

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

“THE HAUNTING OF A WITCH”

1 Samuel 28:3-25

Theme: Ignoring God’s Word will bring great compromise and calamity.



I. THE ANXIETY INDUCED BY A SILENT GOD – **28:3-6**

A. **THE ABSENCE OF CALM APART FROM GOD** – **vv. 3-5**

1. The same event that threw David into a predicament of compromise had tremendous negative impact on King Saul.
2. We are told that *“Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him and buried him in Ramah, his own city”* – the only spiritual leader that Saul had ever given any respect to had now died.
3. Having killed all the priests of the Lord in Nob earlier, and hardening his heart against the Word of God over a period of years, Saul now found himself completely alone when life seemed to fall apart.
4. By way of introduction to this account, we are informed that at some time previous to what was happening, *“Saul had removed from the land those who were mediums and spiritists”* – possibly when he was being plagued by the unclean spirit – cp. **1 Samuel 16:14**
5. Having emphasized that Saul was without any spiritual input, we find him panicking in response to the threat of the Philistines – *“So the Philistines gathered together and came and camped in Shunem; and Saul gathered all Israel together and they camped in Gilboa.”*
6. His response was one that demonstrated that he had no relationship with God – *“When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly”*
 - a) When the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, Saul had been changed from the cowardly man who hid among the baggage into a man of courage – cp. **1 Samuel 10:6 & 9**

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

- b) But after the Spirit had departed from him in **1 Samuel 16:14**, he was afraid and dismayed by Goliath - **17:11, 24**.
- c) He feared at Gilgal when faced by the overwhelming size of the Philistine army - **13:11-12**.
- d) Saul was also afraid of David because he knew that the Lord was with David - **18:12, 29**.
- e) But, had Saul feared God instead of people, there would have been no people to fear – cp. **1 Samuel 12:22-25**.

B. THE ABSENCE OF COUNSEL APART FROM GOD – v. 6

- 1. As a result of Saul's spiritual decadence, He found himself hardened toward God and without comfort.
- 2. In his desperation, Saul attempts to use the Lord as an escape without any sense of repentance or restoration to Him.
- 3. As a result, God was quiet – and refused to provide Him any response – *“When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets.”*
- 4. When God is silent, we ought to start not by levying accusation that He does not care, but with the possibility that our sin is causing His silence – **Isaiah 59:2; Psalm 66:18**.

II. THE ANGER INDUCED BY A SIDESTEPED GOD - 28:7-19

A. THE REFUSAL TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD'S AUTHORITY – vv. 7-11

- 1. As a result of God's silence, Saul didn't respond by repentance and contrition, but defiance – he figures that in all of his authority, he can connect with Samuel independently of God.
- 2. The reason for this thinking is that Samuel had been willing to pronounce God's Word to him throughout his reign regardless of the lack of Saul's spiritual integrity (although it was normally expressions of judgment)

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

3. Saul decides that he would further violate God's Word and consult with the spiritists that he had at one time banished from Israel – *“Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ And his servants said to him, ‘Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor.’”*
4. This is something that was expressly forbidden, not just by Saul, but by God Himself – cp. **Deuteronomy 18:10-12**
5. Understanding the need to maintain his façade of decency and religious respectability (regardless of the emptiness of his soul), *“Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, ‘Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you.’”*
6. The woman was fearful that this was some kind of trap and that this inquirer was attempting to ferret her out in order to turn her over to the authorities for execution – **v. 9**
7. Saul then blasphemed by assuring her safety by swearing in the name of the God that he was defying – *“Saul vowed to her by the Lord, saying, ‘As the Lord lives, there shall no punishment come upon you for this thing.’”*
8. She agrees and Saul asks her to *“bring up Samuel for me.”*

B. THE REPLY ANNOUNCING OF GOD'S ANTIPATHY – vv. 12-19

1. This witch was accustomed to duping naïve inquirers who wanted to contact deceased loved ones by affiliating with demons who would impersonate the deceased being called upon.
2. It seems that even today, there are occultists who can appear to be in contact with the dead who are merely channeling imposture demons.
3. However, *“when the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice”* – because God made an exception and allowed Samuel to actually return in the form of a spirit (his body was still in the grave).
4. She was terrified and realized that the only one to whom God would literally send Samuel back from the dead to

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

consult with would be Saul – *“and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, ‘Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul.’”*

5. Saul never actually saw Samuel – only the witch saw him – *“The king said to her, ‘Do not be afraid; but what do you see?’”*
 - a) Her response was that this spirit was like *“a divine being coming up out of the earth”* – that is a glorified being coming up out of a grave.
 - b) His appearance was like *“an old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe.”*
6. From this description, *“Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage.”*
7. Samuel was not pleased at this assignment – he scolds Saul by saying *“Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”*
8. Saul’s response was to complain about the mess his life and reign had become and blame God for it – **v. 15**
9. Samuel, who had always faithfully served the Lord, confronts Saul by saying *“Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has departed from you and has become your adversary?”*
10. He then pronounces judgment on him by reiterating the verdict of God’s rejection of him and His choice of David – **v. 17.**
11. He then repeats to Saul God’s reasons for judgment – because of His disobedience and disregard for the Word of God – *“As you did not obey the Lord and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the Lord has done this thing to you this day.”*
12. Samuel further pronounces God’s sentence on Saul for his disregard for God’s Word and for consulting the witch – he would die - *“Moreover, the Lord will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.”*
13. In addition, all of Israel will suffer because of Saul’s sin – *“Indeed the Lord will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”*

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

III. THE ANGUISH INDUCED BY AN ANGRY GOD - 28:20-25

A. **THE DEVASTATING DESPAIR OF SAUL – v. 20**

1. The impact of Samuel's message brought Saul to absolute despair – *“Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day and all night.”*
2. Saul had spent a large portion of his reign attempting to manipulate himself into a place of security and prosperity – all the while rejecting the call of God to yield to His Word.
3. The result was that he finally had to reap the consequences of his stubborn and rebellious heart and he was devastated.

B. **THE DOMINATING DEPRESSION OF SAUL – vv. 21-25**

1. Those around Saul were very much aware of the negative condition he was in – and were interested in distancing themselves from him – *“The woman came to Saul and saw that he was terrified, and said to him, ‘Behold, your maidservant has obeyed you, and I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to your words which you spoke to me. So now also, please listen to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you that you may eat and have strength when you go on your way.’”*
2. She was interested in Saul leaving her and going on his way so that the calamities described by Saul would not spill over onto her.
3. However, Saul was in no condition to concern himself with any thing except his desperate predicament – he was so depressed that he could think straight – *“But he refused and said, ‘I will not eat.’”*
4. He was finally persuaded and he allowed the woman to make him a meal and he was finally able to go – *“She brought it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and went away that night.”*
5. Whenever we allow ourselves to rebel against God and His Word, we find our lives and perspectives distorted and confused – often resulting in great depression and distress.

An Exegetical Study of 1 Samuel

6. Saul should have brought himself humbly before the Lord in repentance and sought forgiveness. Instead, he merely sank into great depression.
7. We are told in 1 Chronicles that God considered Saul's approach to Him invalid and insincere – notably because of his refusal to deal with the issues of sin in his life – cp. **1 Chronicles 10:13-14**.