

31. I see a dead man

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People have been fascinated by the world beyond life. That is one of the main reason why so many people, I should say all of non-believers and a good number of believers are scared of their deaths. Unknown future, life after death. That is a precise reason why psychic industry cashes in by contacting or channeling with dead spirits. It is multi billion dollar industry. People pay top dollars to hear from so-called creditable psychics about their dead loved ones or their future. It is nothing more than a demonic playground where they pull spiritually uninformed people down in hook-line-and-sinker.

I have a better One who can tell us about future. No, as a matter of fact, this one is the best, because He is our future and He lives in future, present and past at once. He is beyond our time and space limitation. Nothing is impossible for Him, for He is God. His name is Jesus.

A. SAUL IN A PIT

1 Sam 28:1-2 Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men." And David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever."

V1 and 2 should be a part of chapter 27. When we live closer to our spiritual enemies, it costs us much more than we expect.

1 Sam 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.

Here, the fact of Samuel's death is mentioned again to emphasize the spiritual vacuum of Saul.

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) have no place among His people in passages such as Leviticus 19:31, 20:6, 27 and in Deuteronomy 18:9-14. Saul did this in his earlier days, when he was still influenced by Samuel's leadership.

Things such as tarot cards, palm readers, horoscopes, fortune-telling, transcendental meditation, out-of-body experience, psychic, hypnosis, oriental ying-yang philosophy, crystal ball, 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 absolutely nothing to do with occultic arts or practices.

1 Sam 28:4-5 Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

It is no wonder why Saul was terrified. Because he no longer has God in his life. If we say David was backsliding in the last chapter, we see Saul doing free fall without a parachute. And he is about to hit the ground.

B. WHY DON'T YOU SPEAK TO ME, GOD?

1 Sam 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 is in a terrible place. The Philistines threaten Israel, Saul's courage has failed him, and now God is silent when Saul seeks Him.

Why is God silent toward Saul? Won't God answer everyone who seeks Him? Not always. Not when a man is in a place of judgment or in intentional sin as Saul is. King Saul has rejected and is currently rejecting God's previously revealed will. Since Saul doesn't care to obey God in what he already knows, God will not give him more to know.

If we are not getting God's answers for our prayers, we must examine our lives to see if there is anything that hinders our prayers to Him.

1 Sam 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."

Instead of repenting and seeking God with all of his heart, Saul turns to more trouble, a medium. By the sovereignty of God, He knew that Saul would not repent from his own sins, but heads to deeper sins. That is why the Spirit of God left him.

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 - one who makes contact with the dead. The Hebrew word for medium is "owb," and it has the idea of "mumbling" or speaking with a strange, hollow sound - as if one were "channeling," with a dead person speaking through them. The English word medium has in mind the concept of a channel - they stand in-between the world of the living and the dead, and communicate between the two worlds.

1 Sam 28:8 So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you."

Saul seeks the medium, he brings upon himself a curse and more troubles from God.

Leviticus 20:6 'And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.

I must point out a very important thing here: When Saul was not hearing from God, the right thing for him to do was to humble himself and seek God's way and repent from his sin. God would have meet him where he was. Instead of that, Saul chose an ungodly way to ruin himself and his family.

Would God forgive Saul and listen to his plea? Yes, a thousand times yes! Our God is full of mercy, His love is boundless. But He is a holy and righteous God who does not negotiate with sin.

1 Sam 28:9 Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

The medium wondered if this was a government "sting" operation.

1 Sam 28:10 And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."

It is rather amusing and the same time annoying for me that Saul is using God's name to the medium to convince her about her safety. Saul's oath in the name of the Lord reminds us that spiritual jargon means nothing. This is like we are asking God's blessing upon the bank robbery we are about to do.

C. HE IS BACK!

1 Sam 28:11-12 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!"

In the midst of his sin, depression and demonic influence, Saul forgot that Samuel was in fact his adversary when he slipped into sin.

Why the medium so shocked? Probably she was a fraud, and most of her dealings with the spirit realm were mere tricks with help of demons. She has reason to be afraid, both of the real spiritual presence she sees, and the king right beside her.

If you have noticed, many of formerly famous Hollywood movie stars or singers who are now washed out and cannot find a role in movies and concerts join this psychic venture. Eric Estrada from CHiPs, Dionne Warwick or Cleo, to name a few. Don't believe one moment that they are in this to help people. They are using their former fame to make money on people. It is nothing more than a bunch of hoaxes that squeeze out money from those who are unaware of spiritual consequences.

1 Sam 28:13 And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth."

The Hebrew word translated "spirit" in the New King James Version is actually the Hebrew word "elohim" - literally, "gods," but often applied to the One God in plural form, to both reflect the truth of the Trinity and God's greatness, which is indicated in the Hebrew by the plural form. When the medium says she saw an elohim, does she mean that she saw the One True God? Does she mean that Samuel is deified? No, speaking from her own pagan context, she calls this appearing of Samuel an elohim because that was what it seemed to be in her pagan vocabulary. It is only she who calls Samuel an elohim.

When I was a baby Christian and I read this portion of the Scripture, I was wondering if this was a real Samuel or a demon who looked like Samuel and playing with Saul. I thought that God wouldn't allow the dead person's spirit to show up again to make "Contact the dead person" real.

What do I think about this now? Now I do believe that it was the real Samuel sent by God. The medium was surprised and Saul identified him as Samuel and the message Samuel spoke was clearly from God. There is nothing impossible for God to do including bring up Samuel's spirit in spite of the woman's evil profession.

This strange incident is controversial, and several different approaches have been used to understand this passage. Here are four of the most commonly suggested possibilities:

1) This was a hallucination of the medium.

2) This was a deception by the medium.

Neither one is right, because she was scared and didn't expect the real Samuel.

3) This was a demonic impersonation of Samuel.

4) 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).

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).

Why would God allow Samuel to come up and speak to Saul? Samuel appeared because God had a special purpose to warn this disobedient king of his approaching death, that he might have an opportunity to make his peace with his Maker.

1 Sam 28:14 So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down.

Samuel was wearing a mantle which is a prophet's robe. I am speculating on this. I wouldn't be one bit surprised if it was the same robe he wore when he visited Saul at Gilgal. That is where Saul tore Samuel's robe. As a reminder to Saul, God allowed Samuel to have that robe when he appeared in front of Saul now.

D. FROM THE HEART OF THE EARTH

1 Sam 28:15 Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do."

Here is another important point we must notice:

Samuel's words would be in the mouth of anyone who had left the place of comfort and blessing in the world beyond to come back to the earth. Samuel would rather be back where he was!

Properly speaking, 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 a.k.a. "Paradise" (Luke 23:43). When Jesus finished his work on the cross, the sin's penalty was paid for these believing dead, and they were then ushered into heaven. According to Romans 10:6-7, Jesus descended to the heart of the earth to bring up the spirits who were staying there.

Romans 10:6-7 But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

Saul sounds like a person with the typical self-made victim mentality. Often the person with self-made victim mentality complains and whines about the situation he or she is in. But they don't explain why they are in that mess. I am not talking about the victims by accidents or outside influences. I am talking about the people who put themselves in the mess and want others to come in and rescue them.

Saul listed the problems. He is in distress, a war is about to break out, God departed from him and don't talk to him through dreams or prophets or Urim & Thummim. But he didn't say anything about his disobedience to the Lord or repenting from his disobedience.

God never departs from a man until the man has departed from Him. Then, in the interests of righteousness, God is against that man.

1 Sam 28:16-18 Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the Lord has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day.

Samuel clearly points out the problem of Saul. Since Saul didn't do what he was supposed to do almost 15 years ago which we studied in chapter 15, why should God give him any more instruction and guidance?

Apparently, in the fifteen or so years since the events of 1 Samuel 15, Saul thought that perhaps the Lord had changed His mind. Our repentance and genuine brokenness may change God's mind, but never time.

We could be in the same situation as Saul. We may seek God and His wisdom to handle the current situation we are in. But the Lord is not answering our prayers because of our disobedience in the past and we did not ask for His forgiveness. We need to take care that problem right away. That is why keeping a short account with God is so important. Whenever we sin against God, we need to come to Him and ask for His forgiveness. And He will forgive us.

E. A PROPHECY FOR THE DISOBEDIENT KING

1 Sam 28:19 Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

If the reminding of his sin was not bad enough, Samuel doesn't cut a corner. Saul asked him what to do. Samuel answered what would happen.

God's judgment was already in motion. Before this time, Saul had plenty of time to repent. But now his time has run out.

We can never assume that we will have as much time as we want to repent. The desire to repent, and the opportunity to repent are gifts from God.

I don't believe we will see Saul in heaven. You may say he backslided so bad that he lost his salvation or he was never been saved. However you believe, Saul is in the stage of apostate which means he left his faith.

According to Luke 16:19-31, there were two separate places in the heart of the earth. One for the godly people who were waiting for Jesus to come and get them to heaven after His death on the cross. Across the great gulf, there was a place for ungodly people where they were tormented in burning flame. I believe that Saul died and went down to this place which is a waiting room for the hell-bound people. But I do believe that Jonathan went to the good place. Samuel meant that they would be dead, not necessarily with Samuel and other godly people.

What a sad story this is! God gave chance after chance to Saul to repent from his disobedience. But he went down to his grave with disobedience in his heart. I hope and pray that none of us in our church would do that.

1 Sam 28:20 Then immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

The Philistine army is against Saul, God of the universe is against him. He is done.

Is God against you? Jesus said in Matthew 15:30,

Matthew 15:30 30 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.

We cannot ride on fence. Either we are saved and on His side or not saved, against Him.

1 Sam 28:21-25 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way." But he refused and said, "I will not eat." So his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded it, and baked unleavened bread from it. So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

The dinner Saul ate that night was like the last meal of a man on death row, waiting execution in the morning.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) There is a life after death.

The place where we are going to spend our eternity is up to us. God did everything He could to make the way to heaven easy for us to choose. Hope that this truth from the lips of Samuel scare hell out of those who are not saved.

2) Let's not let our sins to have upper hands in our lives.

We need to deal with our sins as God sees. Not later, but every time we sin against Him.

3) Let's stay away from any of ungodly things.

As born-again Christians, we should not have anything to do with any of these occultic things, such as reading daily horoscope, tarot cards, palm reading, fortune-telling, transcendental meditation, out-of-body experience, psychic, hypnosis, oriental ying-yang philosophy, crystal ball, and Ouija Boards
They are damnable things in the sight of God.

4) Passing time doesn't change God's mind about our sins.

Our repentance and genuine brokenness may change God's mind, but never time.