

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 28:3-25

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1 Samuel 28:3-25

Verse 3

³ Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.

- Samuel, Israel's last judge and great prophet of God, was dead. Saul had killed all of Israel's priests (see 1 Samuel 22) except Abiathar who had gone to David. Gad, Israel's prophet was also in David's camp (see 1 Samuel 25:5). In accordance with the Law of Moses, Saul had banned all "spiritists" from Israel (see Exodus 22:18 & Deuteronomy 18:10-11). Exactly when Saul had done this is unknown.
- Consequently, Saul was left without a spiritual guide or counselor.

Verses 4-7

⁴ The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. ⁵ When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. ⁶ He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. ⁷ Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her."

"There is one in Endor," they said.

- The Philistines began an invasion of Israel. Saul took his army to oppose the Philistines. But when he saw the size of the Philistine army gathered against him he was terrified.
- He prayed to YHWH about the situation, but his prayers were unanswered. The Urim, the tool Israel used to hear God, was with Abiathar in David's camp. Israel's prophet, Gad, was in David's camp.
- In desperation, Saul asked his attendants to find him a witch or medium to whom he could go for spiritual guidance. This was in violation of the Law of

Moses, and Saul had cast such people out of Israel. But, people still sought them and there were still “spiritists” in the land.

- Saul’s counselors knew of such a person in the city of Endor.

Verses 8-10

⁸ So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. “Consult a spirit for me,” he said, “and bring up for me the one I name.”

⁹ But the woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?”

¹⁰ Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this.”

- Saul disguised himself and went to see this woman at night. He asked her to call up a spirit from the dead with whom he wished to consult.
- The woman was on guard. She reminded Saul that the king had ordered all mediums and spiritists to leave Israel. She suggested that Saul had come to trap her and to cause her to be executed by the king.
- Saul reassured her that she would not be punished if she did as he requested.
- All this implies that the woman recognized Saul in spite of his disguise.

Verse 11

**¹¹ Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?”
“Bring up Samuel,” he said.**

- The woman asked Saul with whom he wished to speak. He told her that he wished to speak to Samuel.

Verses 12-14

¹² When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!”

¹³ The king said to her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see a ghostly figure coming up out of the earth.”

¹⁴ “What does he look like?” he asked.

“An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said.

Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

- The woman attempted to conjure up the spirit of Samuel. When it worked, and she saw Samuel, the woman was scared to death and screamed out in fright. Perhaps she had never successfully conjured up a spirit before.
- She revealed that Saul's disguise had not worked and that she knew who he was.
- He wanted to know what had frightened her so badly and she described what she saw, "a ghostly figure coming out of its grave." It was an old man wearing a robe of office.
- When Saul heard this, he knew it was Samuel and he fell down with his face to the ground to honor Samuel.

Verses 15-19

¹⁵ Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"

"I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."

¹⁶ Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷ The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸ Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. ¹⁹ The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines."

- Samuel was clearly disturbed by all this. He asked Saul what he wanted. Saul told him that YHWH had forsaken him and would not answer his prayers. So, he had resorted to this.
- Samuel told him that this is exactly what he had told Saul would happen before he died. God had rejected Saul as king of Israel and had given the kingdom to David because Saul had not been obedient to the Lord.
- Samuel told Saul that he would lose the battle to the Philistines and the next day Saul and his sons would be dead.

Verse 20

²⁰ Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and all that night.

- As Samuel spoke, Saul fainted.

Verses 21-25

²¹ When the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken, she said, "Look, your servant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do. ²² Now please listen to your servant and let me give you some food so you may eat and have the strength to go on your way."

²³ He refused and said, "I will not eat."

But his men joined the woman in urging him, and he listened to them. He got up from the ground and sat on the couch.

²⁴ The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast. ²⁵ Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.

- The medium wanted Saul gone from her house. She fed him, and Saul and the two men with him left.

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