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# In the Company of a Witch

## 1 Samuel 28<sup>27</sup>

### *Russ Kennedy*

The context told us why David is serving with the Philistines and under their king Achish. He is raiding and destroying the tribes around Israel that should have been destroyed in Joshua's day. He is telling Achish he is raiding in Jewish territory which is true but definitely misleading Achish.

David may have been too clever for his own good. This puts David in the awkward position when accompanying Achish on raids into Israel. So he and his men basically are stationed around Achish as body guards and do not participate in the Philistine raids.

But Saul knows he is facing both David and Achish. This brings great fear and hesitation - should he be attacking them when David is among them?

Saul has become desperate because Samuel has died, David is serving with the Philistines and God is silent. Saul has become so desperate to conserve the kingdom that he will go to almost any length. He is shown to be just like the kings of the nations around Israel: prideful, foolish, arrogant, venal and irreligious.

## **The Mercenary Bodyguard**

**(v. 1-2)**

Serving with the Pagans?

<sup>1</sup> In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." <sup>2</sup> David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

### **David's Raids**

As you will remember, the Philistine king Achish had given David a town for his small army, family and followers. On behalf of the king, David had been conducting raids across southern Palestine against remaining Canaanite peoples. But his sponsor, Achish, thinks David is raiding Israeli villages. So David has the deceitfully gained full confidence of the king of Gath.

### **David's Dilemma**

Well, now David is caught in a real dilemma. Achish is gathering his forces to move against Israel. There have been several wars between the Philistines and Saul during his reign. It seems that Achish wants to destroy Saul once and for all. He is recruiting and training a large army. He looks to David as one of his capable, competent and committed militias. Of course he approaches David to ensure that David is prepared to join this final surge against Israel.

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David's response is enigmatic. "You will see what I and my forces can do." This is not a commitment. Achish takes it as such. But David is being clever and too clever by far. Achish decides to appoint David and his men as the king's bodyguard. This means that David will be riding near or at the king's side. The irony here must not be lost on us. In fact, David is and will be Achish's mortal enemy. But Achish has just enlisted David to provide special security. This was not unusual. Given the politics of the day (and down through history) many kings have enlisted mercenaries to be their special body guards. After all, they want to get paid and so are highly incentivized to keep their patron alive.

## The Divine Silence

(v. 3-7)

Our narrator takes us to a very different scene yet one loaded with its own irony.

<sup>3</sup> Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land. <sup>4</sup> The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. <sup>5</sup> When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. <sup>6</sup> And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. <sup>7</sup> Then 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." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a medium at En-dor."

## The King's Situation

King Saul's situation is beginning to decay into greater folly and fear.

Samuel has died and is buried. So Saul's communication with the Lord has been cut off.

At the same time it appears, Saul had removed all the occult leaders out of the land. Saul has recognized the danger of communicating with the spirit world.

Philistines' are gathering on the borders for an invasion. They have a superior force and superior weapons. The danger is great. On his own, Saul has not had a lot of success against Philistines.

## The King's Fear

And so he is afraid. Fear of man has often ruled Saul. Now it has a deep grip on his heart and soul. This kind of fear robs sleep, confuses clear thinking and magnifies troubles.

Rightly, Saul turns to the Lord. But God has withdrawn from Saul. The kingdom will be torn from Saul. God's presence has been lifted from Saul. Now God's Word is withheld from Saul. No matter how he tries to hear from God, the silence is deafening and frightening. What to do?

## The King's Solution

Well Saul's solution is to seek out a medium, a witch. He sends his servants to find one in the land. Now he supposedly has thrown them all out back when Samuel died. But now, he is fully aware that they are back in the land. His servants will be able to find one.

This is a testimony to Saul's spiritual blindness and foolishness. He apparently thinks that he will be able to force God to respond to him by reaching out to God through an outlawed means.

The Mosaic Law was clear about the evil of witchcraft. Yet, Saul somehow thinks he will get as reliable an answer from them as he would have gotten from God.

## The Wicked Substitute

(v. 8-14)

So he prepares to go see a medium. But he cannot go as the king...

<sup>8</sup> So Saul disguised himself and put on other garments and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you." <sup>9</sup> The woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land. Why then are you laying a trap for my life to bring about my death?" <sup>10</sup> But Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." <sup>11</sup> Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." <sup>12</sup> When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." <sup>13</sup> The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a god coming up out of the earth." <sup>14</sup> He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

## The King's Deception

That Saul must disguise himself says it all. He takes two men with him and goes as in plain clothes. He approaches the medium with an open ended request.

The witch is immediately suspicious. Is this a trap? She reminds her customer that Saul has enforced the Law and cut off the mediums and necromancers from the land. They are illegal and subject to death if they practice their cultic arts. But he swears that no harm will come. He will not tell. This is no trap. He just needs her skill and services to bring someone from the dead.

## The Witch's Surprise

Wonder what she thought was going to happen? And why bring up Samuel, a prophet of God? She knows her powers are from Satan and the demonic. She is a medium, after all.

So she does her incantation to call up the spirit. She is almost certainly expecting a demon pretending to be Samuel. What she gets is Samuel himself. She is shocked. This is not normally what happens. She is shocked. Somehow, in seeing the prophet from the dead, she knows who Saul is.

## The Prophet's Appearance

Samuel wants to know what the medium sees. She describes Samuel. The portrayal is so vivid. An old man wrapped in robe. The words she used and the picture she drew made it clear who this was. This was Samuel. This is no demon masquerading as the prophet. This is the prophet himself appearing from Paradise where he awaits along with all the Old Testament saints, the resurrection of Jesus.

Saul knows, well knows this venerable figure. His stare must have burned into the medium's soul. His eyes look with anger and pity on the cringing remains of what was once a tall, mighty

and imposing figure of a king. Now, in a hut in Israel, with the fire dancing, in the presence of a medium, this riven husk now presses his face on the floor in abject servility.

## The Condemning Message

(v. 15-19)

It is hard to imagine what Saul expected the message to be...

<sup>15</sup> Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do."

### Its Confrontation

This raises a question: what is actually happening here? Well, certainly, Samuel has been brought up from the place where the saints go before the resurrection. Jesus called this Abraham's Bosom and Paradise. Without going into too much detail, let's think about this situation for a moment.

At least in the Old Testament, it was possible for those who have passed through death to be allowed to come back. We have this one instance here with Samuel and he is clearly not a ghost, but the recognizable person.

Mediums cannot summon someone from the dead. What they do is a deceit and fraud usually using demonic spirits. By definition a medium is speaking to the spirit world; but it is not the spirit world of the dead but rather that of the demons.

In this instance, it was apparently by God's permission and in His purpose to allow or even send Samuel back. The witch has no power to do this on her own.

It is a great evil to consult with the occult, whether mediums, necromancers, warlocks, witches or any other occult practitioner or practice. Fortune telling, Ouija boards, astrology are all occult practices and should not be a part of a Christian's life at all.

Samuel sounds almost like he has been woken up from sleep for no reason. "Why are you disturbing me?" I would imagine after the comforts and joys of Paradise, or Abraham's Bosom being dragged back up to talk to Saul would be... disturbing.

### Its Complaint

Saul is in distress. He is being threatened by the Philistines. He is being ignored by God no matter what he does. So he has now summoned Samuel to tell him what to do. This is amazing. Look at the arrogance and folly of Saul.

Saul thinks he has *summoned* Samuel. Really? Saul has the power and authority to command Samuel beyond the grave? This is exactly the opposite of the way it was supposed to be. Samuel is the spokesman for God. HE is the mediator of God's Word. Saul was supposed to be in submission to God and to the Word spoken by Samuel. Samuel is not subject to Saul.

Why does Saul need someone to tell him what to do? What is there to decide? What is the choice here? Simply submit to the Philistines? It is rather simple. Repent of your sins. Humble yourself before God. Gather up, train and lead an army against the Philistines.

## Its Content

<sup>16</sup> And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? <sup>17</sup> The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. <sup>18</sup> Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The Lord will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines.”

Samuel’s words are simple, direct and devastating.

First, some history. The Lord has become Saul’s enemy. The Lord has done what Samuel said – The Lord has taken the kingdom away from Saul and given it to David. The Lord has done this because Saul did not obey the Lord. HE did not destroy Amalek as he was commanded. The implication is that Saul will not destroy the Philistines as he should either.

Second, some prophecy. The Lord is going to hand over Saul to the Philistines. He and his sons are going to die. They are going to join Samuel, either in the grave or in Paradise. But Israel is going to be defeated. This is going to be the end for Saul.

## The Unrepentant King

(v. 20-25)

Served by a Pagan?

<sup>20</sup> Then Saul fell at once full length on the ground, filled with fear because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten nothing all day and all night. <sup>21</sup> And the woman came to Saul, and when she saw that he was terrified, she said to him, “Behold, your servant has obeyed you. I have taken my life in my hand and have listened to what you have said to me. <sup>22</sup> Now therefore, you also obey your servant. Let me set a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on your way.” <sup>23</sup> He refused and said, “I will not eat.” But his servants, together with the woman, urged him, and he listened to their words. So he arose from the earth and sat on the bed. <sup>24</sup> Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flour and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread of it, <sup>25</sup> and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

## His Worldly Grief

Saul is stricken with fear and grief and anxiety. He has not eaten all day. He is overcome and collapses to the floor.

## His Merciful Provision

The witch implores him to accept food. His attendants do as well. He finally relents and sits on the bed. The witch prepares him an expensive meal. She kills, prepares and cooks the fattened calf which was being prepared for a family feast day. She prepared and baked unleavened bread. All the while, Saul sits there, submersed in his own inner horrors.

Finally, the meal is served. In language evocative of the Lord Jesus’ last supper, they arose at the end and went out into the night. Saul eats his own last supper. Saul goes out into the night. And the long night of death awaits him the next day.

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## Reflect and Respond

So Saul eats his last supper and gets up the next morning and dies at the hand of the Philistines...

How the proud and the mighty have fallen from the grace of the Lord.

Learn to submit to God's chastening and to accept the consequences of our choices.

Accomplishments do not mean acceptance or approval from God.

All human failure, sin and rebellion points us to our need of Christ and the gospel

If you fear man more than God:

The anointed lines up against you (v. 1-2)

The Word of the Lord is taken from you (v. 3-19)

The enemy of the Lord are the only ones who receive you (v. 20ff)

The failure of Saul points to the need for a new king, David. The failure of all the kings of Israel points to the need for a new King, Jesus