked her to describe the spirit, and he knew that she had, indeed, brought Samuel from the grave. He bowed himself to the ground.

Samuel asked Saul why he had disturbed him, and he told him it was because God had left him. "Why then, did you ask for me? For the Lord has taken the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David. Because thou obeyed not the voice of the Lord, nor executed His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover, the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

Since Saul had not eaten anything for a whole day, the woman made food for Saul and his two servants. After they had eaten, they returned to the camp that night.

### **III. The Promised Battle**

The Philistines were rattling their spears at Aphek on their way to Shunem in the Valley of Jezreel. They came by the thousands with David and his men in the "rereward" (I Sam. 29:2), or as the protective force behind the rear of the army. They were positioned to prevent surprise attacks and ensure safety during the march and battle. The Israelites were not far away, probably at a large spring by Mount Gilboa. What was going through David's mind as he contemplated having to fight his own people??? How could he avoid this fight since he did not believe in touching God's anointed? On the other hand, how could he *not* go? The sweet smell of safety has developed thorns!

God had his back, though. He had everything figured out, as usual. When the Philistine princes saw David with Achish, they were angry and did not want him or his men with them in battle against Israel. They were afraid that David would switch his allegiance back to the Israelites and once again become the hero of Israel. Since Achish was outnumbered in his choice, he knew he had to take David out of the fighting unit.

Achish explained the situation, praised David's integrity, but told him to go home. David protested, and Achish praised him again, comparing him to an angel. David left

at dawn with his men to return to Ziklag. It took them three days to get there, but when they approached, they saw that the Amalekites had invaded from the south, burned the city, and taken their families captive. Although no one had been killed, they were devastated and wept so much that there were no more tears to cry. They began to think of stoning David for taking them away to battle instead of being there to protect their families. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (I Sam. 30:6).

At that moment, David had only one possession in all the world, except his body and the clothes he had on, that he could call his own. Everything else was gone; his property and wives had been carried off by the raiders or burned in ashes. But no one could take *his* God from him. Whatever else we lose, as long as we have God, we are rich; without God, no matter how much we possess, we are still poor. God is enough; everything else is subject to being lost or destroyed.

One other thought on this concept, David strengthened *himself* in the Lord. The Hebrew suggests that this isn't a one-and-done effort but a persistent, continuing effort. When things felt darkest, he set himself to reach out to God and hold on tight. God will give us this strength, but we must reach out and hang on tight. We must work to receive it. If David had not stubbornly resisted the pressure of the circumstances that he found himself in and flung himself, with effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been too strong for him to resist, and he would have found himself wallowing in despair. To rest in God requires serious effort.

This effort consists mainly of two things. One must hold fast to the truth that God is completely and totally ours. If this is not part of our normal thoughts, we will not be strong enough to grasp Him when the going is tough. God won't be a part of our every thought, and He will tend to become a last-ditch effort. Secondly, we must change our daily focus so that we don't lose sight of God.

David had made his choice. He could have stood and looked at the damage of the fire, the loss of his possessions, the loss of his family, the anger and frustration of his men, and seen nothing but disaster...or he could look past all of it and see beyond them to God. It is easiest to see the circumstances that surround us; it takes effort to look to God, my God, and gain His strength. To receive that strength, we must yield ourselves to Him. God must have possession of us, which means we must be obedient to His direction, believe that He has our good in mind, and that we are not our own but are bought with a price. Then, as we cry out to "my God," He answers with "Yes, My beloved child." Only then are we made strong.

After having Abiathar go to God for him to see what he should do, David received God's answer that he should pursue the Amalekites. As they went, they found an Egyptian in the field who had been left to die of thirst and starvation. He led them to the Amalekites, who were eating, drinking, and dancing in celebration because of the great spoil they had taken from Ziklag. David and his men attacked, killing everyone except 400 who escaped on camels. He recovered all that had been taken. "And there was nothing lacking, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil... David recovered all." (I Sam. 30:19).

Only 400 of his men had gone all the way with David to recover their losses; 200 had been too weak to travel that far and stayed behind with the baggage. When they came back to those who had remained behind, the other men didn't want to share the spoils

with them. David would not allow these men to be slighted and made a law that all would receive an equal portion of the spoils of battle, whether they were involved in the fighting or protecting the camp.

David also sent a portion of the spoils to those areas where he had dwelt during his exile as gratitude to them for giving him shelter and protection through those dark days. This helped restore and build goodwill for David among his people.

#### **IV. Defeat and Death**

While David was retrieving the people and spoils of Ziklag, Achish and the Philistines were fighting against Saul and the Israelites. The war was intense. The Philistines had wheeled their chariots across the valley of Jezreel by Shunem, effectively cutting off the northern tribes of Israel from joining their forces with Saul's army. True to Samuel's prophecy, Saul, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons, were killed. Archers had been able to get close to the king and severely wounded Saul. (I Sam. 31).

All was lost, and if he should survive, Saul did not want to be taken captive by Achish! It would be a humiliation and disgrace to be taken by the enemy, so Saul asked his armor bearer to kill him. However, he was too afraid and wouldn't, so Saul fell on his own sword, killing himself. I Chronicles 10:13-14 records the reason for Saul's death: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, even against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the LORD: therefore He slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse."

The Philistines made sure that Israel knew the ultimate humiliation. First, since the Israelites saw that they had been defeated, they fled from the cities, and the Philistines came and dwelt in the homes that God had given them, so their inheritance was diminished. Saul and his sons' heads were cut off. They were stripped of their armor to place them as trophies in the houses of Ashtaroath, their headless bodies were fastened to the temple wall of Shen, and Saul's head was placed in the temple of Dagon. (I Chr. 10:10). By doing this, the Philistines divided the glory of their victory among their gods and proclaimed the defeat of Israel's God.

When the people of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, their mighty men snuck in and removed the bodies of Saul and his sons that night. Years before, Jabesh had been rescued from Nahash the Ammonite by Saul in his first act as king (I Sam. 11). Nahash had put their city under siege to enslave these people. They were willing to be slaves until they were told that they must have their right eye removed. Saul had delivered them when no one else would, and the townspeople never forgot Saul. Their midnight rescue of his body was a final act of loyalty and gratitude.

They brought their bodies to Jabesh, a frontier town, and burned them there, east of the Jordan River where they would be away from the Philistines. They took the bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree to mark the graves. This would have reminded the people of Saul sitting there many times as he talked to his people. It would also have reminded the people of the consequences of sin.

The end of I Samuel brings the end of the man of flesh—Saul. Out of desperation, Saul had spiraled downward both mentally and spiritually. So, Saul passes out of history

and into eternity—a man whose earthly life and opportunities for serving God were largely wasted.

**Conclusion:**

Scripture does not praise Saul's actions, nor does it condemn or pity Saul. The narrative gives a feel of tragedy, of loss, of a man who began with a quiet, unassuming life and ends on a bloody battlefield, a product of rejecting the Holy God. His actions have been dominated by self-service, not one that brought glory to God. It is a life filled with rebellion and stubbornness. Samuel had told him, "Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry." Despite Samuel pointing out his sin, showing his need to change, Saul persisted in rebellion until it became his master and colored his whole life. Not once do we see Saul repenting, only offering excuses and blaming others to justify his actions—and God judged him.

In contrast, David believed that the all-wise, all-powerful Lord was *his* God by covenant. When problems came his way, small or large, he was assured that the Lord was *his* God, an expression that is seen in many of his psalms. Jewish literature states that David was possibly the first ancient singer to express the thought that a person could have a personal, individual relationship with God and God with him. And so, David laid hold of *his* God at that dark hour. He had a grip on God's hand as his very own, and God held on to him.

Think of the difference between the attitude of mind and heart of David to the men who were with him, or those that we encounter each day. When Israel thought of Jehovah or the God of Israel, it was in a wide, general term as a helper to the nation as a whole. This would have been true, but most fail to think of God beyond the community, to bring that thought of a relationship with God personally down to themselves, in an intimate relationship with Him.

David cut through that broad, general thought and got to the heart of the matter. It was not enough for him, in his time of need, to place his trust in some vague, universal goodness. He rested his faith and his heart, filled with pain and burdens, on the promise that God wasn't just the God of Israel, but was his personal God.

Do you think of God in general terms as the God you hear about in church, the God of a "Christian" nation rather than a heathen one? Is He personal to you or just someone who is out there in space somewhere? While it may not be the difference between a vague profession of religion and true salvation, it does explain the closeness of a personal, intimate relationship to the God who loves *you* and gave Himself for *you*."

Let us learn from these two men. Who do you resemble—the one who wanted to do things his own way or the one who was obedient to God? "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (I Pet. 1:14-16).



**8)** Why didn't David become king over all of Israel at this time? What was Abner's part in this? Describe the circumstances that began to split Israel. How do you see Saul's reign and David's reign in this split, according to Scripture?

### **Conclusion:**

In these opening chapters of II Samuel, we see various people trying to make a name for themselves one way or the other. David has been anointed king by God. He is the only one at this point who has a right to any earthly glory. David himself has not been pushing for that glory to be his at any point in his life so far. He has been content to give Saul his rightful due as the anointed king. David had led his men out of necessity, but not because he chose the glory.

Right away, in chapter 1, we see a young man bragging how he has killed the king. David gives a lament for the fallen king and his sons and mourns for their lives, giving them honor. The men of Jabesh-Gilead are given praise for their care of the king. Abner, Saul's general, is promoting Saul's remaining son Ish-bosheth to be the king of Israel but doing it for his own glory. And on we see, down the list of people that are mentioned in these opening chapters, people out for themselves, promoting who they are and why they should be acknowledged.

As we think of them, let's examine some of the reasons that we do things. It is always nice to be acknowledged for doing something nice or something well, but is that our motivation for what we do? Do you bring a meal to someone who has been sick to show off your fancy cooking skills? Do you give special treats to your grandchildren or children to make yourself look better than other members of your family? Do you bring lots of food to a potluck to make sure that there is plenty of food or because it makes you look good as a generous person? You may not be doing any of these things because you want attention, but I think we all have, at times, the wrong motivation for what we do.

Think about the things you do, whether at work, or at home, or at church. What is your motivation? Is it to bring glory to God or to yourself? What would God have you to do differently? We should always do our best, no matter what, but we need to remember Who we're doing it for!

"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy, and for Thy truth's sake" (Ps. 115:1).