

### I Samuel

#### Lesson 43 - Chapter 28 and 29

War is coming. The Philistines have once again determined to establish a higher state of dominance over Israel and undoubtedly hope to convince Saul to accept vassal status over destruction because empire building was not their aim. The King of Gath summoned David in order to assure himself that David would fight alongside him as an ally against David's former homeland, Israel, and against David's former king, Sha'ul. The answer David gave to Achish's inquiry on the matter would make any politician green with envy as the words could be taken to mean whatever the hearer wanted them to mean. To the Philistine King David's response sounded like a sincere loyalty oath. He was so moved by David's words that he appointed David to be his lifetime bodyguard. This was by no means a menial position; this appointment put David in a similar close inner-circle with Achish just he once enjoyed as part of King Saul's royal court.

Now that the Philistines' and David's stage is set, the narrator of Samuel chapter 28 moves us to the other side of the fence and King Saul's situation is addressed. And the situation (that we covered in depth last week) is that he has fallen into dark despair and utter panic. This darkness he felt was no ordinary darkness; it was a **choshek** kind of darkness. **Choshek** (the actual word isn't present in this passage) is a Hebrew word that speaks of a spiritual darkness; it's a state of being whereby God's enlightenment is not present. It is the absence of God that Saul was feeling and this time he was able to identify it as such and he wanted a remedy for it.

Wars in all ages have had a spiritual element to them; especially so the further back we go into history. In David's day what was occurring among human warriors on earth was thought to be but a reflection of the conflict going on among the gods in the heavenlies. Thus before engaging in battle the earthly participants would approach their gods for wisdom and strength and even battle tactics. Sometimes it was to learn of the outcome before it happened. The Hebrew mindset was no different and so when King Sha'ul tried to coax the god who had abandoned him (Yehoveh) to communicate with him regarding the coming war every means was met with silence. Not via dreams and visions or even through the use of the Urim and Thummim stones in the hands of the High Priest was so much as a **yud** or a jot of divine information revealed to the King. This put Saul not only at a distinct military disadvantage, but it also meant that he was on his own and this unnerved him to his core.

Only one avenue remained for the King of Israel to try and get God's attention; and that was through his prophet. But his prophet, Samuel, was dead and buried so that option was also cut-

off.....unless..... Saul could speak to Samuel's departed spirit. The problem is that (if it were even possible) it was completely against Torah Law to inquire of the spirits of the dead. But the terror stricken anti-King had long ago stopped paying any but lip service to God's commandments. His immediate personal needs and fears overrode any sense of righteous behavior or proper reverence for God

Let's re-read a portion of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Chapter 28 where Saul's dilemma plays out.

### RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 28: 7 – end

A necromancer, a **Ba'alath Ob**, who lived not far from Mt. Gilboa in En Dor, reluctantly welcomed a small group of men into her home after dark. It had to be obvious to her that these were government officials and so when they inquired if she would be willing to bring up the spirit of a certain dead person for a séance she balked. At first she didn't recognize the King; but because he was so distinctively tall in stature and could not but have behaved with such aristocratic bearing no amount of tattered peasant clothing could disguise his royal status. Thus the woman condescended and quoted to the 3 men the King's own decree that no divining or necromancing was to occur in Israel or the perpetrator would surely lose their life as penalty. And far be it from her to disobey the law of the king.

After assuring the witch of En Dor that he would not place any guilt on her for what she was about to do at his request, Saul says that he wants Samuel's spirit brought up from She'ol so that he might get vital information from him.

Interestingly the witch apparently no sooner heard the King's request than an apparition of the great deceased Prophet Samuel appeared. She shrieked in horror at his sight. He was wearing a **meil**, a cloak that is more or less the uniform of a Prophet. Therefore she knew instantly that it was indeed Samuel, which confirmed her suspicion that the man who asked for him was Saul since Kings and their Prophets were generally paired up.

Notice that whatever it was that appeared seems to have been seen only by the witch. Although virtually any painting or illustration of this event depicts Samuel as visible to all present that was not the case. It is obvious that the **Ba'alath Ob** was being swept along into something she had no control over, by a power she did not understand. There is no indication

that she spoke special words, burned incense, or performed an occult ritual. Saul spoke the words that he wanted Samuel and suddenly there he was! The witch, who had conjured up dead spirits countless times, was not expecting what she was encountering (to say the least). No doubt this was the Lord who was manipulating this frightening event for His own purposes.

Saul told the woman to calm down and then asked what it was she was seeing, and she responded that it was “gods” coming up from the underworld. Gods? As in divine beings? The Hebrew word she uttered was **elohim**; and while **elohim** is a title the Bible uses (at times) to refer to YHWH, all other times it means gods. On the other hand, **elohim** was a common term also used by pagans that referred to spirits that resided in the underworld. Although the witch in our story apparently was a Hebrew, her profession means that she had adopted pagan ways and thus thought and behaved as a pagan. By no means was she inferring by her reference to “gods” that something holy or on par with Yehoveh had appeared. But for certain the spirit of a dead person who carried authority was present.

The King, still seeing nothing, bowed low to show humility to Samuel. But the apparition was not pleased to have been awakened from his resting place, nor was he impressed that the King of Israel lay sprawled before him in submission. “Why”, asks the spirit, “Have you disturbed me and brought me up?” This was hardly the answer of a Genie whose main concern was to grant his master’s wish. Rather this was a grumpy dead person who demanded to know what the meaning was of this inconvenience.

Sha’ul responds that he was very upset because the Philistines were about to attack. And almost naively the king tells Samuel that he’s tried to get Yehoveh to speak with him, but hasn’t had any luck. So he’s taken this drastic course of action so that Samuel can tell him what to do about the upcoming war with the Philistines and what the outcome is going to be.

Can’t you almost see Samuel roll his eyes in disgust at Saul’s expectation? “Why ask me”, says Samuel, since the Lord has not only abandoned you but is now your enemy? All that’s happened is that what God said He’d do, He did. He has taken the Kingdom away from Saul and turned it over to David. And Samuel reminds the anti-king that the reason for God’s furious anger is because Saul refused to be obedient and especially so as concerns Saul’s ambivalence towards the Amalekites whom Yehoveh ordered eradicated.

Let me be clear: the verb tenses regarding what Samuel is saying to King Sha’ul have as much to do with Saul’s trauma as does the content of the decree itself. All the verbs present in

this passage are of the complete or perfect tense, meaning that Samuel is saying that God has already done these things. Nothing can be undone; the outcome is sealed because it's happened in the past (from a Heavenly perspective). All that remains is for it to be fulfilled on earth.

And what is to happen is that Saul is going to be defeated by the Philistines, the Kingdom of Israel is going to be put under the power of the Philistines, and Saul and all of his sons are going to die in battle at the hand of the Philistines.....tomorrow! The death sentence has been handed down and it is going to be carried out in a matter of hours.

But here's the thing: none of this was really a surprise to Sha'ul. His own royal advisors had been telling him for years that God had left him; and that spirits of evil were tormenting and directing him. Samuel, the very man who ordained Saul as king of Israel, walked away from him and told Saul that this was because God had permanently left the king. Even though Saul paid no attention to the Torah and its curses, he knew the laws well, and he knew the penalties for violation. Saul somehow thought he could defeat God's will, but deep inside he knew there would be a day of reckoning. Well that day had arrived and there was no postponing it.

I hope your mind is swirling as you think about this as much as mine was when I was preparing this lesson because here we have an excellent illustration of what is so irrationally common among mankind; we know the truth, we know the inevitable outcome of our disobedience, but we go blindly forward as though the day of judgment will never arrive. If we put it out of our minds and continue doing what we know is unwise or sinful, perhaps God will forget about it and judgment will bypass us.

I'd like to take a few moments to share something with you directly from my heart. I am fascinated with those TV programs about prisons and the poor tormented souls who occupy them, primarily because on the one hand there is seldom any repentance or remorse for what they had done (outside of self pity for losing their freedom) to wind up in jail, and on the other hand while they hate being in prison they acknowledge that they knew at the time that it was inescapable that their crimes would lead them there. They did those things knowing how wrong it was and knowing how terribly it would affect some innocent person; and at some level they enjoyed doing what they did. But at the same time they knew they would eventually be brought to justice and pay a terrible price; yet no one and nothing could deter them. Why do they do that?

Let me frame that question in another way that's maybe a little closer to home. Why do we as God's redeemed disobey Him (or go our own way) knowing that in some form or another there will be consequences? It may be immediate or it may be delayed consequences; the consequences may be in the form of disasters in our lives, or the result of the civil justice system or it may be in the form of eternal divine justice, or all of the above. Why does Satan do what he does knowing that the destructive outcome of his willful rebellion was sealed the moment he determined to become God's chief adversary? You would think that any rational sane person or powerful supernatural being (upon understanding their no-win predicament) would throw themselves upon God's offer of mercy; but no it just doesn't happen that way except for so relatively few.

And while we've all heard wonderful stories of deathbed conversions, I can tell you that no Pastor or Priest or Rabbi who has lived to a ripe old age would advise anyone to count on it. It is a rare thing and often the words we hear on the deathbed are just last moment grasping at straws and it carries no lasting weight. We are warned in both Testaments that without sincere repentance and turning from our wicked ways it is more likely than not that at some point Yehoveh will determine that we have crossed a divine line in the sand and His offer of mercy has been withdrawn never to be offered again. Just as for King Saul and for Satan it is possible for God to abandon us and condemn us if we have stepped over that line and firmly entrenched ourselves there. Who the Lord relegates to the ranks of the likes of Saul and Satan, and who He will be patient with until death, we have no insight into. We can speculate, but we cannot know.

I have tried to display both David and Saul as honestly and without prejudice as they are portrayed in the Scriptures so that we can see that in most ways they weren't all that different from one another. And yet in the single most important way, they were polar opposites. Both sinned. Both disobeyed God and His Holy Laws. Both could be selfish and rash and ruthless. Both would deceive others to get what they wanted or to protect themselves. What apparently separated them was that David determined to stick to God (even when he was doing wrong) and to co-operate with God and to run back to Him when confronted with his sin; while Saul chose to embrace his wrong, challenge God and directly fight against Him if need be regardless of who told him of his trespasses.

**(1Co 6:9-11 CJB) <sup>9</sup>Don't you know that unrighteous people will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't delude yourselves- people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, who engage in active or passive homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> who steal, who are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, who rob- none of them will share in the Kingdom of God.**

**<sup>11</sup> Some of you used to do these things. But you have cleansed yourselves, you have been set apart for God, you have come to be counted righteous through the power of**

### ***the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and the Spirit of our God.***

David was willing to admit his wrongs before the Lord, repent and change; Saul only set his jaw all the firmer and became even more defiant (nobody, including God, rebukes the King of Israel!)

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 28:19 has Samuel telling Sha'ul that "tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me", meaning in the underworld of the dead. The thing to understand is that Samuel didn't mean this in the sense that by the end of the day tomorrow Sha'ul and his sons would be in the same eternal state as Samuel. Rather this is referring to the concept of ***She'ol***, the grave, the place that all humans (righteous or wicked) will suffer; then from there men will judged.

<sup>DRA</sup> **Hebrews 9:27 *And as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment.***

King Saul virtually collapsed when he heard the Word of the Lord through Samuel. This is NOT what he was expecting. He expected a battle plan. He expected to have his fears alleviated. He expected that he would receive a good word of encouragement. On the other hand, Saul believed it. Like the criminal who commits his dirty deed and then is finally caught, resignation to his fate quickly sets in.

Saul had eaten nothing, and this added to his physical weakness. The ancient Rabbis are in consensus that the REASON the king had not eaten was not from losing his appetite due to his high level of upset. Rather it was that the always "religious" Saul was fasting that he might purify himself to be approved before YHWH. Imagine: Saul was purifying himself (in his own way) to approach the God of Israel who has already permanently rejected him; and he was intending to approach the Lord by means of a pagan séance that violated God's strict prohibition of consulting the spirits of the dead!

I could laugh at this a bit if it were not so tragic and delusional, and so prevalent not only within our modern society but even within the institutional Church. We hear God's Word, we know God's Word, and then we reject the Lord's commandments and instead behave religiously when it seems convenient. We refuse to follow the way clearly laid out in the Scriptures, and expect God to accept a manmade way more to our liking. Then we're surprised and

devastated (and even angry with God) when He doesn't answer our requests or honor our observances!

Notice that when Moses, Abraham, and other true and faithful men of God (not the merely religious) heard that their time was near, the phrase used to describe what was coming was that they were about to "go to be with their fathers". It was a mostly pleasant thought; they would cross-over peacefully and rest in comfort with generations of their families near to them. Saul was offered no such bed of roses. Tomorrow was essentially his violent execution; God's judgment carried out by the hands of wicked men, in the most painful way. And then afterwards, the darkness and loneliness of the grave.

And part of that pain would be that he would live just long enough to see his sons killed and their blood spattered on his feet. The Book of Chronicles sums this up and leaves no doubt as to what happened to Saul, and why.

**(1Ch 10:13-14 CJB) <sup>13</sup> So Sha'ul died for the transgression he committed against ADONAI, because of the word of ADONAI that he did not keep and because he sought the counsel of a spirit <sup>14</sup> instead of consulting ADONAI. Therefore ADONAI put him to death and turned the rulership over to David the son of Yishai.**

Finally the 2 men who came with Saul joined with the witch in convincing Saul to eat and regain some physical strength. The woman prepared a meal fit for a king, using a valuable fattened calf as its main dish and also preparing unleavened bread because this all had to happen quickly. The witch was essentially preparing the last meal of a condemned man.

Before we move on to chapter 29, I would like to tie up a couple of loose ends. All sorts of Theological theories and doctrines have arisen from this story of Saul and the Witch of En Dor. After the Roman Church was established this incident was discounted as not the real thing. Luther and Calvin both claim that this was a diabolical fake brought about by Satan. The early gentile Church Fathers argued vehemently about this troubling story; Origen (for instance) believed it and took it quite literally, but Eustathius (like Calvin would) said that this was a demonic forgery.

There is no reason to think that this incident was anything but of the Lord, and it was quite real.

In fact we have other Scripture that speaks directly to the issue that has caused many Church leaders to simply label the story itself as false, or to give the Devil the credit for Samuel's appearance and his pronouncements. Would God speak His Word by means of an ungodly situation whereby even a witch is at the center of it?

Turn your Bibles to Ezekiel 14 (page 653 in the CJB).

<sup>CJB</sup> **Ezekiel 14:1** *Then certain of Isra'el's leaders came to me; and while they were sitting with me,*

<sup>2</sup> *the word of ADONAI came to me:*

<sup>3</sup> *"Human being, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, thus setting in front of themselves the stumbling block that leads to sin. Should I let them consult me at all?"*

<sup>4</sup> *Therefore speak to them, and tell them that Adonai ELOHIM says, 'Everyone in the house of Isra'el who takes his idols into his heart, thus setting in front of himself the stumbling block that leads to sin, and then comes to the prophet, I myself, ADONAI, will answer him in a manner suited to his many idols,*

<sup>5</sup> *in order to grab hold of the house of Isra'el in their hearts; since, through their idols, they have all fallen away from me.'*

<sup>6</sup> *"Therefore say to the house of Isra'el that Adonai ELOHIM says, 'Repent! Turn yourselves away from your idols, turn your faces away from all your disgusting practices!*

<sup>7</sup> *For everyone, whether from the house of Isra'el or a foreigner living in Isra'el, who separates himself from me and takes his idols into his heart, thus setting in front of himself the stumbling block that leads to sin, and then comes to the prophet, asking him to consult me for him, I myself, ADONAI, will answer him.*

<sup>8</sup> *I will set my face against that person, make him a warning sign and an example, and cut him off from my people. Then you will know that I am ADONAI.*

Here we have the Word of God exploring just such a situation as we saw at En Dor. Idolatrous Hebrews are seeking God through pagan idols. And what does Yehoveh say He will do when a Hebrew does such a thing? He says that HE shall speak to them as they are consulting these idols, and that He will tell them to repent from their ungodliness or otherwise the Lord will turn away from them and cut them off from the rest of His people. That is exactly what we saw



in the story of Saul and the Witch of En Dor.

Notice in Ezekiel that in His response God is not answering their prayers; He is not offering a blessing by means of pagan and manmade ways of worship and communication that are unauthorized by the Torah. Rather He is giving a warning of a curse for their actions. He is telling them to stop now! Repent! Otherwise they will become no more than a warning sign and a very unpleasant example for the future generations.

Food for thought.

### **READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 29 all**

It may not seem so, but the rather innocuous opening verse of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 29 has caused a fair amount of consternation with Bible scholars; can you spot the reason why that is?

It's because we're told that the Philistines gathered their army at Afek, and the Israelites gathered their army at a spring in Yizre'el. In the previous chapter (28) we're told that the Philistines gathered their army at Shunem, and Saul's troops massed at Mt. Gilboa. What gives? Is one set of these locations right and the other wrong? Or, as many scholars say, is chapter 29 placed chronologically out of order and it should have come before chapter 28?

Let's deal with this as it is a sterling example of what happens when in studying the Bible, history and common sense are ignored and the intellectual elite prefer to amend the Holy texts with their thoughts and wisdom.

We are dealing with a rather long (long for the Bible, anyway) and complex story that has elements of it occurring simultaneously at different locations. Whether such a story is being told around a campfire, written in a book, or shown in a film, there is no other practical way to

communicate the overall situation without communicating it in vignettes.

What we are dealing with in the Bible also happens in modern movies and in TV programs as a routine (we just never give it any thought). Movies cut back and forth between elements of the storyline that are either happening at the same moment (but they affect each other and thus the story's outcome); or at times the movie will flash forward or flash back to try and include necessary information.

The TV series Seinfeld took this principle to a new level. It constantly took a simple story involving a number of characters and showed what they were each doing apart from the others, but chronologically all of these things were happening at approximately the same time. In the end it all came together and we could see how each of these actions affected the others and brought us to whatever the outcome turned out to be. That, more or less, is what we're finding here in this story of David, Saul, Achish, the Witch of En Dor, the Philistines in general, and it all leads to how it was that Saul died and paved the way for David to assume the throne.

We also need to remember that because centuries ago some scholars decided to divide some of the larger books of the Bible into 2 (such as Samuel and Kings), and then took the further step of dividing all the books into chapters and then further into verses, we get this false sense of beginnings and endings when as often as not one chapter simply runs directly into the next without interruption.

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel chapter 29 is being told largely in flash back style. Thus in chapter 28, verse 4 begins, "The Philistines assembled; THEN they went and pitched camp at Shunem....." But chapter 29 now tells us WHERE the Philistines assembled: it was at Afek. In other words, while our minds tend to read 28:4 as saying that the Philistines assembled at Shunem, the words don't say that at all. The words merely say that **first** they assembled, and then **second** after assembling they went to camp at Shunem. Chapter 29 explains that the assembly was at a place called Afek. And when we look at a map, the common sense of it becomes apparent.

Shunem was considerably north of Philistine territory and deep in the heart of Israel. Afek, on the other hand, was on the northern edge of the Philistine territory, on the main road to the Jezreel, in an area that they controlled. So the 5 armies of the 5 kings of Philistia meet at a secure location in territory they controlled, and then once gathered marched together as one large and intimidating force through Israelite territory until they made their battle camp at Shunem on the edge of the Jezreel Valley.

As for the Israelites, they first gathered their forces at a meeting point that was spring in the Jezreel. It would have been the only suitable spring in the area that was able to accommodate a large number of troops; it was the one formed by the Harod, about 5 miles southeast of the city of Jezreel. This was the same spring where Gideon selected his 300 best warriors to attack the Midianites by choosing those who drank from this spring in a very warrior-like alert manner and leaving the others behind. After the various clan and tribal forces of Israel met up at this same spring, found out where the Philistines set up their war camp (at Shunem), then they moved to oppose them under King Saul's leadership by setting up their own war camp at Mt. Gilboa.

We'll continue with this pivotal event in Israel's history next week.