

Saul said to his servants, "Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." (1 Samuel 28:7)

Lord God, you rule over the living and the dead. Thank you for guiding us by your Word of life. Make us to look to you alone for direction and purpose, trusting in the power of your Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

After being anointed as Israel's first monarch, King Saul gradually became less and less obedient to God. After the prophet Samuel died, Saul was left with no advisors. That's when he did the unthinkable, going so far as to employ witchcraft to speak to the dead by consulting the medium at En-dor.

Read: 1 Samuel 28:3-19

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

The Biblical Context

The time prior to the Monarchy was a rough and lawless time. As Scripture says: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

Even though God raised up the great prophet Samuel to guide his people in faith, the people clamored for God to give them a king like the other nations around them. God relented, but warned the people that having a king could easily lead to tyranny. Such was the case with Israel's first king, Saul.

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel and the books of 1 and 2 Kings tell the story of Israel as a united nation and the subsequent division into north and south kingdoms. Part of the biblical books of History, some of this content is repeated in 1 and 2 Chronicles in a more abbreviated form.

Discussion Questions

1. In earlier days, when he was still obedient to God, Scripture says, "Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land" (v. 3). What changed that led Saul to break his own law?
2. A "medium" is a person who uses occult means to contact the dead. Why does God consider this a sinful act? What commandment does it break?
3. What sense do you get in this story that God was already angry with King Saul? In what way is God's silence a punishment in and of itself?
4. How did the woman respond when Samuel's spirit appeared? Do you think she actually expected the séance to work? Is it possible to contact the dead?
5. Read: 1 Samuel 2:6 and Psalm 88:3-6. The biblical word "Sheol" refers to the place of the dead. From what you read in these verses, where did people of the Bible understand Sheol to be located? How does today's story share this same understanding of where people go when they die?
6. Read Hebrews 4:9-13. Many Christian tombstones are inscribed with the phrase "Rest in Peace." What is the "Sabbath rest" of which Scripture speaks here? Is this something you look forward to?
7. How does the Word of God "lay bare" some of the false assumptions we may have about the afterlife? Why is it essential to be guided by God's Word alone?
8. What sense do you get that what Saul did here was the "last straw" for God? What were the consequences of Saul's sin?