



Study #8: Shattered Wisdom

I Samuel 28
Week of 11/8

O Lord, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed (Psalm 30:7).

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the Law given through Moses, one of the “detestable practices” the Lord explicitly prohibited was using divination or using anyone “who is a medium or spiritist, or who consults the dead.” In fact, God says that it was because of these practices that He was driving out the nations in the land (cf. Deut. 18:9–13).

We see how far Saul had fallen in 1 Samuel 28. Finding no answer from God through the prescribed means of communication with God, Saul turned to illicit means: a spiritist. The irony is that Saul, following the commands of the Law, had previously expelled all mediums from the land. Now in desperation, he put on a disguise and consulted one himself.

Saul's disobedience here is obvious. But note also the resounding consequence of his disobedience, and the theme of the entire chapter: fear. When Saul saw the Philistine army, “he was afraid; terror filled his heart” (v. 5). When Samuel actually appeared, the woman cried out in fear, and Saul had to instruct her, “Don't be afraid” (v. 13). In speaking with Samuel, Saul confessed that he was in “great distress” (v. 15). After receiving Samuel's terrible message, Saul fell to the ground and was “filled with fear” (v. 20). Finally, the encounter ended with Saul being “greatly shaken” (v. 21), rendered as “terrified.”

Sin often leads to a downward spiral of more and more sin. Recall that Saul brought this upon himself. He was once considered among the prophets (10:11; 19:24), but his continued rejection of the LORD left him with no prophetic word. He once used priestly means to consult God (see 14:18–19), but then chose to slaughter the priests at Nob (22:6–19) and now the priestly Urim did him no good. Saul removed himself from the grace and presence of God, and he was left with a terrifying fear and an inability to lead his people. Such is the consequences of unchecked sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The message about the debilitating consequences of sin is a powerful one for us all, but is especially relevant for the leaders of God's people. If, like Saul, God's ministers choose to reject the light of God's Word and Spirit, there will be nothing left by which to lead God's people. Pray today for the leaders in your church and across the nation and world, asking God to send upon them the continual grace of His Spirit, and that they would openly receive it.¹

¹ http://www.preceptaustin.org/1samuel_devotionals-2.htm

Open It

1. Discuss a time when you were younger when you tried to fix a problem, only to make a bigger one.

Read It: 1 Samuel 28:3–25

Explore It

2. What big event opens our text this week? What was Israel's response?
3. What law did Saul establish in those days?
4. What trouble faces the nation of Israel?
5. Why does Saul seek the help of a medium?
6. What happens during this visit with the medium of En-dor?

Get It

Saul and the Medium of En-dor (28:3–25)

After Samuel dies, Israel mourns and Saul kicks all the mediums and sorcerers out of the land. Samuel was the last judge of Israel and, attempting to do something good (he hasn't gotten much right), Saul drives out the witches and warlocks. However, when Saul tries to call on the LORD because of the Philistine threat, God did not answer. Saul gets nervous, so he seeks the help of (you guessed it) a spiritual medium. Saul's servants find a woman who lives in En-dor, so Saul visits her and the medium gets her Ouija Board and crystal ball. Okay, not really, but I'm sure the situation got pretty weird. This illustrates Saul's complete

collapse. Not only does he make a law outlawing spiritual mediums, but he breaks his own law! When God is silent, people go to extreme measures to get guidance. Saul has become more and more miserable in the last several chapters and this is the culminating act of his life before he dies in chapter 31.

Continually loving and seeking the LORD, unlike Saul, not only glorifies God, but it will mean peace and joy for our own soul. The medium, per Saul's request, calls up Samuel. As he appears, Saul becomes very afraid. Saul complains that the LORD is silent, but Samuel tells Saul what he already knows. "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" (v. 17).

Your group should remember the reason why. If they do not, Samuel tells Saul once again in verse 18: "Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD and did not carry out His fierce wrath against Amalek." Saul is beside himself, falling to the ground weak and helpless. Saul was a miserable, lonely, obsessed man because he didn't seek the LORD's face. God's mercy on those who love Him should amaze your group. Help them come to see how the opposite is present in Saul's life and that we should hate every grievous way in us that opposes God's commands.²

7. Our text begins by telling us that Samuel is dead. What is it about the death of a leader or mentor in our lives that can cause us to feel isolated or alone?

When Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him: *Saul is in a terrible place. The Philistines threaten Israel, Saul's courage has failed him, and now God is silent when Saul seeks Him. Saul hoped that God would speak to him through **dreams**, but God was silent. He hoped God would speak to him through the **Urim**³ but God was silent. He wanted to hear from God through the **prophets**, but God would not talk to Saul.⁴*

8. Saul initially sought the Lord in his time of need, but after numerous attempts to hear from the LORD had failed, he sought to resolve his trouble through other means. What are we to do when God is silent?

²<http://crupressgreen.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/divinehelp.pdf>

³ The Urim ("lights") and Thummim ("perfections") were gemstones that were carried by the high priest of Israel on the ephod / priestly garments. They were used by the high priest to determine God's will in some situations. Some propose that God would cause the Urim and Thummim to light up in varying patterns to reveal His decision. Others propose that the Urim and Thummim were kept in a pouch and were engraved with symbols identifying yes / no and true / false.

It is unclear whether the Urim and Thummim were on, by, or in the high priest's ephod. No one knows the precise nature of the Urim and Thummim or exactly how they were used. The Bible simply does not give us enough information. References to the Urim and Thummim are rare in the Bible. They are first mentioned in the description of the breastplate of judgment (Exodus 28:30; Leviticus 8:8). When Joshua succeeded Moses as leader over Israel, he was to receive answers from God by means of the Urim through Eleazar the high priest (Numbers 27:21). The Urim and Thummim are next mentioned in Moses' dying blessing upon Levi (Deuteronomy 33:8). The following Scriptures likely also speak of the Urim and Thummim: Joshua 7:14-18; 1 Samuel 14:37-45; and 2 Samuel 21:1. (<http://www.gotquestions.org/urim-thummim.html>)

⁴ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Sa/1Sa_28.cfm

9. Saul sought an answer from the LORD through dreams, Urim, and the prophets. What are some methods (good and not so good) that Christians use to determine God's will?

10. How might living out the truths of James 4:8-9 have changed the circumstances for Saul? What does this passage remind us to do when we are seeking an answer of the Lord?

Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her: *It wasn't easy to find a **medium** in the land of Israel, because Saul had previously put them out of the land. So Saul asks his staff to find him one, and they suggest a woman in the city of **En-dor**.*

*Traditionally, this woman is known as the Witch of En-dor. It may be appropriate to call her a witch, but it is more accurate to call her a **medium** or a necromancer — one who makes contact with the dead. The Hebrew word for **medium** is *owb*, and it has the idea of "mumbling" or speaking with a strange, hollow sound — as if one were "channeling," with a dead person speaking through them. The Hebrew word has in mind the sound the channel makes as they speak. The English word **medium** has in mind the concept of a channel — they stand in between the world of the living and the dead, and communicate between the two worlds.⁵*

11. Saul's actions of seeking a medium were full of hypocrisy. Why is hypocrisy, especially among leaders, so disappointing? How can a leader's hypocrisy affect those whom he leads?

12. How do you feel about Christians consulting mediums, fortune tellers, psychics, horoscopes, Ouija boards, and the like? What experiences if any have you had with these things?

Read the following passages concerning mediums and necromancers.

Leviticus 20:6

"If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.

Leviticus 19:31

"Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.

⁵ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Sa/1Sa_28.cfm

Deuteronomy 18:10-13

There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

13. Why do you think God prohibits His children from these practices?

Saul swore to her by the LORD: *Saul's oath in the name of the LORD reminds us that spiritual jargon means nothing. As certainly **as the LORD lives**, Saul was in complete disobedience and darkness! This is the last time Saul uses the name of the LORD. He uses it to swear to a medium that she will not be punished!*⁶

14. Saul swears "surely as the LORD lives" in verse 10, yet all the while seeks to sidestep God. Why is it that we can be filled with such confidence concerning God in one facet of our lives but not another?

Saul perceived that it was Samuel: *However Samuel appeared, he was visible to both the medium and Saul. This wasn't a "crystal ball" appearance that only the medium could pretend to see. Nor was it a "voice in the dark" that one might encounter in a séance. This was a real appearance of Samuel.*

What is going on here? *This strange incident is controversial, and several different approaches have been used to understand this passage. Here are four of the most commonly suggested possibilities.*

- *Some believe that this was **a hallucination of the medium**. But this doesn't make sense, because it doesn't explain why the medium was so frightened. It doesn't explain why Saul saw Samuel also, and why Samuel spoke to Saul, not to the medium.*
- *Some believe that this was **a deception by the medium**. But this also isn't an adequate explanation, for the same reasons given to the previous suggestion.*
- *Some believe that this was **a demonic impersonation of Samuel**. It is possible that the medium, with her occult powers, summoned a demonic spirit that deceived both her and Saul. But this suggestion is also inadequate, because it does not speak to the issue of motive. After all, what advantage does Satan gain by "Samuel's" words to Saul?*

⁶ https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Sa/1Sa_28.cfm

- *Some believe that this was **a genuine (but strange) appearance of Samuel**. This is the best explanation, because it is supported by the reaction of the medium, who got more than she bargained for. It is also supported by the truth of what Samuel said (and the text says that Samuel said it). Some may say that it is impossible for Samuel to reappear in some way, coming from the world beyond back to this world. But Moses and Elijah also came from the world beyond back to this world when they appeared with Jesus at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).⁷*

15. God enabled Samuel to enter the land of the living after being deceased. How do you think this was possible? Why might God have allowed this to take place?

16. Why do you think the medium at En-dor was shocked when Samuel appeared?

17. How does Samuel's message to Saul help us to see that God's hand may be in this apparition?

1 Chronicles 10:13-14

So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the Lord, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

18. In what ways are we to seek guidance from the Lord? When have you had to wait on an answer from Him?

19. Saul believed in the LORD's existence, but his faith lacked humility and obedience. Why are these essential qualities of real faith?

⁷https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/guzik_david/StudyGuide_1Sa/1Sa_28.cfm