

1 Samuel Chapter 28

1 Samuel 28:1 "And it came to pass in those days, that the Philistines gathered their armies together for warfare, to fight with Israel. And Achish said unto David, Know thou assuredly, that thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men."

“Know thou assuredly”:

The kindness showed to David and his men by Achish in Gath was not without expectation of reciprocation.

This phrase seems to presuppose an understanding of this expectation.

Living in Philistine territory obligated David and his men to fight for Achish.

This is the first time since David had been with Achish that he had insisted on David going to battle with him against Israel.

If David is going to remain in their land, he will be expected to fight on the side of Achish.

1 Samuel 28:2 "And David said to Achish, Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do. And Achish said to David, Therefore will I make thee keeper of mine head for ever."

Achish so trusted David that he made David one of his bodyguards (“keeper of mine head”).

What thy servant can do”:

Being a man of honor, David would not fail to help those who had shown him kindness.

David was drawing attention to the fact the he had proven himself as a valiant and successful warrior and was assuring Achish of his fidelity and ability.

“Keeper”:

In light of David’s victory over Goliath (17:49-54), and imagined bad reputation among the Israelites, Achish was expressing considerable trust in David’s loyalty and ability.

Achish thinks the statement that David made, indicates that he will go with them into battle.

Achish makes David his personal body guard.

Verses 3-13:

Having deprived himself of every legitimate men's spiritual input as a result of his own disobedience and rebellion, Saul walked in foolishness again by seeking out the very resource (a medium), he had previously removed from the land.

Saul swore to the medium an oath of safety by the very God that he was disobeying even then.

Yet the inexorable curiosity of Saul to consult Samuel, in spite of Samuel's death, was satisfied by the medium's willingness to "bring up" Samuel.

1 Samuel 28:3 "Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land."

"Familiar spirits, and the wizards":

By divine law, they were banned from Israel (Deut. 18:11), and Israel was not to be defiled by them (Lev. 19:31).

Turning to them was tantamount to playing the harlot and would result in God setting His face against the person and cutting him off from among His people (Lev. 20:27).

Even Saul understood this and had previously dealt with the issue (see verse 9).

We studied before, how Saul did many things pleasing unto God.

He just did not do all things pleasing unto God.

He kept God's commandments when it was to his advantage.

Samuel was dead, so Saul could not get him to call upon God for him.

The people with familiar spirits got their information from other sources, so Saul had gotten rid of them.

These people should have been done away with, because they were agents of the devil, himself.

1 Samuel 28:4 "And the Philistines gathered themselves together, and came and pitched in Shunem: and Saul gathered all Israel together, and they pitched in Gilboa."

"Shunem":

Situated southwest of the hill of Moreh and 16 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee; the Philistines designated it as their camp site.

"Gilboa":

The mountain range beginning 5 miles south of Shunem and extending southwards along the eastern edge of the plain of Jezreel (see note on 31:1).

1 Samuel 28:5 "And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled."

Saul experienced the kind of overwhelming terror that many people feel when they are estranged from God.

Those who walk with God do not need to fear anything (Psalm 27:1-3).

“His heart greatly trembled”:

Saul had hidden himself when he was chosen by lot to be king (10:22).

When the Spirit of the LORD came upon him, he was changed (10:6), but after the Spirit departed (16:14), he was afraid and dismayed by Goliath (17:11, 24).

He feared at Gilgal when faced by the overwhelming size of the Philistine army (13:11-12).

Saul was also afraid of David because he knew that the LORD was with David (18:12, 29).

But Saul was to fear God (12:24), not people.

Saul was afraid, because this time he did not have the advantage.

He liked to fight when he had five times as many men as his enemies.

These Philistines had many men.

His heart trembled for fear he would lose this battle.

This confrontation would take place on the soil of Israel.

It was actually in the land of Issachar.

1 Samuel 28:6 "And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."

The three ways to determine the will of the LORD in the Old Testament were “dreams,” the “Urim” and Thummim, and the “prophets.”

Saul tried all three.

The original Urim was with Abiathar, who was with David (23:2, 6, 9), so Saul must have fabricated one for his own use.

Even though Saul thought to seek the LORD, he did so in the wrong way and with a heart far from God, and he received no answer.

The Urim was used by the priest as a means of inquiring of the LORD (Num. 27:21).

It was originally put in the breastpiece of judgment with the Thummim and worn over Aaron's heart when he went in before the LORD (see note on Exodus 28:30).

Somehow, unknown to us, God revealed His will by it.

Prophets were formerly called seers (9:9), and were used as a reference for inquiring of the LORD.

God also had used prophets to declare His Word when people were not interested in it, (see Amos 7:12-13).

Since Saul had rejected the LORD, God had rejected him (15:23).

Saul appears to have had no court prophet in the manner that Gad and Nathan were to David (22:5; 1 Samuel chapter 12); and by this time, the ephod with the Urim was in David's possession by virtue of Abiathar the priest (23:6).

This was the most frightening thing of all.

He prayed to the LORD and got no answer at all.

Now, he knows the LORD has removed His blessing.

The Urim, which was on the garment of the high priest, was one of the things God spoke to His people through.

All of this is very frightening.

Verses 7-9:

Saul knew that consulting mediums was wrong, which is why he outlawed the practice (28:3; Lev. 19:31), and came to her "by night".

But he was so desperate for answers, he did it anyway.

Desperation dilutes a person's ability to make wise decisions.

1 Samuel 28:7 "Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, [there is] a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor."

"Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit":

In Saul's desperation, he sought the very source that he had formerly removed from the land (see verse 28:3).

In spite of the ban, Saul's servant knew exactly where to find a medium.

"En-dor":

Located about 3.5 miles northwest of Shunem between Mt. Tabor and the Hill of Moreh.

Saul risked his life by venturing into the Philistine-held territory to seek out the counsel of the medium; thus he went in disguise by night (verse 8).

Necromancy was strictly forbidden by the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:31).

Although "Saul" had instituted a purge against all forms of spiritism, apparently this spiritist medium had escaped previous notice.

It appears that Saul wanted a message of hope from somewhere, even if it is from a woman with a familiar spirit.

He had been very opposed to these people, and drove them out at one time.

Saul was a man who did whatever was to his advantage, whether it was of God, or not.

It is interesting that his men knew of this witch of En-dor.

1 Samuel 28:8 "And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me [him] up, whom I shall name unto thee."

Stripped himself of his royal robes, or military apparel, as supreme commander, and clothed himself in the habit of a peasant or a common soldier; and this not only that he might not be known by the woman, but that he might pass from his army incognito, and it might not be known that he was gone, and especially where he was gone.

"And he went, and two men with him":

These, according to the tradition of the Jews, were Abner and Amasa.

But it is not probable that Saul should leave his army destitute of their general at a time as this.

"And they came to the woman by night":

Not only that they might not be seen, but because it was a work of darkness they were going about, and it was only in the night season that such persons exercised their black art.

Though the Jews say it was day, only because of their distress it was like tonight with them; but the literal sense is best.

"And he said, I pray thee divine unto me by the familiar spirit":

Exercise her art of divination, by the assistance of the familiar spirit she conversed with.

"And bring me up whom I shall name unto thee":

That is, from the dead; for necromancy was the kind of divination she professed; and such persons pretended to have a power to bring up a deceased person, and consult with him about secret and future things.

This shows just how badly Saul was disturbed about this battle.

His disguise was so the woman would not recognize him.

She might not help him if she recognized who he was.

The two men with him were to keep him safe from his enemies.

Divination was forbidden to Jews, yet it seemed many Israelites went to her, to divine for them.

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 "There shall not be found among you [any one] that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, [or] that useth divination, [or] an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch," "Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer." "For all that do these things [are] an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee."

Saul is trying to see a vision of a dead person.

Many people go to séances today to try to do the same thing.

In both cases, this is very evil.

1 Samuel 28:9 "And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?"

For his speech and garb discovered him to be an Israelite, and therefore acquainted with these such matters.

"To cause me to die":

By accusing me to Saul as guilty of a capital crime.

1 Samuel 28:10 "And Saul sware to her by the LORD, saying, [As] the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing."

“Sware to her by the LORD”:

Though blatantly walking in disobedience to God, it is ironic that Saul would swear by the very existence of the LORD as a means of assuring his credibility to the medium.

Even more, Saul swore that no punishment would come upon her when the Levitical law required her to be stoned to death (Lev. 20:27).

At one time, early in the reign of Saul, he had tried to keep the commandments of the law.

He just recently, had done away with all of those with familiar spirits that he knew of.

This woman realizes this is Saul.

She makes him swear that no harm will come to her, before she will divine for him.

These evil people do have some power, but it is from the devil.

Verses 11-19:

The biblical writer seems to believe that the medium’s vision truly was Samuel in spirit form rather than an evil spirit.

The fact that his prophecy proved true further supports this view.

1 Samuel 28:11 "Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel."

“Bring up”:

To “bring up” the dead (verse 15), was common terminology used by the necromancers in the ancient Near East for bringing back the spirit of the deceased so as to gain information from him.

Accordingly, the term does not necessarily point to Sheol as the common receptacle in the earth of all disembodied spirits, good or bad, as sometimes taught.

1 Samuel 28:12 "And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou [art] Saul."

“The woman saw Samuel”:

Though questions have arisen as to the nature of Samuel’s appearance, the text clearly indicates that Samuel, not an apparition, was evident to the eyes of the medium.

God miraculously permitted the actual spirit of Samuel to speak (verses 16-19).

Because she understood her inability to raise the dead in this manner, she immediately knew:

- (1) That it must have been by the power of God; and
- (2) That her disguised inquirer must be Saul.

The appearance of “Samuel” has been explained by conservative theologians as either a hoax, a demonic impersonation of Samuel, or as a genuine appearance of the prophet.

Whatever view one holds, certainly God, not the spiritist witch of Endor, controlled the circumstances and utilized them to announce Saul’s imminent demise at the hands of the Philistines (verse 19; (see the note on 1 Chron. 10:13-14).

She must go through with her claim to be able to bring back dead people, so she asks Saul who does he want to see.

He says Samuel.

When she had a vision of Samuel, she believes she was doomed.

Samuel had guided Saul in the past and Saul wanted his help here.

Verses 13-15:

In the ancient Near East spiritist mediums used the term “gods” to refer to disembodied spirits.

In Samuel’s case the term would particularly signify one who had exercised considerable authority while still on earth (Psalm 82:6).

Disquieting the dead was a term used in the Phoenician inscriptions of those who looted the graves of the dead.

Here it appears to be referring to arousing the deceased, to “bring” him “up.”

All of the terms found (in chapter 28), are employed by the necromancers as technical words in their trade; they do not in themselves prove the validity of their craft.

1 Samuel 28:13 And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

“I saw gods ascending out of the earth”:

The word translated “divine being” is actually the Hebrew word meaning “God, gods, angel, ruler, or judge.”

It can also be used to designate a likeness to one of these.

From the medium’s perspective, Samuel appeared to be “like a divine being” ascending out of the earth.

There is no other such miracle as this in all of Scripture.

It seems that Saul had not seen the vision of Samuel.

He believes this woman with the familiar spirit had, however.

This is why he asks her what she saw.

Notice, this is not God she saw rising.

This possibly had to do with the spirits she had conjured up.

1 Samuel 28:14 "And he said unto her, What form [is] he of? And she said, An old man cometh 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 himself."

“An old man ... covered with a mantle”:

Obviously age and clothing do not exist in the realm of the spirits of those who have died, but God miraculously gave such appearances so that Saul was able to perceive that the spirit was indeed Samuel.

The question arises whether all believers will remain in the form they were in when they died.

Samuel may have been as such simply for the benefit of Saul, or he might be in this state until he receives his resurrection body.

Since Scripture teaches that the resurrection of Old Testament saints is yet future (see Danial 12:1-2), Samuel must have temporarily been in this condition solely for the benefit of Saul.

Saul is convinced she had seen Samuel.

He bows to Samuel.

1 Samuel 28:15 "And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do."

"Disquieted me":

Samuel's comment expresses agitation caused by Saul's efforts to contact him since living humanity was not allowed to seek out discussions with the dead (Deut. 18:11; Lev. 20:6).

Witchcraft puts the seeker in contact with demons impersonating those who are being sought, since the dead person cannot ordinarily be contacted, except in this unique case.

"Disquieted":

Means troubled.

It appears that somehow, Saul is speaking to Samuel.

It also appears that Samuel is answering Saul.

Saul had called on Samuel, because Samuel had been his friend.

He knows and respects what Samuel says.

Saul tried to pray to God, and God would not answer him.

His only help was in Samuel.

1 Samuel 28:16 "Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?"

Whom thou knowest to have been a prophet of the LORD, and therefore can say nothing more or less than what comes from him, and is according to his will, if anything at all.

"Seeing the LORD is departed from thee":

As Saul himself owned: to which he adds.

"And is become thine enemy":

To make his case appear still more desperate.

“Thine enemy”:

see 15:26-35.

1 Samuel 28:17 "And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, [even] to David:"

Render, as in margin of the English Version, the LORD hath done or performed for Himself.

"And given it to thy neighbor, even to David":

An evil spirit personating Samuel would not have spoken thus; he would not have wished to help David, “the man after God’s own heart,” to the throne of Israel.

Nor would an evil spirit have spoken in such solemn terms of the punishment due to rebellion against God.

Bishop Wordsworth, who argues against the supposition that the visible representation at Gilgal, as Abarbanal thinks; which is the first thing for which the kingdom was threatened to be taken from him (1 Sam. 13:13).

There was nothing Samuel could do.

God had decided long ago to take the kingdom from Saul, and give it to David.

From the very early days, Saul had disobeyed God.

He had kept part of the commandments, but not all.

He was not sold out to God.

Saul was his own god.

He felt anything he did was alright because he had been anointed.

Samuel is not more powerful than God.

Samuel had always tried to do exactly as God had told him to do.

He would not help Saul here, even if he could.

1 Samuel 28:18 "Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day."

At Gilgal, as Abarbanel thinks; which is the first thing for which the kingdom was threatened to be taken from him (1 Sam. 13:13).

"Nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek":

In sparing Agag, and the best of the cattle (1 Sam. 15:9).

"Therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day":

Forsaken him, and rent his kingdom from him, and then He would deliver him into the hands of the Philistines.

Saul had rebelled against the commandments of God.

Rebellion is akin to witchcraft.

Even this terrible thing Saul has done here is another very bad thing to do.

He has not been king in the sight of God since he disobeyed in the battle with Amalek.

Saul tried to justify himself then, and is actually trying to justify coming to a woman with familiar spirits here.

1 Samuel 28:19 "Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and tomorrow [shalt] thou and thy sons [be] with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

"Be with me":

This could mean with him in "the abode of the dead."

There is no doubt that Samuel meant this to serve as a premonition of Saul's soon death.

Saul and his sons will be dead tomorrow.

The Philistines will win this battle against these Israelites because God is not with them.

It is punishment from the LORD that causes the Philistines to win.

The other Israelites that are not killed, will be captured by the Philistines.

1 Samuel 28:20 "Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night."

"No strength in him":

Already afraid with a heart that “trembled greatly” because of the philistines (verse 5), Saul’s fear was so heightened by the words of Samuel that he was completely deprived of strength and vigor, which was reinforced by a lack of nourishment.

The woman had met his physical needs, and he returned to his camp to await his doom (see verses 21-25).

This just means that Saul fell face first on the earth.

He either fainted from fear or exhaustion, or both.

He had eaten no bread, because he was trying to get an answer from God.

The answer he got was not what he wanted to hear.

1 Samuel 28:21 "And the woman came unto Saul, and saw that he was sore troubled, and said unto him, Behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me."

Having left him and the apparition in a room by themselves to converse together and perhaps on hearing him fall to the ground came in.

"And saw that he was sore troubled":

By his lying on the ground, and the agonies he seemed to be in, and the uneasiness that sat upon his countenance.

"And said unto him, behold, thine handmaid hath obeyed thy voice":

In divining by her familiar spirit for him, and in bringing up Samuel to him, as he desired.

"And I have put my life in my hand":

Exposed it to the utmost danger, since a person of her profession, and taken in the exercise of it, was punishable with death.

Especially since she was in the greater danger, as it was Saul himself, who had by an edict expelled all such persons from his dominions, who now employed her, as she perceived.

"And have hearkened unto thy words which thou spakest unto me":

To the oath he had taken, that no hurt should come to her, which she confided in, and relied upon, and to what he bid her do, according to her art of divination.

1 Samuel 28:22 "Now therefore, I pray thee, hearken thou also unto the voice of thine handmaid, and let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way."

She argues that as she had hearkened unto him to the endangering of her life.

It was but reasonable, and might be expected, that he would hearken to her in a case that would be to the preservation of his life.

"And let me set a morsel of bread before thee, and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way":

Which she might urge, not merely out of respect to the king, but for her own sake.

Lest should he die in her house, she might be taken up, not only for a witch, but as being accessory to the death of the king; and therefore she moves, that he would take some food for refreshment of nature, that he might be able to depart her house, and go on his way to his army.

Even this evil woman had compassion on Saul, when she saw that he fainted.

He had come to her to help him and the best advice she has now, is for him to eat.

She will prepare food for him to eat that, it make him strong enough to go back to where he had come from.

1 Samuel 28:23 "But he refused, and said, I will not eat. But his servants, together with the woman, compelled him; and he hearkened unto their voice. So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed."

That is, upon the divan, or cushioned seat, that usually runs around the walls of rooms in the Eastern dwellings.

There is nothing in the narration to support the common idea, represented so often in painting, that the scene above related took place in a cave.

The witch probably lived in a dwelling of her own at En-dor.

There is nothing either in the narrative to indicate that she was living in a place of concealment.

At first he did not want to eat.

He was so troubled, he had no appetite.

He could, also have been fasting to receive an answer to his prayer.

It will do no good to fast now.

God has intended for him and his sons to die in this battle.

He finally gave in to his two friends and the woman and then agreed to eat before returning to the front.

1 Samuel 28:24 "And the woman had a fat calf in the house; and she hasted, and killed it, and took flour, and kneaded [it], and did bake unleavened bread thereof:"

There was no time to be lost; so she did not wait to leaven the dough, but at once baked it, and set it before the king.

The unleavened cakes were because there was no time for the bread to rise.

It is interesting that she had a fatted calf in her house.

1 Samuel 28:25 "And she brought [it] before Saul, and before his servants; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night."

Saul accepted his impending death and did not try to change God's mind.

Saul and his servants that were with him, needed strength for their trip back, and for the battle with the Philistines that lay ahead.

The servants were the two men that had come with him to see the woman.

Saul, in his desperation, had come to the woman with the familiar spirit.

He found no help from her.

When God has judged a person, there is no one who can help them.

This is the case with Saul here.

1 Samuel Chapter 28 Questions

1. In verse 1, what does Achish ask David to do?
2. What position did Achish give David?
3. Where was Samuel buried?
4. _____ had put away those that had familiar spirits.
5. When did Saul keep God's commandments?

6. Where did the Philistines gather to go against Israel?
7. When Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was _____.
8. Which ways had Saul expected to hear from the LORD, and did not?
9. In verse 7, what does Saul tell his men to seek for him?
10. What does Saul ask her to do?
11. Why was she afraid to divine?
12. What did she make Saul do, before she would divine for him?
13. Do people with familiar spirits have any power?
14. Who did he ask her to bring up?
15. When the woman saw Samuel, what did she do?
16. What did the woman see?
17. How did she describe the man she saw?
18. Saul was convinced she had seen _____.
19. What did Samuel say to Saul?
20. Where had he tried to get help?
21. What does "disquieted" mean?
22. Who took the kingdom from Saul?
23. Rebellion is akin to _____.
24. What terrible news does Samuel give Saul in verse 19?
25. What happened, when Saul heard this news?
26. Why had he not eaten?
27. What did the woman advise Saul to do?
28. What did she feed them?
29. Why was the bread unleavened?
30. When God has judged a person, who can help him?