

April 5

1 Samuel 28, 31; 2 Samuel 1; 1 Chronicles 10

Hello and I am Lisa Ashton here today with the April 5th Project 4:4 accelerator. Today we are covering I Samuel 28, 31, II Sam 1 and I Chron 10.

Now, without doubt, the most fascinating portion of the chapters we read today is the section that deals with Saul's strange and desperate encounter with the witch of Endor. So what was going on when Saul visited the witch (or the medium) at Endor? Here are a few possibilities taken from an Old Testament scholar, John Davis, who writes in his book entitled The Birth of a Kingdom.

1) The appearance of Samuel was not a literal one but merely the product of psychological impressions. According to this view, the woman permitted herself to become emotionally involved, and psychologically identified herself with the prophet so that she was convinced that he had actually appeared when called. Two objections can be raised against that view. The first is derived from verse 12, which indicates that when Samuel did appear, the medium cried out with a loud voice, apparently surprised or startled by his appearance. Such would not be the case if she were merely seeking a vision caused by psychological excitement. Second, the general reading of the text leads one to the conclusion that not only did the woman speak with Samuel but Saul spoke with him as well.

2) A demon or Satan impersonated Samuel. Those holding this view argue for the idea that a visible form of Samuel himself appeared which was in reality merely an impersonation of him. Many who defend this view argue that God would not permit a woman of this type to actually disturb the rest of a godly man. The whole affair is therefore considered a satanic or demonic deception of Saul. While it is true that Satan can perform such deceptions, it is highly doubtful that he has the prophetic knowledge necessary to reveal that which was given to Saul in this chapter. Furthermore, if this were a demon or an evil spirit, it is improbable that he would have given the prediction found in the passage. More likely, in light of the godly character of David and the wickedness of Saul, the demonic power would have flattered Saul with positive prophecy.

3) The most popular view, and the one that is maintained by most orthodox commentators, is that this was a genuine appearance of Samuel brought about by God Himself. In favor of this proposal is the Septuagint reading of 1 Chronicles 10:13, which is as follows: "Saul asked counsel of her that had a familiar spirit to inquire of her and Samuel made answer to him." Furthermore the fact that she cried out when she saw Samuel indicated that she did not bring up Samuel and did not expect him to appear in this manner. The fact that Saul bowed himself to the ground out of reverence is a further indication that this was a real appearance.

There are still several unanswered questions from this text, but we can at least hold fast to what is clear from this passage. And that is, Samuel appears to Saul and communicates with him through this medium. So you may ask, "Well why would God

allow that?" I don't have the complete answer but certainly he wanted to emphasize the doom of Saul and to show His divine displeasure for the sin of resorting to a medium. Divination had been expressly forbidden by the Law of Moses. That was a very serious breach of God's law then, and it is still.

Messing with palm readers, tarot card readers, fortune tellers and mediums in an attempt to learn something about the future is dangerous. It is a particularly dangerous one because it opens people up to the influence of demonic powers. God says it is sin and any occult practice or divination should be avoided at all costs. Don't mess with it. The powers of darkness are very real but let's be assured that the Spirit of Christ which dwells in you is greater still.

Moving on. The other topic to address today is King Saul's death. It seems as though we are presented with two substantially different accounts of exactly how Saul died. In the account of I Samuel 31 and the parallel (almost identical) account found in I Chronicles 10, we are told that an injured King Saul, unwilling and afraid to be taken captive to the Philistines, killed himself in the midst of the rout on Mt. Gilboa, when his armor bearer refused to do the job for him. The armor bearer then, seeing what the king had done, followed his master into death by duplicating his action. When we get to 2 Samuel 1, however, we find a foreign mercenary, an Amalekite, arriving at the camp of David bearing the crown and bracelet of Saul. When closely questioned by David his story is, "I found the king wounded and dying in the midst of the battlefield. Since I didn't think that he could live, I agreed when he asked me to finish him off, and I brought you his crown and bracelet because I recognize your claim to be the next king."

Two different versions but not because there is any question about what really happened. Shortly after Saul's suicide, this Amalekite mercenary apparently happened on the scene – (maybe he was there when it happened!) – and thinking that David will be glad to hear of his arch-rival's death he takes the crown and bracelet to the man who will be king and exaggerates his role in the affairs of the day. Given the rivalry between Saul and David, the fervor with which Saul sought David's life, and the obvious need that Israel now has for a strong king, the Amalekite was certain that he would be treated like a hero and rewarded generously.

However, all David can hear when the Amalekite gives his report is the sentence, "I killed the king." That is the thing that David himself would not do, nor allow to be done, on the two occasions when Saul fell into his hands. God alone has the right to remove the king. The Amalekite framed a lie calculated to make himself find favor with David. His misfortune was that David believed his lie. So he died because he had dared to kill the king. Perhaps Saul's injuries were not mortal -- perhaps he would have lived had not he chosen to fall upon his sword.

The parallel passage from I Chronicles you may have noticed that reasons were assigned to the death and failure of King Saul. We are told there that Saul died because, "he was unfaithful to the Lord, he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance and did not inquire of the Lord" --

unfaithfulness, disobedience, and divination. Those are the words that summarize the story of King Saul. He started well, but he didn't finish well.

The close of our reading today is David mourning the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. What is amazing is that there is no righteous gloating in it. Nothing like, "look how God has vindicated me in the matter of my enemy." There is none of that -- just real grief and mourning, not only over Jonathan's death -- but even over Saul's death. "In life," he sings, "Saul and Jonathan were loved and gracious and in death they were not parted... O daughters of Israel weep for Saul..." There does not seem to be a jealous or vindictive bone in the body of David. He wants Israel to remember the good things about who Saul was and what he did. In this song we see David at his very best.

That's a wrap for today. And let me warn you, tomorrow it gets a little crazy as we see David rise to the throne...more lies, deception, murders, betrayal...don't you just LOVE reading the Bible! Who needs Hollywood?

This is Lisa Ashton reminding you that "Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." Bye for now.