

Notes and Quotes

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Saul's Visit With The Medium (1 Sam. 28:5-25)

Over the past ten to twenty years we have witnessed a great revival of interest in the occult. In movies, on television, and even in Saturday morning cartoons, there is an abundance of witches and warlocks, ghouls and ghosts. The occult is no longer a sub-culture. It has captured the interest of people all the way from Wall Street to rural communities. This should be alarming to us, for two reasons: (1) Because of what the Bible says about sorcery (Rev. 21:8; Gal. 5:20), and (2) It is a troubling fact of history that outbreaks of occultism frequently accompany the collapse of a civilization; one example, the Roman Empire.

With the infiltration of occultism in our society the people of God must seek their God, and urge others in that direction. When the people of Judah started turning to "mediums and wizards," the prophet of God told them: "To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," (Isa. 8:19, 20). As preachers, teachers, parents and active Christians deal with this occult revival by teaching God's Word, attention will eventually have to be directed to the incident recorded in 1 Samuel 28.

Saul, in his declining days, visited a witch or "medium" at Endor. He asked her to "conduct a séance" to bring Samuel up from the dead. The witch was hesitant, since Saul himself had banned all spiritualists and mediums "out of the land." Reluctantly, the witch agreed, saying, "Who shall I bring up for you?" Saul asked for Samuel, but before the witch started her conjuring and incantations, Samuel appeared. Samuel simply told Saul that he (Saul) no longer had a relationship with God, because he had disobeyed the voice of the Lord (refer, 1 Sam. 15). Samuel went on to tell Saul, "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," (1 Sam. 28:19).

The question that may be raised about this: Does this give any Biblical sanction to the use of mediums to contact the dead? I believe this passage not only does not sanction séances, it constitutes a strong statement against it.

Consider the following observations:

1. Earlier, "Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land," (1 Sam. 28:3). This was in keeping with the plain statements of God in His law against occultism; like Leviticus 19:31 — "Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not

seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God," (See also: Lev. 20:6; and Isa. 8:19, 20).

2. Saul's turning to this medium was after the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, and "a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him," (1 Sam. 16:14). If one uses Saul's example for approval of what they want to do today, they are using a practice he engaged in AFTER the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him, and this "distressing spirit" troubled him.

3. This was also after Saul had tried, in vain, to consult the Lord (see 1 Sam. 28:6). And why didn't the Lord answer him? The Lord refuses to answer impenitent sinners (see Isa. 1:15; 59:1, 2).

4. There is a significant fact about this event revealed in the text itself. It appears that before the woman had begun her incantations, there was the appearance of something extraordinary. This struck the witch with astonishment and terror; she was surprised! This, along with the other facts in the case, leads me to conclude that she was neither the cause nor the medium of this apparition. The following observation is made in the Keil and Delitzsch commentary: "These words (verses 12 and 13, -web) imply most unquestionably that the woman saw an apparition which she did not anticipate, and therefore that she was not really able to conjure up departed spirits or persons who had died," (page 262, Vol. 2).

5. Her claim (in verse 21) is nothing but that, a claim. Being an experienced, professional impostor, she would naturally claim that this had happened through her powers.

6. It cannot escape our notice, that just because you find some person doing something in Old Testament history, that doesn't necessarily show approval of that act! You can find David involved in an adulterous affair; Moses disobeying the Lord; Abraham using deception; and so forth. Saul's visit to a witch (after the Spirit of the Lord departed from him) was not revealed as a pattern for God's people to follow. In fact, First Chronicles 10:13 says: "... Saul died for his unfaithfulness which he had committed against the Lord, because he did not keep the word of the Lord, and also because he consulted a medium for guidance."

Conclusion

In view of these facts, from the text and other related passages, my own conclusion is: This was a communication to Saul, by the power of God. This interpretation presents no problems to me. God used a donkey to communicate (back in Numbers 22). And, God caused an appearance of men who had died on the Mount of Transfiguration; Moses and Elijah (Man. 17:1-5). I think this is one of the instances included in the opening statement of Hebrews, where it says that God spoke in times past "in different ways," (see Heb. 1:1). One thing is certain: If an individual is not going to change his attitude toward God and change his conduct, there is no benefit from a re-appearance and/or the counsel of the dead. That lessons emerges from this story, and also from Luke 16:31. Stay away from the occult!

