

Saul and the Medium of En-dor – 1 Samuel 28:1-25

Introduction:

Have you ever wondered why people turn to cults or to strange religions or groups when Jesus is waiting for them to come to Him? It could be that people have said “No” to God so often that when they do turn to Him, as they will when things get tough, He does not respond. People have often asked, “Why doesn’t God answer my prayer?” yet they have not given God the time of day until they hit a crisis. Suddenly, after ignoring God and going their own way, they want God to rescue them because they have made a mess of things.

King Saul tries this in 1 Samuel 28. He has ignored God throughout his reign, and when his enemies come up against him, he expects God to rescue him. When God is silent, he resorts to consulting a “witch” or “medium.” This chapter raises almost as many questions as it answers, but nonetheless it is God’s Word to us. What will we learn from King Saul’s mistakes?

The Crisis – 1 Samuel 28:1-6

1. According to verse 1, what event sets the scene for this chapter?
2. Though this chapter is about King Saul, we are introduced to David in verse 1. What command does King Achish the Philistine give to David? Why would he do that? What predicament will this put David in?
3. What is David’s response to the Philistine king (v. 2)? To complicate things even more, what else does King Achish do (v. 2)?
4. In verse 3 we are introduced to Samuel. Who was he? What has happened? Why might he be mentioned at this time?
5. What good thing did King Saul do according to verse 3? (compare this with Deuteronomy 18:9-14) Why this command from God?
6. What is happening in verse 4? What can we anticipate will happen next?
7. How did King Saul respond at the gathering of the Philistine army (v. 5)? Why?

8. What was King Saul's response to this crisis (v. 6)? How did the Lord respond? Why?
9. What were the three ways King Saul used to try to hear the voice of God (v. 6)?
10. How might King Saul be feeling at this point?

Working with a Medium – 1 Samuel 28:7-14

11. What does King Saul command his servants to find for him (v. 7)? Were they successful?
12. King Saul seeks out the medium. What does he do so he will not be discovered (v. 8)?
13. In verse 9 the medium lays out an argument why she should not help King Saul in his quest. What does she say?
14. What promise does King Saul make to the woman in verse 10? How does he assure her that it would be as he said it would be?
15. To this point King Saul has not revealed who he wants conjured up. Who is he looking for (v. 11)? Why might he choose to do this?
16. In verse 12 the ruse is up. What seems to have triggered the medium on who was there asking for help (v. 12)? Though we are not told how she was able to identify King Saul, what possibilities come to your mind?
17. King Saul assures her that she need not fear him (v. 13). What does she tell King Saul she sees in that verse?
18. King Saul wants to be sure this is the right person. What question does he ask (v. 14)? What is the response of the medium?
19. From the description given, what does King Saul conclude (v. 14)? How does the king respond to this news?

The Message from Samuel – 1 Samuel 28:15-20

20. What does Samuel ask King Saul in verse 15? What is implied in this? (cf. Isaiah 57:2)
21. According to King Saul, why has he called Samuel (v. 15)? What caused the King to take such drastic measures? What does he want from Samuel?
22. In verses 16-18 Samuel explains why God is not answering King Saul. What explanation is given? What can King expect to happen in the future (v. 17)? What was King Saul's crime? Explain.
23. On top of losing the kingdom to David, what else does Samuel foresee happening (v. 19)? When will this take place?

The King is Overcome with Grief – 1 Samuel 28:20-25

24. What is the response of King Saul to what Samuel told him would happen (v. 20)? Why?
25. The King is faint for fear, and because he has not eaten. In verses 21-22 the woman offers bread to the King. What is she afraid might happen?
26. How did King Saul respond to the offer of food (v. 23)? Why might he refuse the food?
27. Who joined in, trying to coax the king into eating (v. 23)?
28. King Saul finally gave in and was ready to eat. Did the woman give the king just a portion of bread (v. 24)? Why would she offer such a feast?
29. The chapter ends with the woman sighing a sigh of relief! (cf. v. 25) Why?

Conclusion:

The main message of this chapter is quite clear. King Saul had disobeyed God and had lived in pride rather than submission, and now he was about to face the consequences. David would become king, but before that happened the armies of Israel would be defeated by the Philistines. On top of that, King Saul and his sons would die in battle – tomorrow. The consequences of not following God were disastrous.

This message is wrapped up in a story that has baffled Christian expositors for centuries. The Jews who first read this story would have no problem with it. They believed the dead went to a “holding place” called Sheol. Both the righteous and the unrighteous went there according to early belief in Israel. It was from this place that Samuel would have been called, and that did not surprise the early Jews as it does us.

However, by the time of the prophets the belief had changed so that the righteous dead went to a good future, while the wicked went to a future of suffering. This is further expanded in the New Testament where the final destination of the wicked, including Satan, was a Lake of Fire, a place of torment. The righteous went to a Heavenly Home prepared for them by Jesus himself.

The question this chapter leaves us with is, can we communicate with the dead? We are told we should not, but we know not all listen to God. Can the dead communicate with the living? The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) seems to teach there is a separation between the living and the dead. Jesus says “no one has ascended into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man” (John 3:13). Paul says, “We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

So did King Saul actually communicate with the dead Samuel? If it was not Samuel, who was it? What do you think?