

Week 14: *The Contrast Continues: Saul's Demise*

Hook



Main Point: A godly person doesn't treat God like a genie in a bottle.

Western film and television helped to popularize the trope of magic genies: 1940's *The Thief of Bagdad*, 1958's *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad*, and the 1964 television series *I Dream of Jeannie*.¹ Perhaps the best-known depiction of a genie on the screen is Robin Williams in the animated film *Aladdin*. This cartoon's box office reached more than \$500 million and would inspire a 2019 live-action adaptation.²

Q: If you had three wishes to be granted by a genie, what would they be?

Q: In what ways do some believers approach their relationship with God as if He were a genie in a bottle?

RECAP: In this study section (weeks 8–17), David was still on the run from Saul. It's a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David's life – eight years. The text will continue contrasting Saul and David, showing David's integrity and trust in the Lord. Last week, we saw David flee to Israel's enemy, the Philistines, and how he navigated staying faithful to God while serving a pagan king. This week, we'll see Saul spiral into witchcraft, which he had outlawed in Israel.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled concerning events in his life (Psalms 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David's life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

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Book

Main Point: A godly person doesn't treat God like a genie in a bottle.

1 Samuel 28:3–7 and Psalm 56 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Godly people trust the Lord even when they are afraid.

Q: How does this scene remind you of the battle with Goliath?

Q: How was David's attitude different from Saul's, both when he fought Goliath and now as a vassal of Achish going out to fight against Israel?

The story opens with a reminder that Samuel had died, which happened in 25:1, before the story of David and Abigail, so it's likely been several years. The story also tells us that Saul had put the mediums and necromancers out of the land (28:3). Mosaic law outlawed mediums, necromancers, and any kind of sorcery or witchcraft. Not only was it against the law, but it was also a capital offense (Exodus 22:18; Leviticus 19:31; 20:27). The Israelites were expected to trust God, not magic, even if they were using it to worship God. Other nations used incantations and magical practices as part of their sacrifices and worship, but Israel did not. Saul knew consulting a medium was outlawed; he had kicked them out of the land himself. Both pieces of background information set the background for this account.³

In the last lesson, we learned that the Philistines were gathering their armies to attack Israel while David was a vassal of Achish, king of Gath. He had Achish's favor and trust and, last we heard, Achish had told David to go with him into battle against Israel (27:1). Even though David was an Israelite, Achish believed he would fight on his side, not only because they had made a suzerain/vassal treaty, but also because David had been telling Achish that the spoils he brought him were from battles against Israel and Israel's allies when he had really been fighting Israel's enemies (27:8–12). So as the two armies were gathering, David was with Achish on the other side (29:2).

When Saul saw the size of the Philistine army, he was terrified. The text says that he was afraid and that "his heart trembled greatly," repeated more intensely for emphasis. The scene is familiar. Many years earlier, when David fought Goliath, the two armies were camped on either side, and Saul was "greatly afraid" (17:11). Saul had another chance here to do the right thing and trust in the Lord the way David had trusted God in his battle with Goliath, but Saul didn't; he gave into his fear. Saul did try to inquire of the Lord using the approved methods – the Urim and Thummim, dreams, and the prophets (28:6) – but God did not answer him.

God had rejected Saul many years before when he failed to obey His commands to destroy the whole city of the Amalekites (15:4–11), which David accomplished later

(27:8). God had commanded them to burn up everything as “devoted to destruction,” which means a purification offering to the Lord. Instead, they kept the best of the spoils for themselves and burned as an offering only what was “despised and worthless” (15:9). This is when God “regretted”⁴ making Saul king and chose David instead (15:11–16:13). This doesn’t mean that God thought He had done something wrong or made a mistake. This was all part of His plan. The word literally means to “be sorry” or “console yourself.” God wasn’t saying He shouldn’t have made Saul king, but that He was saddened by how it had turned out, even though He knew this is what would happen. Samuel had already told Saul that God would replace him with “a man after [My] own heart” when he offered an unlawful sacrifice (13:7–14). When God rejected Saul because he kept the spoils, Samuel told Him, “Rebellion is as the sin of divination,” a foreshadowing of what he would eventually do in this story (15:23).

In all these accounts, Saul operated out of a lack of trust in God and fear of the Philistines. Each time, out of fear of man, he broke God’s law in some way. Saul feared man, but did not fear God. Jesus told His disciples not to fear those who can only destroy the body, but to fear God, who can destroy both body and soul (Matthew 10:28). Saul had it backward, and he would end this story with a dread of God and the judgment that would befall him rather than a healthy, holy fear of the Lord.

But when David had seen the army of the Philistines, even as a young shepherd boy, he said, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” (17:26). For David, no matter how big the enemy was, his God was bigger. When David had to flee from Saul, he admitted he was scared, but he chose to put His trust in God as his refuge (Psalm 57; 142). When the Philistines seized him in Gath, he said, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in you” (Psalm 56:3). Not if, when. We will all feel afraid at times. It’s not the feeling of fear that is sinful; what’s sinful is living in that fear instead of trusting in God. David was also afraid of the Philistines, but he chose to trust in God, while Saul turned to magic.

Q: Describe some situations when you were afraid and didn’t know what to do. What would it look like to seek God and His guidance in those times?

Q: When it feels as if life is spinning out of control, why is it difficult to trust God?

1 Samuel 28:8–18 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Ungodly people don’t walk with the Lord yet expect His blessing.

Q: Why do you think the woman cried out when she saw Samuel?

Q: Why did Samuel tell Saul that he didn’t need to conjure him?

Saul disguised himself to go to the medium because it was illegal to go to her, ironically, by his own law (28:8). He was disguised well enough that the woman didn’t recognize him and accused him of trying to get her killed (28:9). Saul swore by God that no harm

would come to her. This wasn't the first time Saul had sworn by God or spoken God's blessing on people even though God had rejected him and he no longer spoke for God. The irony is that he was swearing by God that she would not be punished for breaking God's law. Such an oath is not only foolish and arrogant; it is blasphemous.⁵

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out in a loud voice. Scholars disagree about why she cried out. Some believe it is because the "magic" she had been doing was all fakery, and this was the first time something supernatural had really happened to her. Others believe it was simply because he looked like "a god" to her, and that was scary (28:13).⁶ Still others say it was because she suddenly realized who Saul was (28:12).⁷ Some believe that all magic is fake, but the Bible shows Pharaoh's magicians can do some of the same supernatural acts as God, but not all (Exodus 7:22), and the New Testament tells us how – by demonic power (Acts 16:16–18). Therefore, magic was forbidden because it connects to demons, just as idolatry is worshipping demons (1 Corinthians 10:20). Maybe this woman had never done real magic, or maybe she had. Still, this time was different because she raised an actual man of God.

Saul bowed to pay homage to Samuel, yet his actions showed a lack of respect for God Himself (28:14). Samuel told Saul it didn't make sense that he would think Samuel could help him if God weren't answering him. Samuel was a prophet of God; he couldn't do more for Saul than God could (28:16). Saul should have understood that God was no longer speaking to him because God had rejected him (28:16–18). This didn't mean Saul was beyond hope. If he had truly repented, turned back to God, and sought Him with all his heart, God would have forgiven him. God makes that promise to His people repeatedly (Joel 2:12). He had even forgiven Israel just before Saul became king, delivering them from the Philistines, the exact people Saul was so terrified of (1 Samuel 7:3–4). So he should have known God could and would do it again. No one is ever beyond forgiveness; God forgives people who sin grievously – *if* they truly repent, even the wickedest king, Ahab (1 Kings 8:33–34; 21:27–29). The problem was that Saul wanted God's help and blessing without submitting to Him as Lord and obeying His law.

This is something we see often in our culture. Some people are happy to accept Jesus as their Savior but forget the "Lord" part. They want grace, forgiveness, and blessing, but they don't want to have to obey God's Word or submit to His authority as king of their lives. But if we don't accept Jesus as both our Lord and Savior, then our faith is just lip service. This doesn't mean our obedience *earns* us blessing. But being a disciple isn't just about praying a prayer and getting our ticket into heaven. It's about picking up our cross and following Jesus (Luke 9:23). With that comes incredible spiritual blessing, but we can't expect the blessing if we're not following Him. God isn't a magic genie we come to ask for stuff. He is our heavenly Father who delights in giving good things to His children (Matthew 7:7–11). The difference is the relationship. Heavenly father, spiritual child. But it is also honoring treating God as God, not a genie, and treating prayer as communion with our heavenly Father, not a gumball machine. The "magic" happens when you submit and obey; you see the true blessing.

Q: How has submitting to God as Lord blessed you? How has trusting in His will worked out better than demanding what you think you want?

Q: What areas of your life do you still need to submit to the lordship of Christ?

1 Samuel 28:19–25 and Psalm 111:10 and 128:1 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Godly people aren't afraid of God; they have a healthy fear of Him.

Q: How is Saul's "falling down" different than when he bowed to Samuel?

Q: How was Saul's fear different than the "fear of the Lord" that leads to wisdom?

Samuel finally prophesied Saul's doom. Originally, because Saul had disobeyed, God had rejected him as king and raised up David to take his place (28:16–18). But now, he would not only lose the kingship, but he would also lose his life (28:19). It had been many years since Saul's first act of disobedience against the Lord; he'd had ample time to repent, but he didn't. God's judgment of Saul wasn't just about these individual acts of disobedience but the heart they came from. Jesus said our actions are external expressions of what's in our hearts (Matthew 15:18–20). Saul had proven over time by his many actions that he didn't fear the Lord. And fearing and loving the Lord in your heart/inner person is what makes a man after God's own heart.

Saul fell to the ground. The word used here is a version of "stature" to emphasize that this man, who was the tallest in all of Israel by a head, was now lying completely flat, out of fear.⁸ Not the healthy, godly kind of fear of the Lord, but terror. Saul was scared of what God was going to do to him. But this unhealthy fear of God was all he had now because he didn't live his life with a healthy fear of the Lord – not being scared of God but honoring Him as God, seeing His holiness, and submitting to His Lordship over our lives. Scripture tells us that it's the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7). In Psalms, David said those who fear Him will abide in well-being and have no lack, and His eyes are on those who fear him (Psalm 25:12–13; 33:18; 34:9). But this fear is not scary, for "the friendship of the Lord" and "the steadfast love of the Lord" is for those who fear Him (Psalm 25:14; 103:17–18).

One day all the nations will bow before Christ, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, whether they lived that way on earth or not (Philippians 2:9–11). For those who have a godly, healthy fear of the Lord, this will be a wonderful moment of seeing God's kingdom finally come to fulfillment. But for those who do not love God, it will be a day of terror and judgment (Isaiah 17:9–11; Zephaniah 1:14–18;). Scripture continually describes the Day of the Lord as vindication for the righteous but judgment for the wicked, and this story of Saul shows us how. If we have a healthy fear of the Lord and honor Him as the Lord of our lives now, we won't be afraid when we stand before Him on Judgment Day. Because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ

(Romans 8:1). We will experience only grace, mercy, and forgiveness. And we will bow before Him in honor and praise, not terror.

Q: Why does wisdom have to start with the fear of the Lord? How does a healthy fear of the Lord reframe everything you think about the world and how to live?

Q: What does it look like to walk in fear of the Lord in our day-to-day lives? Give some examples of having a healthy fear of the Lord.

Q: What would be the difference in the life of someone with a healthy fear of God versus someone afraid of God? How would he or she live differently?

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Took

Main Point: A godly person doesn't treat God like a magic genie.

Jesus describes the kind of relationship that believers should have with him in John 15:

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

A disciple isn't to approach Jesus only when he is in need. Instead, the only effective and vibrant kind of Jesus-follower is the one who abides in Him. The life of someone who abides in Jesus is marked by obedience, trust, and prayer. Our desires change as we conform more to Jesus; we begin to pray for the Father's will when we abide in Him. This kind of perspective and prayer life results in much fruit.

Q: How does someone "abide" in Jesus?

Q: How would you compare Saul with someone who abides in Christ?

CHALLENGES

THINK: In what ways do you sometimes treat God like a genie in a bottle? In what ways do you expect Him to give you stuff (what you think you want) instead of seeing that the true blessing comes from submitting to His will (what He knows you need)? How can you remind yourself to submit to the lordship of Christ every day and in all situations?

PRAY for God to give you a healthy fear of Him. Pray for your heart to be softened to submit to His will in all things instead of demanding your own way. Ask Him to reveal to you areas in your life in which you still need to submit to His lordship.

ACT: Pray the Psalms. Try changing up your prayer life this week. Just for this week, don't ask God for anything in your own words. So you won't be tempted to treat Him like a genie in a bottle. Instead, pray the words of David about trusting in God and

fearing Him from these psalms over the next seven days: Psalms 19, 25, 34, 36, 40, 103, 128. (Psalm 128 isn't one of David's, but it still fits.)

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll move away from Saul's story to continue David's and see how God orchestrated his situation so that he was still able to keep favor with Achish without having to fight with the Philistines against Israel.

¹ <https://www.ign.com/articles/2019/05/25/a-history-of-genies-in-folklore-and-pop-culture>

² [https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Aladdin-\(1992\)#tab=international](https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Aladdin-(1992)#tab=international)

³ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996). *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁴ For a discussion of what it means to say that God “regretted” something He had done, see Lesson 2.

⁵ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁶ Robert D. Bergen, *1–2 Samuel, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

⁷ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

⁸ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).