

# Saul and the Witch of Endor

I Samuel 28

Introduction:

- V. 1-2 continue the narrative of ch. 27
  - David is in a precarious situation, but first there is a pause in the storyline. There is breaking news about what King Saul is up to
- I. (1Sa 28:3-5) Saul is fearful of an attack from the Philistines
- a. Samuel was dead.
    - i. He was God's prophet, and counsellor to Saul. In a multitude of counselors there is safety- but we must follow the counsel we are given!
    - ii. Many times those who seek counsel really just want a confirmation of what they have already decided.
    - iii. Samuel's death was originally reported in 1 Samuel 25:1. Here, the fact is mentioned again to emphasize the spiritual vacuum left by Samuel's departure.
  - b. To his credit, Saul obeyed the commands in the Mosaic Law to cast out those who practiced occultic arts. God commanded that mediums and spiritists (those who either can or claim to contact the dead and spirit beings) should have no place among His people in passages such as Deuteronomy 18:9-14. Saul did this in his earlier days when he was still influenced by Samuel's leadership.
  - c. Things such as tarot cards, palm readers, horoscopes and Ouija Boards are modern attempts to practice forms of spiritism. They are dangerous links to the demonic, even if undertaken in a spirit of fun. Christians should have nothing to do with them!
  - d. The location of Shunem means that the Philistines made an aggressive attack against Saul and Israel and would likely continue pushing into Israelite territory
- II. (1Sa 28:6-8) Saul seeks out a spirit medium

- a. V. 6- God will not speak to Saul- the famine of God's silence is the worst type of famine.
- b. This silence demonstrates that God will not always answer when a man is in a place of judgment as Saul is. King Saul has rejected and is currently rejecting God's previously revealed will. Since Saul didn't care to obey God in what he already knew, God will not give him more to know.
- c. If we want God to guide us, we must follow what guidance we already have from Him.
- d. There is a comfort in knowing God speaks to us- however even this comfort can be lost!
- e. It wasn't easy to find a medium in the land of Israel because Saul had previously put them out of the land. So Saul asked his staff to find him one and they suggested a woman in the city of Endor.
- f. Traditionally, this woman is known as the Witch of Endor. It may be appropriate to call her a witch but it is more accurate to call her a medium or a necromancer – one who makes contact with the dead.
- g. Bring up the one I shall name for you: Saul will ask the medium to channel the deceased prophet Samuel. He did this because he wanted to know what God might say to him. He even swears by the name of the Lord that nothing would happen to her! How foolish!
- h. (1Sa 28:11-14) To the medium's surprise, Samuel appears.
- i. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice: The medium was probably so shocked because she was a fraud, and most of her dealings with the spirit realm were tricks. Now Samuel really appeared from the world beyond and she was completely surprised to have a real encounter with the spirit realm.
- j. Perhaps this medium was familiar with the presence of demonic spirits but the presence of the Holy Spirit was probably unfamiliar to her.
- k. I believe this was a real appearance of Samuel.

- I. This strange incident is controversial, and several different approaches have been used to understand this passage. Here are some of the most commonly suggested possibilities:
    - i. Some believe that this was a deception by the medium. But this isn't an adequate explanation because it doesn't explain why the medium was so frightened. It doesn't explain why Samuel spoke to Saul, not to the medium.
    - ii. Some believe that this was a demonic impersonation of Samuel. It is possible that the medium, with her occultic powers, summoned a demonic spirit that deceived both her and Saul. But this suggestion is also inadequate, because it does not speak to the issue of motive. After all, what advantage does Satan gain by "Samuel's" words to Saul?
    - iii. Some believe that this was a genuine (but strange) appearance of Samuel. This is the best explanation because it is supported by the reaction of the medium, who got more than she bargained for. It is also supported by the truth of what Samuel said (and the text says that Samuel said it v. 15). Some may say that it is impossible for Samuel to reappear in some way, coming from the world beyond back to this world. But Moses and Elijah also came from the world beyond back to this world when they appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).
  - m. Clarke makes an additional valuable point: "I believe that the woman of En-dor had no power over Samuel; and that no incantation can avail over any departed saint of God, nor indeed over any human disembodied spirit." Samuel really came, but not because the medium called for him. Samuel appeared because God had a special purpose for it.
- III. Samuel speaks to Saul v. 15-18
    - a. Many bible teachers believe that technically, Samuel was not in *heaven*. Jesus explained in the story of the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)) that before the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the believing dead went to a place of

comfort and blessing known as *Abraham's bosom*. When Jesus finished his work on the cross, these believing dead were then ushered into heaven. Sheol- abode of the dead for both believers and unbelievers separated by gulf fixed.

- b. Many are looking for a messenger from the afterlife (went to Heaven and back, etc.), instead of following God's revelation today
- c. V. 15- Saul's distress and concern is the reason for disturbing Samuel
- d. God has departed- "God never departs from a man until the man has departed from Him. Then, in the interests of righteousness, God is against that man."  
(Morgan)
- e. "Saul is asking for guidance when his course of action is obvious: he has to fight the Philistines. What he really wants is reassurance that all will be well and that he will win the battle." (Baldwin)
- f. Samuel simply repeated what the Lord had already told Saul
- g. Application- any religious experience should be tested against the Bible's message
- h. Samuel called Saul's mind back to what happened in 1 Samuel 15. See v. 28-29
- i. It had been about 15 years now, so maybe Saul thought God changed his mind. He did not.
- j. (1Sa 28:19) Samuel tells Saul about his fate.
- k. You and your sons will be with me- sheol/hades representing the afterlife, but not necessarily the place of blessing that Samuel was in
- l. The question then becomes, do Samuel's words "with me" refer broadly to Sheol, the place of the dead, or do they refer more specifically to the abode of the righteous? A case could be made either way
- m. The Lord will deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines... you and your sons: When judgment fell upon Saul it would also trouble the people around him. His sons and all Israel would also suffer.
- n. The woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled: It's a sad note when a practitioner of the occult comforts the King of Israel. But they were two

of the same kind; each lived in rebellion to God, and each was under judgment from the Lord.

- o. And they ate: The dinner Saul ate that night was like the last meal of a man on death row, waiting execution in the morning.
- p. Then he rose and went away that night: Saul left this strange encounter resigned to his fate.

Conclusion:

- We may find ourselves desperate, we if we follow God we are never hopeless. Don't let desperation lead you down a road away from God
- Nothing is more important than being sensitive to God's word- this is expressed through repentance, obedience, and faith