

33. I see a dead man

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

I have a better Person who can tell us about our unknown future. This One is the best, because He is our future and He lives in the future, the present, and the past all 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 Samuel 28:3-5 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. 4 Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.

What do you get out of this?

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 occults. God commanded that mediums and spiritists – those who 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 realm, even if undertaken in a spirit of fun. Christians should have absolutely nothing to do with occults or its practices.

It is no wonder that 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 Samuel 28:6-10 And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. 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." 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." 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?" 10 And Saul swore to her by the Lord, saying, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing."

What kind of interpretation are you getting from this paragraph?

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 receiving judgment or 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.

In v7, instead of repenting and seeking God with all of his heart, Saul turns to find more trouble – a medium. By the sovereignty of God, He knew that Saul would not repent from his 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 a 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.

By seeking the medium, Saul 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 met him where he was. Instead of that, Saul chose an ungodly way to ruin himself and his family further. Would God forgive Saul and listen to his plea? Yes, thousand times yes! Our God is full of mercy and His love is boundless. But He is a holy and righteous God who does not negotiate with sin.

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

It is rather amusing and at 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.

C. HE IS BACK!

1 Samuel 28:11-14 Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." 12 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!" 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." 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.

What do you see here?

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

Why is the medium so shocked? Probably she was a fraud, and most of her dealings with the spirit realm were mere tricks with the help of demons. She has a 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 have joined 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 "has-been" 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.

In v13, 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 bringing 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 an 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.

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 in 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.

D. FROM THE HEART OF THE EARTH

1 Samuel 28:15-18 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." 16 Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? 17 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. 18 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.

What is your interpretation of this?

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 in 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" according to 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 ended up 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 doesn't talk to him through dreams or prophets or Urim and 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 the Lord. Then, in the interests of righteousness, God is against that man.

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, after those 15 years, 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 of 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 immediately and ask for His forgiveness. Then, He will forgive us.

E. A PROPHECY FOR THE DISOBEDIENT KING

1 Samuel 28:19-25 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." 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. 21 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. 22 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." 23 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. 24 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. 25 So she brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

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 that we will see Saul in heaven. You may say he backslid 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 uncrossable gulf, there was a place for ungodly people where they were tormented in burning flames. 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.

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.

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

Are you against God? Jesus said in Matthew 15:

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

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

F. APPLICATIONS

1) There is life after death. The place where we are going to spend our eternity is up to us.

2) Let's not let our sins have the upper hand in our lives. We need to deal with our sins as God sees.

3) Let's stay away from any of the ungodly things. As born-again Christians, we should not have anything to do with any of these occultic things, because they are damnable things in the sight of God.

32. Identity crisis

6/8/2003

There was a cave bat of whose name is Betty in a forest. She was all alone without any friend. She wanted to be around other animals or birds. One day, she went to a group of animals in the forest. There were deers, tigers, squirrels, rabbits, wolves and so on. Betty the bat said, "Hey, I am one of you guys. See my ears, my nose and mouth. I can be your friend." One of the wolves glared at her and snarled at her, "No, you are not one of us, because you have wings like birds. Go away." Before they grab her, Betty thought it would be best for her to go away from this grumpy group.

Betty flapped her wings and looked for a group of birds to hang around. Finally, she found them in the middle of air a way above the forest. She got excited and exclaimed, "Hey friends, here I am. I am one of you guys. For I have wings just like you guys." One of an owl with a graduation hat and eye glasses replied, "By no means, you are not one of us. You are not a bird. Because you have ears, mouth, nose like an animal. Stay away from us."

Betty the bat didn't like the way the big brown eagle looking at her and got scared and flew away from them too. So she decided to fly around all alone at night without any other birds or animals.

Backslidden Christians are like that. They don't feel that they fit into any one of the categories: when they try to hang around believers, they don't want to follow God's ways like the rest of the believers. They are uncomfortable. If they choose to hang around with non believers to do whatever the world offers them, the Holy Spirit constantly convict them and even non believers mock at them when they find out they were once born-again Christians. So either way, they are miserable and convicted.

1 Samuel 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.

A. WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

1 Samuel 29:1 Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelis encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel.

Remember v1-2 of chapter 28? I told you guys that there is always big price for backsliding? Here we see David and his men were told that they have to go to war against their own people Israel.

The battle lines were drawn in the previous chapter, when the Philistines made a deep incursion into Israelite territory. The Philistines were intent on delivering a

death-blow to Israel, and the two armies square off in anticipation of battle.

Where is Saul? The night before, Saul sought the help of a medium, wanting to hear from God. Through a strange appearance of the prophet Samuel, God told Saul he would die the next day in battle. Instead of humbling himself in repentance before the Lord, Saul simply resigned himself to this fate.

1 Samuel 29:2 And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by hundreds and by thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish.

The anointed future king of Israel David, now living in the territory of his God's enemy, were in the group of the army that is about to attack his own land Israel. The Philistines didn't think much of his group, so that they put them at the end of the marching column.

If that is not enough other leaders of the Philistine army demand an explanation of David's men's presence in the marching column.

When we turn away from the things of God, we may soon find ourselves in a place we never thought we would be.

1 Samuel 29:3 Then the princes of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me."

Achish came quickly to David's defense, because he didn't know the truth about David's loyalty for the Philistines.

However, the Philistine leaders could see what David was blinded to. Non believers may not do what the Bible tell them to do, but they do know what Christians are supposed to do.

1 Samuel 29:4 But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, "Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men?"

The leaders of the Philistines reasoned wisely, according to the common practice of mankind. Actually it was good for David that they were such good politicians. It was ordered by a gracious providence of God that they refused to let David go with them to this battle, in which he must have been either an enemy to his country, or false to his newly pledged alliance and to his trust. Had he fought for the Philistines, he would have fought against God and his country; and had he in the battle gone over to the Israelis, he would have deceived and become a traitor to the hospitable Achish. God therefore delivered him from such disgrace. And the same time, this providence of God gave him a chance to rescue his wives, and his men's wives and their children from captivity. We are going to study this in next chapter.

1 Samuel 29:5 Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands'?"