

Witches!

1 Samuel 28

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me to 1 Samuel chapter 28, 1 Samuel chapter 28. We were looking last week at chapter 27 and into the first couple of verses of chapter 28. You will remember that David has been spending the last sixteen months among the Philistines as a provocateur, as a double agent, more or less. He has been telling king Achish that he has been engaging in predatory incursions in southern Judah when in actual fact he has been slaying Canaanites in accordance I think with the holy war prerogatives of the books of Moses. But David may now in the story have overplayed his hand. He has now been made the chief body guard of king Achish and Achish has declared war on Israel. And at that cliff hanging moment — Will David fight against his own people? — the story ended in verse 2 of chapter 28.

Now if you think this story writer is going to tell you what did David do, he's not going to tell you tonight. You're going to have to wait until chapter 29 before we discover the answer to that question. This is like one of those episodes that isn't, "To be continued next week." It's like the end of the season and it's "To be continued in the fall." We have to wait a long time.

And if you think there were problems in David's camp there are even more problems in Saul's camp. Now before we begin to read the passage let's look to God in prayer.

Father as we turn now again to the Scriptures, You wrote them, You caused them to be written by the finger of God and we pray for the blessing of the Spirit, the illumination of the Spirit, that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Verse 3 of 1 Samuel chapter 28 — this is God's holy and inerrant Word:

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. The Philistines assembled and came and encamped at Shunem. And Saul gathered all Israel, and they encamped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. 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 Endor."

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." 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?" But Saul swore to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." 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." 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." 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.

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." And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy? 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. 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. 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."

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. 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. 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." 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 a bed. Now the woman had a fattened calf in the house, and she quickly killed it, and she took flower

and kneaded it and baked unleavened bread out of it, and she put it before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Well so far, God's holy and inerrant Word.

Necromancy, wizardry, was condemned by God's law. You'll find it in Deuteronomy 18 and in other places. I'm reading from the 2007 edition of the ESV. A change took place, you know the Bible translators are always tinkering, and the ESV changed its rendition of that prohibition in Deuteronomy 18 from the 2001 edition to the 2007 edition. The 2001 edition said that necromancy and wizardry was forbidden. Well, the 2007 edition says mediums or necromancers or one who inquires of the dead is forbidden, omitting the word wizard. That makes Gandalf and Dumbledore all right and Saruman and Voldemort bad. I guess that was something that lay behind that change in translation. (laughter)

Now I want to say three things. Don't ever think that the Bible writers, I mean the human writers, let alone God the Holy Spirit — don't ever think that the Bible writers are not as wise and clever as you are because if you see problems in this passage don't jump to the conclusion that the author of the text didn't see these problems. There are problems galore in this passage. Was it really Samuel? — that being the chief among them. It's doubtful that you or I have ever seen a problem that didn't occur to the Bible writers themselves.

Now let me put that in a different way. The text, the text raises no problem. When you read this text you don't get a sense that the writer is full of angst about what he is writing. This is what happened. This is what happened. Samuel spoke to Saul, dead Samuel spoke to Saul. That's what the text says. The text doesn't tell us how. Did this woman really have powers to raise Samuel from the dead? She seems to be as surprised as Oda Mae was in *Ghost* when Sam begins to speak to her. She screams, suggesting perhaps that in the past all that she had managed to do was fakery and she was shocked out of her skin when something actually happened. God can do this. God can bring Samuel back and speak to Saul. Do you not believe that? Because if you don't believe that you've got huge problems when Moses and Elijah come back and speak to Jesus because they too were equally dead.

Strange this passage is, but you know, Samuel's life as a prophet began just like this. In 1 Samuel 3 — it's a year ago now — but you remember. In the temple, in Shiloh, God calls him three times and God speaks to him and says to him, "This is what you must prophecy. You must prophesy against the house of Eli." Within days Eli and his sons are dead. And now at the end, no after the end of his life, he's called back once more and God says to him, "This is what you must prophesy, that Saul and his sons are going to die." And the next morning in the next chapter Saul and his sons are dead.

I. If you reject God's word He will take it away from you.

I want us to see three truths in this passage. The first of which is this: that if you reject God's Word, He will take it away from you. If you reject God's Word He'll take it away from you. Samuel is dead. What's the writer telling us? He's saying that the mouthpiece through which God spoke to His people, to Saul in particular, is dead. The voice of God that Saul would seek at this period in the history of redemption. That voice is no longer there. He has no access to the Word of God, the direct Word of God. There were other methods that Saul attempted. Dreams, in this period of history, God spoke through dreams. God could speak through the urim and thummim that were kept in the ephod. You remember Abiathar was the sole survivor of the slaughter of the priests at Nob and in that ephod, the priestly garment, were the urim and thummim, two stones — one said “yes” on the one side and “no” on the other. If there were two “yeses” it was “yes” and if it was two “noes” it was “no.” If it was a “yes” and a “no” it was undecided. But he has no access to that because Abiathar is with David. Saul has no access to the Word of God because Saul has rejected the Word of God. He has rejected Samuel's prophecy and Saul is afraid. The Philistines, in great number — is David among them? — we don't know. That's another cliff hanging story. But the Philistines are coming and Saul needs guidance. What is he to do? And God is silent. God does not speak to Saul.

Do you understand what's happening here? God has given him over. He's given him over to a reprobate mind. He's given Saul over to believe the lie. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 1. He's exchanged the truth of God for a lie. It is so evident in this passage. Where is he going? He's going to a witch! He can't go to a prophet, he can't go to God's Word because God isn't speaking to him and he's exchanged the truth of God for a lie. He has no access to the truth. The whole of Saul's life has become a lie.

There was an incident in the 1620s, a man by the name of John Rogers in a town called Dedham in England — a Puritan, an early Puritan preacher. He begins to impersonate God in the middle of his sermon. He's pretending to be God and he's speaking to a congregation of about 500 people and he's reprimanding them, that they had the Bible, they had God's Word, but then they've neglected God's Word. They haven't used it, they haven't loved it, they haven't studied it, they haven't remembered it, and this huge pulpit Bible — you have to imagine it on a cushion on a pulpit — and still impersonating God he lifts this Bible and begins to carry it out of the building. And then he turns. This is a Puritan preacher. And now he begins to impersonate the congregation and he's talking to God and he gets down on his knees and he pleads, “Kill our children! Burn our houses! Take away our goods but don't take the Bible away from us!”

Do you love the Bible like that? Do you treasure it like that? Saul has no Bible. Saul has no access to the Word of God. God isn't speaking to him. God has

given to us a book, sixty-six books, but one book, and all of from Genesis to Revelation, all of it is God's holy, infallible Word able to make us wise unto salvation. Treasure it, love it, study it. Does it lie on a shelf from Sunday to Sunday, unread, unopened? Bring it to church with you. Bring your own Bible to church with you, a well-used thumbed Bible with sticky notes in it. Treasure your Bible. Saul is a paradigm of what happens when God removes His Word, when God removes His voice. If you reject, if you reject God's Word, God will take it away from you. God will take it away from you. That's what this passage is teaching.

II. If you reject God, all you have left is Satan.

Secondly it's teaching in verses 7 through 14 it's teaching that if you reject God all you have left is Satan. If you reject God all you have left is Satan. Saul has believed the lie. This is Paul's explanation of Saul, I think. He's given him over to a reprobate mind. He's exchanged the truth of God for a lie. He's believed the liar's voice. And who is the liar? Satan, because he's a liar from the very beginning.

Now, do you notice in verse 3 and then again in verse 9 we're told that Saul had put the mediums and necromancers out of the land. He's about to go and consult one but he has put them out of the land. Do you see the irony? Do you see now some of the double-talk, the hypocrisy that sin gets itself into? You know, you say one thing and you practice another. You say one thing and practice another. You ban mediums and necromancy because that's what God's law says and then you turn to them yourself. It's hypocrisy. As we've been reading this week, sadly and tragically because that's what sin is. You stand against homosexuality and then you take someone from rentaboy.com to Europe for a week. It's hypocrisy. It's a double-standard. It's the talk of the evil one. That's where sin gets us into. That's where sin always leads us, into hypocrisy, into double-talk. He disguises himself.

Do you now how the woman says to him, "Don't you know that Saul has banned this and you're getting me into trouble?" Don't you think the writer is smiling as he's writing this story, that Saul has been caught by his own word? His own word is condemning him. Do you notice it just gets worse? He swears to this woman that no harm will come to her and he swears — look at the passage — and he swears in the name of the Lord, verse 10 — "As the Lord" — look at the capital letters. It's the covenant name of the Lord. It's Yahweh. He's using God's covenant name and he's swearing. He's talking to the devil. He's talking to wickedness and he's swearing in the name of God and you want to shake him and say, "Don't you see the hypocrisy?" When Samuel appears, and he appears it seems, to the woman rather than to Saul, it's the woman that describes to Saul what she sees. And she's scared out of her wits because it looks as though, it looks as though nothing like this has even happened to her before. I mean she got money just because she said she could speak to these people. I mean you've

seen Oda Mae. It's a parallel. Don't feel sorry for Saul.

You know, I suppose you saw the title and you thought I was going to preach about witches. I'm not going to preach about witches. Do you know who the evil person is in this chapter? It's not the witch. Actually, she comes out pretty good in this chapter. The evil wicked person in this chapter is Saul. Don't feel sorry for Saul. Saul has rejected God. He has said "No, no, no, no," throughout his life. Saul is reaping what he has sowed. When you don't have access to — what was Ligon telling us this morning? Abba — it's the most precious word that you can ever utter — My Father in heaven. You call the God of the universe who made this gigantic, indescribably complex universe and you come and you say, "Father." Saul has no access to that and when you don't have access to that and you're as frightened as Saul is, you do desperate things.

Do you see what's going on here? There's a conflict going on here. In all of these stories there's a conflict. It's a conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. There's a conflict between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness. And in chapter 28 of 1 Samuel we're right in the middle of the kingdom of darkness. This is like, it's like the Garden of Eden and the serpent is speaking here and the serpent is saying, "Trust in me. Trust in me." And Saul is captivated by it. He's caught in the kingdom of darkness. Now that conflict, that conflict takes place throughout history. Jesus, in Caesarea Philippi said, "I build My church in enemy occupied territory but the gates of hell will not prevail against it."

This is an attempt, in part, of the gates of hell, but you see, who is it who's speaking here? I mean who is really speaking? Samuel is speaking and Samuel is speaking God's word. You know, that's a delicious thing about this chapter because Saul is going into wickedness, he's going into witchcraft, and the spirit of Samuel somehow has appeared to this woman because God can do that. And when Samuel speaks, it's the word of God. You know, Saul wants the word of God. "Okay Saul, okay. I'll give you the word of God. I'll give you the word of God." And what is that word? It's the same old word he's heard before. It's exactly the same word you heard in 1 Samuel 15, the last time that Saul spoke to Samuel this was the word that he gave to him. "God has abandoned you. God has forsaken you."

Now, you're saying, you're saying this isn't fair. Why doesn't Samuel preach the Gospel to Saul? Why doesn't Samuel preach the Gospel to Saul? Because Saul doesn't want to hear the Gospel, because Saul only wants to hear the lie, because the only thing that's coming out of Samuel's heart is "no, no, no." If you reject God all you have is Satan, that's all you have is Satan, and Satan will make you believe the lie every time.

III. If you reject God, He will reject you.

There's a third thing here. If you reject God, if you reject His Word He'll take it away from you, if you reject God all you have is Satan, if you reject God He will reject you. You know, that's the most important lesson of this chapter. I know I haven't answered all of your questions about witches and about this spirit of Samuel and how did it all work and you know what about Ouija boards and all that séances and all that stuff, but that's not what this chapter is really about. This chapter is about the sovereignty of God, the triumph of His kingdom over the kingdom of darkness, and it's about this for Saul — Saul, you want to hear God's word? This is it: "Tomorrow you and your sons are going to die. Tomorrow they are dead." God speaks in the midst of this darkness. There's a really strange moment here. Saul has been fasting. Who knows why he's been fasting when he's supposedly been preparing for battle, but he's been fasting and he's collapsed, he's fainted on the ground. I guess if he'd seen the spirit of Samuel or at least been told that it was there you might faint too, but Saul has fainted on the ground. And then it's surreal isn't it? There's a meal. There's a meal. Put yourself there. You go to this witch and this place called Endor with two of your friends in disguise, and the spirit of Samuel has been raised and he's speaking to you, and then he tells you you're going to die tomorrow and your children, and then you say, "I'm starving!" What is this? She kills a fatted calf. She feeds him. And three times in the passage it says, "It was night. It was night."

What's it remind you of? Yeah, the Last Supper and Judas and a word in the gospel of John that says, "After he has eaten the morsel he went out and it was night." This is like a preview of Judas. That's what this passage is about. It's like a preview of Judas whose heart had been sold to the devil. My dear friends, here's the lesson: if you reject God, He will reject you.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this solemn word. We pray that You would hide it now in our hearts for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

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