

The Last Meal

The Singer, Part 9

1 Samuel 28 & 31

If I were to ask you what was one of the most important factors that led to the downfall of a 1,000 year old Russian monarchy, the murders of Czar Nicholas II and his family, the rise of a man named Lenin and Russian communism – if I were to ask you what was one of the root causes that prepared the way for all the above, you would probably never include in your answer the mention of a man named Grigory Yefimovich.

While Grigory was still in his teens he gained a reputation for two things: he claimed to be able to tell certain aspects of the future – and was evidently successful enough times to be regarded as a spiritually connected young man. He was also known for his immoral lifestyle. The local villagers even gave him the nickname Rasputin which means, debauchery.

When he was 22 he made a spiritual pilgrimage to Mt. Athos in Greece. There he came under the influence of a heretical religious sect known as the Flagelants. They believed sinning was necessary to salvation – the more you sinned the more secure your salvation. Two years later, Rasputin reappeared in his Russian village as a religious man . . . a holy man . . . with incantations and hypnosis that seemed to help some of the sick villagers . . . and he continued his immoral lifestyle too.

He eventually wandered into the capital city of St. Petersburg where society was highly interested in the occult and the spirit world. He quickly became known as a priest who could connect with the spirit world and even bring physical healing to some.

The imperial family of Czar Nicholas heard of him and invited him into their home to treat their son who suffered from hemophilia. Through hypnosis, Rasputin was able to alleviate some of the suffering of their son. Because of that, he was welcomed into the family circle as a close and trusted friend – Alexandra came to revere him as a holy man sent by God to save her son, and her husband's throne. Even after Alexandra was confronted with Rasputin's immoral and financial scandals in and out of court, she refused to act on any of it – strangely protective of this holy man with power to help her son.

When World War I broke out, Czar Nicholas took personal command of the army, leaving Alexandra and Rasputin even greater power at home.

Key leaders were exiled, institutions disrupted; the economy and public morale reached the bottom. Strikes and riots erupted in the capital city. Rumors began circulating about the relationship between Rasputin and Alexandra.

A group of cabinet members secretly conspired to kill Rasputin. On the night of December 30th, Rasputin was invited to what he thought was a royal party – instead he was given poisoned wine, then shot when he tried to escape. He was then bound and thrown into the river where he drowned.

The damage to the Russian monarchy was irreparable. Wicked friends of Rasputin's were still in power and the Czar had lost all credibility, along with the Queen, Alexandra. The time was ripe for revolution.

Just three months later, Czar Nicholas and his family were brutally murdered by the Russian rebels called Bolsheviks. The vacuum of leadership was filled by the leader of these rebels whose nickname was Lenin and he brought with him his new ideas of Marxism.

His rise to power would lead to three years of civil war – and even then, the Russian people never quite got what they were promised.

One historian wrote, if there had been no Rasputin, there would never have been a Lenin – no Lenin and there would never have been the propagation of atheistic communism through the empire of the Soviet Union for nearly 100 years.

What was a contributing factor behind it all? A demonically empowered man with evil ambitions.

There is little doubt in my mind that Satan is a mastermind, determined to influence and deceive.

So often it requires only one individual – in the right place, at the right time – with the wrong theology and a wayward heart.

Some of Israel's darkest days are about to begin.

The collapse of tribal territories, defeat in war, then civil war among the tribes of Israel will soon begin.

Behind it all, and in the end, is a King whose final days will be marked by a desperate connection to the occult world.

If King Saul's record was not already deeply tarnished, what he does in the last 48 hours of his life seal his doom.

He is going to add injury to insult. He's going to seek counsel from a witch – a medium – a woman supposedly connected to the spirit world.

And Saul will only further rebel against the Lord as he turns to spiritism.

Since Saul's life and death are woven into the fabric of David's life and soon coronation, I want us to pause at Saul's final hour, and learn some final lessons from his own biography.

Let's break down these last few hours of Saul's life into three points of reference.

1. First, the tragedy of an unrepentant life

In order to study these events chronologically, let's go back to *chapter 28 of First Samuel*. You may remember that the opening verses tell us that the Philistines are gathering their forces for war, to fight against Israel.

What has happened is that Saul's murderous preoccupation with David has effectively neglected the growing threat of the Philistines.ⁱ

He's been so intent on killing David that his own kingdom and the safety of his own nation has fallen by the wayside.

The Philistines have been sharpening their swords, and Saul hadn't noticed them. But the Philistines have evidently been watching him . . . the time is ripe for revolution – for war.

If you were with us in our last study, it's at this point that David is invited to go along with the Philistine, King Achish. David is trapped and has to comply.

Had David marched into battle, he would have effectively helped the Philistines kill the king of Israel, along with his sons.

David and his mighty men are rejected by the other Philistine kings and sent back to their town of Ziklag. While that was taking place in chapters 29 and 30, this is what's taking place in Saul's life, in chapter 28.

Notice verse 3 of chapter 28. Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land.

In other words, according to the demand of God, any practice of the occult had been banned in Israel – fortune tellers, channelers of spirit beings, necromancers – those who contacted the dead, were all forbidden.

And not because it was all hokus-pokus, by the way. But because it was spiritually dangerous and destructive and it distracted Israel from God's word, delivered by godly prophets and priests.

Verse 3 here is simply given to us as a backdrop to the irony of Saul's unrepentant life.

Now notice verse 4. The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa (which was a mountain). 5. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

That Hebrew verb for *trembled* means, literally *to quake* – it was used of Mount Sinai shaking, as God descended to deliver the law to Moses.ⁱⁱ

Saul is literally shaking with fear.

Notice verse 6. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim or by prophets. The Urim was among precious objects the High priest carried that delivered yes and no answers from God.

Now Saul obviously has a number of problems facing him – little wonder he needed advice.

He's lost his brilliant commanding officer – David, who'd never lost a battle.ⁱⁱⁱ

He's lost contact with God through prescribed methods.

He's unprepared for this massive battle and really doesn't seem to have any battle plan.

So before he decides to rush down that mountain into the jaws of the Philistine army, he wants to know if he's going to win or not.

Yes or no?

And the heavens are silent.

Some of the saddest verses in his biography – or anyone's for that matter is Saul's comments that God doesn't answer him. Down in *verse 15 he remarks that God has turned away from me, and answers me no more.*

David will answer why from his own experience as he writes in *Psalm 66:18, If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.*

David isn't saying that God doesn't literally hear you when you refuse to repent of some sin, because we know from scripture that God is omnipresent and omniscient and He actually hears everything.

In fact, He knows what you're going to say before you say it.

What David means is that God will not respond when you request of Him from an unrepentant heart.

The tragedy here is that Saul has chosen to be wayward, rather than worship and honor God.

You can't have it both ways.

Chuck Swindoll told the funny story of something that happened to him years ago when he visited the hospital one evening. As he walked through the parking lot he spotted the husband of the woman he'd come to visit. They both attended the church he pastored. The man was standing off to the side of the front entrance, smoking. But the man caught sight of Swindoll walking toward him – at some distance away – and he evidently didn't want his pastor to see him smoking, so he stuck his hand, with the lit cigarette into his front pants pocket. Swindoll commented, "I just decided to go over and carry on a conversation with him." He said the man turned all shades of red, fidgeted, smoke was literally coming out of his pocket. Finally, Chuck just laughed and said, "Listen, why don't you go ahead and finish it?" The man said, "Finish what." And he hurried off in a cloud of smoke.

Listen, we don't go to God for advice or communion or advice or with a need while at the same time attempting to hide something we know He wouldn't like.

Saul is complaining, "God doesn't answer me . . . God doesn't answer me anymore!" but he's got stuffed into his royal robes a heart that is smoldering with disobedience, and he knows it.

He can now hear the shouts of the Philistines, but not the voice of God.^{iv}

This is the tragedy of Saul's unrepentant life. Secondly, let me point out:

2. The reality of an unseen world

Look at verse 7. Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at Endor."

Evidently, one medium had escaped his earlier purge. Now in the Hebrew text, she's literally referred to as a woman who was a *mistress of necromancy*.^v

In other words, she consulted the dead in order to determine the future.

Saul has categorically refused God's prophets and God's word – his disobedience has blocked God's prescribed channels of communion.

And it's interesting to me that God actually uses Saul's visit to this medium – this occultic witch of Endor – to reaffirm Saul's judgment.

Notice what happens next – *verse 8. So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you."* 9. *The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?"* 10. *But Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."*

By the way, you can't miss the irony here that Saul is swearing on the life of the very Lord he is refusing to acknowledge.

Notice verse 11. Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." 12. *When the woman saw Samuel she cried out with a loud voice.*

That's the long way of saying, "she screamed."

Which becomes almost comical; she evidently wasn't expecting much of a result.

And by the way, Samuel begins to emerge prior to any of her incantations, formulas or pleadings the spirit world.

God can perform this, by the way, in the same way He brought Moses and Elijah back from the dead to appear with Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration to bolster the faith of Peter, James and John.^{vi}

Now, there's a lot of ink spilled over whether or not this was really Samuel.

How do we know it was Samuel, used by the Lord, rather than some demonic mist or even just any departed human being?

Five reasons:

- a. First, because the woman saw him and described him – although polytheistic and superstitious, she described in *verse 14 a god coming up from out of the earth* – she then she described him as *an old man wrapped in a robe (14)*
- b. Secondly, because Saul recognized him and bowed in respect (*14*)

- c. Thirdly, because the biblical text literally refers to the figure as Samuel – three times, in fact;
- d. Fourthly, because the message was a mirror image of the message delivered by Samuel to Saul years earlier when God pronounced judgment against him for unrepentance – *vv. 16-18*;^{vii}
- e. And one more reason this had to God’s divinely inspired prophet – because Samuel knew the future

The dead don’t know the future – any more than the living do – beyond what God provides.

- Which is why the man who died and then suffered in torment didn’t know what would happen to his brothers he’d left behind (*Luke 16*)
- Which is why the believing martyrs from the Great Tribulation ask God before His throne how long before their lives are avenged (*Revelation 6*).

The dead don’t know the future any more than you do.

However, keep in mind that the demonic spirit world does know, by means of their own organized communication, what’s happening 1,000 miles away . . . or 1 mile away . . . we can’t imagine how quickly they can communicate and share that information.

They can read your email – or see that letter that was sent to you two days ago, but it hasn’t arrived yet. And they know your grandfather’s nickname and your favorite departed pet’s favorite toy, too.

The devil is deceitful and his kingdom has communication methods we know nothing of. We don’t trivialize them, we don’t focus on them and we certainly don’t solicit them for information.

They don’t know the future any more than in generalities or prophecies provided by God.

To my fifth point, look at how specific Samuel is – obviously provided with information by God Himself – notice *verse 19*. ***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.***

In other words, tomorrow you’re going to depart earth as well.

This was one final message of judgment through the prophet Samuel; but it was also one final invitation to repentance.

It would be great to read that Saul fell down and pleaded for the forgiveness and mercy of God.

What we read instead, in *verse 20* is that Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night.

The next few verses tell us that they convinced him to eat a meal before leaving. He refused at first, but then sat in this woman’s dwelling for several hours while she prepared some veal and bread.

No whisper of sorrow over sin; no grasping for Samuel this time; no begging for the God of Samuel to forgive him.

Instead he eats his meal and while he’s there he comes to the conclusion that his own plans are infallible – he eats and then leaves, not even considering the word of God that this was going to be his last meal.

He’s going to march into battle with his sons even though Samuel has prophesied defeat and death – maybe he thought to himself, I’ll get around it somehow . . .

Maybe the medium was wrong . . . maybe it was my own imagination after all . . . maybe I can avoid the death verdict from this priest and prophet of God.

Peter Marshall, a former pastor and chaplain of the United States Senate often told the legend of the Middle Eastern servant who went to the market to purchase food for his master’s household – he turned a corner in the market place and came face to face with the Grim Reaper. He was wearing that trademark black hood that covered his face and he suddenly raised his bony hand and his sickle into the air. The servant turned and ran, terrified that Death had come for him.

He ran to his master and begged him to allow him to borrow a horse and flee to the nearby village of Samara where some friends lived . . . for just a few days. His master agreed.

The servant raced to the village and his master went on to the market place to purchase the food himself.

He also turned that same corner and came face to face with the Grim Reaper. The Reaper seemed uninterested in him and so he boldly asked, “Why did you threaten my servant earlier today?” The Reaper asked, “What do you mean?” “Well,” the master responded, “you raised your sickle into the air to strike him dead and he ran for his life.”

The Grim Reaper said, “No, I raised my hand in surprise . . . I wondered why he would be in this

village; you see, I have an appointment with him tonight in the village of Samara.”

Saul’s appointment with death will take place as announced. So also, ladies and gentlemen, we will one day arrive at our appointment with death . . . will you arrive to face the judgment of God, or will you have an advocate there – your Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ?

Chapter 31 delivers the rather gory news of Saul’s appointment with death. It records his defeat in battle – the deaths of his sons. And Saul, in *verse 4 of chapter 31, falls on his own sword* and takes his life.

For the Philistines, this is the day they had longed for. They quickly spread the news; put Saul’s armor in the temple of their goddess.

They celebrate the strength of their armies and their false gods. Saul has become the very image of their boast that Israel’s God could not even protect His own king.

One author wrote, “Saul had chosen inch by inch, day by day to compromise and live in light of disobedience. He had spit in the face of the One who gave him grace, as if to say, “I don’t need You; I’ll live like I want, and die as I please.”^{viii}

This is the tragedy of an unrepentant life. This is the reality of an unseen world.

3. This is the penalty of an unbroken heart

The Israelites in this region are now on the run . . . they are decimated and divided.

In terms of territory, Israel has now returned in defeat, back to where she had been at the beginning of Saul’s reign.^{ix}

It would be a day or two before David would even hear the news of Saul’s death.

Behind all this bad news and tragic setting is providential news – God isn’t finished with Israel . . . He’s just beginning.

Let me close with some similarities between this scene here and the scene at Golgotha as Jesus Christ died.

That might sound odd at first . . . comparing the death of Saul to the death of Jesus, because Saul and Jesus Christ were nothing alike.

- But consider the fact that “Saul’s death appeared to be the end of all national hope.” When Saul died, many people must have thought, that’s the end of Israel – the Philistines will surely conquer us now.
 - In a similar way, Christ’s death appeared to be the end of all spiritual hope. Surely the enemy has won. There’s no future, no living Savior, no kingdom.
- The death of King Saul paved the way for an entirely new plan of operation and ushered in David’s kingly line which led to the Messiah.
 - When Jesus died, He paved the way for a whole new operation would be brought into existence – a new line of redeemed sinners.”^x
- Saul’s death led to an unlikely person – an unknown shepherd boy from a poor family – to sit upon the throne.
 - So also, the death of Jesus Christ – and His saving grace – has reached unlikely people, you and me – who will sit upon the throne.
- The death of King Saul ends the Book of First Samuel . . . but a second book is about to open and the next few pages begin the reign of King David.
 - The death of Jesus Christ ended the Book of Suffering . . . but another book is about to open . . . the reign of the Son of David upon a royal throne in His glorious kingdom . . . and we with Him . . . there just a little more history to write.

And the King shall ride into Jerusalem and His Kingdom shall begin on earth . . . and we, unlikely peasants, will reign with Him.

One book has ended . . . but there’s another book about to be opened . . . a book of glory and a royal throne . . . and it’s just a few pages away.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 3/2/2014 by Stephen Davey.

-
- i J. Carl Laney, First and Second Samuel (Moody Press, 1982), p. 77
- ii Ibid
- iii Phillip Keller, David: I (Word Books, 1985), p. 175
- iv Davis, p. 150
- v Laney, p. 78
- vi Keller, p. 177
- vii Laney, p. 79
- viii Charles R. Swindoll, David: Man of Passion & Destiny (Word Publishing, 1997), p. 123
- ix Kenneth L. Chafin, 1, 2 Samuel (Word Books, 1989), p. 233
- x Adapted from Swindoll, p. 125