

November 3

Scriptures: Read 1 Samuel 28 and 29

Key Verse: “I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore...” (1 Samuel 28:15)

Overview

The time came when the Philistines felt themselves strong enough to unite and make a large-scale war against all the Israelites. Achish, the king of Gath, one of the five major Philistine city-states, had welcomed David and shown him kindness by giving him refuge from Saul. He considered David, and his army allies with him, against their mutual enemy, Saul, as David led him to believe (27:8-12). He had every right, therefore, to request David's assistance and, with total faith in David, he asked him to join in the invasion of Israel. David's response was ambiguous, and his well chosen words did not promise his help to Achish in the war against Israel, they only indicated that he was capable (28:2).

David was obliged to assemble his army and go to the Philistine camp. Being fully aware that David would not attack Israel, his army must have waited anxiously to hear what David was going to do in this potentially embarrassing and dangerous situation. David, no doubt, was waiting on God, and the answer to this problem came when the other Philistine rulers refused to allow him to go with them into battle. They did not trust him and feared he might turn on them to show his allegiance with Israel (29:4). This must have come as a great relief for David and an answer to prayer.

God had responded to help David out of his problem, but Saul tried in vain to hear from God. It was clear that God was with David, His chosen one, and had rejected Saul and taken His Spirit from him because he was rebellious (15:26; 16:14). With great fear of the impending battle, Saul sought to know the plan of action he should take and the outcome of the battle. God gave him no answer in the conventional and accepted methods of revelation (28:6; for information on “Urim”, Exodus 28:29-30, and comments on Exodus 28). He did not inquire of the Lord with a pure heart, nor did he repent of his wicked ways. He later spoke words indicating the most horrible and frightening situation in which to be: “God has departed from me” (28:15). It was Saul, however, who first rejected God.

In chapter 28, we read once again of Samuel's death (28:3a; 25:1). This is not a useless and misplaced repetition, but is written here for a purpose. The prophet Samuel had once been Saul's friend and advisor, through whom he heard from God. It was probably because of Samuel's words and influence that Saul had at one time, in obedience to God, “put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land” (28:3b; Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:10-12); here we see that Saul, panic-stricken and in desperation, fell to such a depth that he even sought to consult one.

For many years, Saul had ignored God's prophet Samuel and ruled as he alone desired, yet now that Samuel was dead, he tried as a last resort to communicate with him through a medium! Samuel did indeed appear but not through any magic or power of the medium, it was a miracle of

God. The witch screamed in fear, for she must have known that what occurred was beyond her control and was the work of God. Samuel's words were truthful, yet it would have been better for Saul's psychological state had he never heard them. The pronouncement of both Israel's defeat and the impending death of Saul and his sons deaths was too much for him to bear. Hearing these shocking words of doom, and being in a weak physical condition (from fasting and making a perilous 14 kilometer nighttime journey), Saul fell over and fainted (28:20).

Saul's misery all stemmed from his rebellion against God. If he had been truly repentant, God would have forgiven and accepted him. God is merciful and wants to forgive us our sins, if we but ask with a sincere and contrite heart. We need not fear impending doom, but can rest assured of peace both here and in eternity.

Prayer

Lord, we praise You for Your mercy and willingness to forgive us when we ask with a repentant heart. Please keep us in surrender to You, humble and respectful to those whom You have placed in office as you did Samuel. You said that rebellion is the same as the sin of witchcraft. Deliver us, O God.