

Personal Application

Maurice C Burrell and J Stafford Wright in *Some Modern Faiths* (IVP 1983 pp 107-108) suggest there are three reasons for the biblical ban on consulting spiritists and mediums:

- Contact with spirits easily becomes a substitute for Christian experience of prayer and trusting in God.
- Many of the apparent messages from the departed may in fact be drawn from the memories of the bereaved through the heightened sensitivity of the medium.
- The further people go into spiritism the further they are drawn away from Christian truths. For example Jesus is seen as "a son of God as we are all sons of God." There is a subsequent loss of belief in the Trinity and the significance of the atoning death of Jesus is denied. The person and the work of the Holy Spirit gets confused.

Why are so-called "modern" people still so gullible about spiritual things?

How might you respond to someone who says they do or have done something "spiritual" which you think is questionable eg consults a horoscope, a fortune teller, a palm reader, Tarot cards, a séance, ouija board etc.

Pray

This study has been written to accompany a sermon series at St Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn. It is written for small group and personal study. It is meant as a resource so feel free to select the parts that are most useful to you or your group. It is advised that you at least do the section "Getting Inside the Passage," some parts of "Personal Application" and "Pray." The section "Going Further" will take you further into the 1 Samuel and the Bible as a whole.

With acknowledgement and thanks to Rev. Peter MacPherson
St Alfred's Nth Blackburn



1 Samuel 28 Small Group Study Material

Witchcraft

Context

David had fled Israel to live as a fugitive among the Philistines. He is now caught in his own deceit and may have to fight against his own people. Saul is coming to the end of his kingship. He must face the Philistines without Samuel, David or indeed God. He is desperate for guidance and breaks the Old Testament law about not consulting the dead. He receives a stinging prophetic denunciation consistent with Samuel's earlier rebukes (see chapters 13 & 15). There is a mood of desperation, fear and darkness in this passage. Ironically it is the "witch of Endor" who performs a last act of grace for Saul.

Getting Inside the Passage

1-2 What is the dilemma that David is in?

3-7 God's silence.

Why does God not speak to Saul? v.6 (Contrast 30:7 where God guides David in battle).

Note the different ways Saul expected God to speak:

Dreams eg Gen. 20:3-6; 1Kgs. 3:5; Matt. 2:12-13

Urim and Thummim: Exod. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21;
Deut. 33:8; Ezra 2:63; 1Sam 14:36-42

Prophet: Samuel is dead; Gad was advising David 22:5, 25:5-19;
the other "prophets" could get no answer from Yahweh.

Remember that Samuel had already told Saul that he would lose the kingdom 13:13-14, 15:28.

Note how Saul's attitudes to "spiritists and mediums" have changed vv 3 and 7.

8-14 Saul and the woman

Saul goes in disguise so that 1) he can get through the Philistine lines incognito,

2) the woman wouldn't recognize him. The darkness symbolically heightens what he is doing and the state of his soul.

What do you think of the woman?

Note the irony of Saul swearing by Yahweh.

15-20 Saul and Samuel

Why does Saul come to Samuel?

Does Samuel tell Saul anything he doesn't already know? (look back at chapters 13 & 15)

Why is Saul filled with fear?

21-25 Saul's last experience of grace.

What do you think of the woman now?

What do you think of Saul?

What does this whole incident in chapter 28 tell you about God?

Going Further

A spiritist or medium is someone who claims to be able to communicate with the dead. There is a presumption that the spirit of the dead person can predict the future. The Bible suggests that this is possible but that it is wrong and God's people should have nothing to do with it.

The Old Testament law is clear:

Lev. 20:27 "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads."

Deut 18:10-13 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. 13 You must be blameless before the LORD your God.

Also see Lev. 19:31; Lev. 20:6; 2 Kgs. 21:6; 2Kgs. 23:24; 2Chr. 33:6; Isa. 8:19; Isa. 19:3; Jer. 27:9

In the New Testament a girl with a spirit that allowed her to predict the future (and thereby make lots of money) was exorcised by Paul (Acts 16:16-18). The New Testament treats death as the end point of life but says that we will all be raised and those who have put their faith in Christ will live forever with him (1 Cor 15; 1 Thess 4). While we are alive we are guided by the Holy Spirit not by any other spirits. All spirits are to be tested (1 John 4:1-3)

Look at 1 Chronicles to see how seriously God judged what Saul did:

1 Chron. 10:13-14 Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD; he did not keep the word of the LORD and even consulted a medium for guidance, 14 and did not inquire of the LORD. So the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.