

1 SAMUEL 28:1-25
SAVED? OR LOST?
SAUL: CAN A SAVED PERSON DABBLE IN THE OCCULT?

“In those days the Philistines gathered their troops for war in order to fight Israel. Achish said to David, ‘You should fully understand that you and your men must go with me into the battle.’ David replied to Achish, ‘That being the case, you will come to know what your servant can do!’ Achish said to David, ‘Then I will make you my bodyguard from now on.’

“Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented over him and had buried him in Ramah, his hometown. In the meantime, Saul had removed the mediums and magicians from the land. The Philistines assembled; they came and camped at Shunem. Saul mustered all Israel and camped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was absolutely terrified. So Saul inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him—not by dreams nor by Urim nor by the prophets. So Saul instructed his servants, ‘Find me a woman who is a medium, so that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ His servants replied to him, ‘There is a woman who is a medium in En-dor.’

“So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothing and left, accompanied by two of his men. They came to the woman at night and said, ‘Use your ritual pit to conjure up for me the one I tell you.’

“But the woman said to him, ‘Look, you are aware of what Saul has done; he has removed the mediums and magicians from the land! Why are you trapping me so you can put me to death?’ But Saul swore an oath to her by the LORD, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, you will not incur guilt in this matter!’ The woman replied, ‘Who is it that I should bring up for you?’ He said, ‘Bring up for me Samuel.’

“When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out loudly. The woman said to Saul, ‘Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!’ The king said to her, ‘Don’t be afraid! What have you seen?’ The woman replied to Saul, ‘I have seen one like a god coming up from the ground!’ He said to her, ‘What about his appearance?’ She said, ‘An old man is coming up! He is wrapped in a robe!’

“Then Saul realized it was Samuel, and he bowed his face toward the ground and kneeled down. Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’ Saul replied, ‘I am terribly troubled! The Philistines are fighting against me and God has turned away from me. He does not answer me—not by the prophets nor by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what I should do.’

“Samuel said, ‘Why are you asking me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and has become your enemy? The LORD has done exactly as I prophesied! The LORD has torn the kingdom from your hand and has given it to your neighbor David! Since you did not obey the LORD and did not carry out his fierce anger against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this thing to you today. The LORD will hand you and Israel over to the Philistines! Tomorrow both you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand the army of Israel over to the Philistines!’

“Saul quickly fell full length on the ground and was very afraid because of Samuel’s words. He was completely drained of energy, not having eaten anything all that day and night. When the woman came to Saul and saw how terrified he was, she said to him, ‘Your servant has done what you asked. I took my life into my own hands and did what you told me. Now it’s

your turn to listen to your servant! Let me set before you a bit of bread so that you can eat. When you regain your strength, you can go on your way.’

“But he refused, saying, ‘I won’t eat!’ Both his servants and the woman urged him to eat, so he gave in. He got up from the ground and sat down on the bed. Now the woman had a well-fed calf at her home that she quickly slaughtered. Taking some flour, she kneaded bread and baked it without leaven. She brought it to Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they arose and left that same night.”¹

Curiosity is innate to the human condition. The advances of science are driven by desire to discover what makes things work, to peer into the unknown, to think the thoughts of God after Him. Curiosity about what lies ahead drives the study of eschatology—we want to know what God will do in the future. Curiosity, the desire to know, is a powerful and positive means for innovation. However, when that longing to know steps out of its lane and appeals to the dark denizens of the unseen world for knowledge, we may be assured that no good can result. To speak to the dead is to join the dead.

The wise man has stated,

“It is the glory of God to conceal things,
but the glory of kings is to search things out.”

[**PROVERBS 25:2**]

These words give explicit permission to explore what God has hidden. However, the same words convey an implicit warning not to explore what is forbidden. Desperation can drive people to act in a way that is destructive, even attempting to bargain with demonic powers to secure an advantage of knowing what lies ahead. An example of this desperation is provided in the life of Saul, the first king of the United Kingdom of Israel.

DAVID’S DILEMMA — David had been pursued by Saul until he despaired of life. Though he had gathered about him a band of warriors that were being moulded into an effective army, David was in constant fear for his life. He had spared Saul’s life on several occasions. After a final time when he had spared the king’s life, fear at last overwhelmed the young warrior. He said in his heart, “Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand” [**1 SAMUEL 27:1**]. Together with his six hundred men, David fled to the Philistines, living with Achish [see **1 SAMUEL 27:2-7**].

The text opens with David still living with Achish [see **1 SAMUEL 28:1, 2**]; he would live with the Philistines for a year and four months [**1 SAMUEL 27:7**]. The Philistines were preparing for war with Israel and Achish said that David and his men were to join in battle against Saul. David blustered about his loyalty to Achish, but it is obvious that he is in a dilemma. David cannot afford to fight against Saul, for that would vindicate Saul in his argument that David was a traitor. It would mean the end of any possibility that David could ever be king over Israel; if he fought against Israel, he would be forever discredited as rightful claimant to the throne. On the other hand, he could not side with Israel as that would jeopardise his relationship with Achish. David was in a precarious position; he had no possibility of delivering himself from the dilemma.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

At this point, the narrative focuses on Saul's actions as he faces the prospect of battle with the Philistines. We won't learn how David resolved the dangerous situation he faced. Let's jump ahead one chapter to settle in our minds what happened to deliver David from the peril he faced. "Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines said, 'What are these Hebrews doing here?' And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, 'Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.' But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, 'Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,

"Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?"

"Then Achish called David and said to him, 'As the LORD lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.' And David said to Achish, 'But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?' And Achish answered David and said, 'I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, "He shall not go up with us to the battle." Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light.' So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel" [2 SAMUEL 29:1-11].

David faced a daunting situation had he continued into battle with the Philistines. Though the text does not specifically name God as the One delivering David, it is obvious to the worshipper of the Living God that David was delivered by divine mercy. The tension between Saul and David is not enough to overcome the concern the Philistine lords had with a man who was noted for striking down "ten thousands" of their fellow Philistines. Achish had at first been concerned about David's loyalty. Earlier, David had fled to Achish, only to become alarmed that he might be killed. So, he pretended that he was insane in order to escape. With the passage of time, David was driven back to Gath where he managed to find acceptance by Achish. However, the acceptance he found from this king did not transfer to the remainder of the Philistine lords.

Though rejected by the Philistine lords, Achish dismisses David with this testimony, "I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day" [2 SAMUEL 29:6]. This is somewhat stunning since David had continually deceived Achish throughout the time he stayed in Gath. David and his men had made multiples raids against multiple peoples. He was ruthless in his attacks, leaving neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath. Thus, the divine testimony is, "Achish trusted David, thinking, 'He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore, he shall always be my servant'" [2 SAMUEL 27:12].

SEEKING ANSWERS — It is time to focus again on Saul. Several questions are raised by the divine account. Was Saul saved? What is necessary to be accepted by the LORD? If he was saved, is it actually possible for a saved individual to communicate with the dead? Did Saul commit a sin so heinous that he could not be saved? Did he actually speak with Samuel? All these questions arise quite naturally from the narrative before us. The answers merit our study. Looking back to the incident when Israel built a golden calf while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments, Paul cautions, “These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” [**1 CORINTHIANS 10:11**]. In light of this admonition, consider that the account before us is written for our instruction.

God was quite definite in prohibiting His people from consulting the occult. Among the sins for which the Canaanites were dispossessed was the practise of the dark arts. Throughout the eighteenth chapter of Leviticus, God has warned against what we rightly recognise as sexual perversions. The list is long and unquestionably specific—sexual relations with close relatives; incest; sexual relations with siblings; polygamy; adultery; slaughter of the innocent such as killing the unborn by abortion; homosexuality; bestiality. God warned Israel, and God warns us, “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God” [**LEVITICUS 18:24-30**; see also **DEUTERONOMY 12:29-31**].

Soon after these words were written, God, through Moses, specifically commanded His people concerning occult practises, “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; to not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God” [**LEVITICUS 19:31**].

Shortly after this command was written, God instructed Moses to write, “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. Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God” [**LEVITICUS 20:6, 7**].

If, somehow, these warnings were not sufficiently clear, Moses would add this warning, “A man or woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them” [**LEVITICUS 20:27**].

In the second recitation of the Law, the Book we know as Deuteronomy, God warned, “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. 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, for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this” [**DEUTERONOMY 18:9-14**]. All these sins are associated as abominations before the LORD.

Much later in Israel's history, speaking through Isaiah, God warns those who seek to please Him, "When they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness" [ISAIAH 8:19-22].

Until the end of this age, God stands opposed to witchcraft, sorcery, the occult arts. Revealing who is excluded from the heavenly city, God warns, "As for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur which is the second death" [REVELATION 21:8]. Make no mistake, Ouija boards, witchcraft, black magic or white magic, fortune telling and necromancy are alike condemned by God. The individual who dabbles in the occult is playing with death—they open themselves to the deceit of demonic powers. I say this by way of warning to the people of God; God is quite clear that all these abominations—including occult practises—means that the practitioners are engaging in worship of pagan gods [see DEUTERONOMY 12:29-31],

In light of God's specific proscription, focus attention on the first king of the United Kingdom. Saul had sinned egregiously and repeatedly against the LORD God. God did appoint him to be king over Israel. Anointed by Samuel, "God gave him another heart" [1 SAMUEL 10:9]. Later, Saul was proclaimed king before all Israel [see 1 SAMUEL 10:17 ff.]. After this, Saul was mighty in battle; however, having secured his reign, he dishonoured the Lord by offering sacrifice rather than waiting for Samuel to fulfil his role as prophet [see 1 SAMUEL 13:8-15]. Compounding this act of lèse majesté, Saul lied in a futile attempt to excuse his actions. Samuel sternly rebuked him by warning, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the Lord your God, with which he commanded you. For then the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you" [1 SAMUEL 13:13, 14].

Saul's character deficits were compounded when he made a rash vow that almost cost the life of his son Jonathan though Jonathan had secured a notable victory against the Philistines. Then, despite receiving a command from the LORD Himself to destroy the Amalekites and all their flocks, Saul spared the king of the Amalekites, Agag, and the best specimens of the flocks. Then, Saul set up a monument to himself [see 1 SAMUEL 15:12]! The LORD then spoke to Samuel, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments" [1 SAMUEL 15:11].

The dramatic confrontation between Samuel and Saul is recorded in chapter fifteen. It will be profitable for us to refresh our memories by reading the account provided in the Word. "Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, 'Blessed be you to the Lord. I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' And Samuel said, 'What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?' Saul said, 'They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the Lord your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.' Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night.' And he said to him, 'Speak.'

“And Samuel said, ‘Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, “Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.” Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?’ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.’” And Samuel said,

““Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has also rejected you from being king.””

[2 SAMUEL 15:13-23]

The remainder of the Book of First Samuel recounts events leading up to the anticipated battle that is described in the text. The progressive madness of the first king of the United Kingdom is recited in detail. He is alternately terrified by and bold against the Philistines. His boldness flows more from the brave warriors gathered to his army than from his leadership. He welcomes deliverance wrought by a shepherd boy and then invests the capital of office trying to murder him. David marries Saul’s daughter as result of a royal scheme gone awry. Saul had intended that David would be killed by the hand of the Philistines in a foolish attempt to gather one hundred foreskins from Philistine warriors. Obviously, no Philistine would willingly donate his foreskins to an enemy, so it would be necessary for David to slay one hundred Philistines in battle before desecrating their bodies after death. After repeated attempts to murder a loyal subject recognised as a leader of the army, the king attempted to murder David while he slept in his own bed, driving him away as a fugitive. Again and again Saul pursued David, who was repeatedly and mercifully delivered from death by the God’s merciful intervention.

Samuel had died and was buried in Ramah. Acting on Samuel’s guidance, Saul had banned necromancers and mediums from the land. Then, the Philistines gathered for battle. Saul, as had been increasingly evident, was indecisive about how to prepare for battle. Samuel was no longer available to provide guidance. Saul attempted to act like one committed to following the LORD; thus, he went through the motions of inquiring of the LORD. However, “the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim or by the prophets” [1 SAMUEL 28:6]. Samuel had rejected Saul [see 1 SAMUEL 15:35]. God, also was silent. And Saul was increasingly desperate for divine guidance.

Before you castigate Saul for wanting to know how to respond to the crisis, recall your own response to challenges. When livelihood, or treasured relationships, or even health is threatened, we are often faced with a dilemma. Faced with trials, we often equivocate. Saul was not acting all that differently from how many Christians may act when the crunch comes. Remember, in time of crisis we exhibit the behaviour in which we have trained ourselves.

Like a man facing the diagnosis of a terminal disease, Saul grasped for any possible help. He was willing to gamble away any possibility of divine help by seeking the most severely condemned source of help in order to get answers to the challenges facing him. He was frantic. When the religion on which he had relied failed, he would go wherever an answer might be found. Morally exhausted, his wantonness had at last caught up to him and Saul made a choice that would prove extremely costly, both for him and for the kingdom.

Turning to his servants, Saul demanded, “Seek out for me a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her” [1 SAMUEL 28:7]. I find it somewhat disconcerting that the servants did not have to make a search for this individual—they knew precisely where she was and what she did. “Behold, there is a medium at En-dor.” It is equally disturbing that no one cautioned the king. His advisors were responsible to give him sound advice; clearly, they failed the king at this time.

The king disguised himself and went to the woman in En-dor. Saul demands of her, “Divine for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you” [1 SAMUEL 28:8]. The woman demurred, reminding the visitor that mediums and necromancers had been banished from the land. She questioned whether her mysterious visitors might be laying a trap that would result in her death. However, the one who spoke to her reassured her, even swearing by the LORD, “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing” [1 SAMUEL 28:10].

Without a solid doctrinal foundation, Saul was susceptible to searching for answers in all the wrong places. Like a church member who though knowing the rituals of the Faith but without a living relationship with the True and Living God might pay for a psychic reading, Saul wanted answers now! Let me be very clear in warning you. Professed Christians who watch mediums as entertainment, who pay to attend their shows or who consult them for answers do so in defiance of the Living God. Such people are daring God to hold them accountable. Presuming against God can never turn out well for anyone, especially the professed child of God.

RECEIVING THE ANSWER — The woman was apparently assured that the risk of attempting to communicate with the dead was minimal, so she asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” Saul responded, “Bring up Samuel for me” [1 SAMUEL 28:11]. The woman performed her rites, expecting, no doubt, that she would bring up a spirit masquerading as Samuel. The text indicates that the woman was terrified when she actually brought up Samuel. “When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice.” Realising that this was Saul, the king who under Samuel’s guidance had banished all the mediums and necromancers from the land, she cried out, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul” [1 SAMUEL 28:12].

Allaying her fears, Saul asked her to describe what she saw. Obviously, the king was unable to see what she saw. Do mediums actually see the demonic beings that deceive them? The answer is of no importance, mediums dabble in the occult and are thus liable to being deceived. In this instance it appears that the Living God intervened and actually dispatched Samuel to repeat the message he had consistently delivered to the king. Thus, when asked to describe what she saw, the woman responded by describing “An old man ... wrapped in a robe” [1 SAMUEL 28:14]. Realising that it is Samuel, Saul bows deeply.

During the days of his flesh, Samuel was notoriously cantankerous whenever he confronted Saul. In private the prophet wept and pleaded with God; in public he was bold, his words acerbic. Unlike so many ministers in this day, when delivering the mind of God, Saul considered Samuel unaccommodating, unhelpful, incapable of understanding. Samuel surely irritated the king, Saul seemed to quail whenever Samuel spoke; now Saul is appropriately deferential, humbled in the knowledge that Samuel has actually come up from the grave.

“Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” the prophet demanded. Saul’s answer can only be described as pathetic. “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” [1 SAMUEL 28:15].

The prophet’s answer appears haughty, imperious, curt, abrupt; however, the didactic tone reveals that he still speaks for the LORD. His impatience reveals his disdain for the contemptible man who has failed to follow the LORD with his whole heart. Samuel had invested great capital in Saul only to see all his hopes dashed as the king’s flawed character exercised control over his life. “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” [1 SAMUEL 28:16-19].

If God had turned away, why would Saul imagine that Samuel could turn God back? God had spoken quite clearly by Samuel when the aged prophet had confronted the self-willed sovereign, “The Lord sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord” [1 SAMUEL 15:18, 19]? The LORD had had enough of Saul’s disobedience. God, through Samuel on that day, had pronounced the stunning sentence for Saul’s continual disobedience. “The LORD has torn the Kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for He is not a man, that He should have regret” [1 SAMUEL 15:28, 29]. Now, the Prophet iterates the sentence God previously announced, adding the name of the neighbour to whom God was giving the Kingdom. “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” [1 SAMUEL 28:17].

Soon, the king would join Samuel in Sheol. Seven times Samuel invokes the Name of the Living God in his stern response to the king. Look at the reply once again, noting the repeated reference to the LORD. “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” [1 SAMUEL 28:16-19]. How daunting is the pronouncement that this will take place, *tomorrow*.

We are not privy to Samuel’s departure; it is unimportant. What is critical is that the LORD has spoken. Saul appeared to have hoped that past failure would be set aside and that he would be able to continue on; but God did not change. Saul’s execrable disobedience, his craven attempt to excuse his behaviour by blaming his own army, demonstrated that his heart was not committed to honouring God. Like professed Christians who cease following the Lord, who excuse their own pursuit of pleasure at the expense of service to the King and who exalt themselves, Saul had done what he wanted to do rather than obeying the LORD. Following his own desire had led him to this moment of destruction.

Though it is now late in the evening, tomorrow all will come crashing down—the army of Israel, the king’s sons and Saul himself shall all be killed. It is not David who will carry out the sentence of the Lord—it is the Philistines. For years Saul had pursued David, imagining that the younger man threatened his reign. All the while it was Saul himself who was the threat; the kingdom was endangered by the king. When he was at last removed, it would be at the expense of the army of Israel. Saul’s sin would be the cause of sorrow in many homes. Saul had brought disaster upon himself, upon his sons and upon the kingdom through his disobedience.

THE CONSEQUENCES — The remainder of the chapter reveals the shock as Saul is confronted with the consequences of his own perfidy. Throughout his reign he had endeavoured to be known as a worshipper of the LORD God. Was Saul saved? I believe that Saul was saved; God did choose him and appointed him to be the king, suggesting a relationship with the LORD. However, we must realise that divine anointing can never guarantee continued blessing. Saul squandered opportunity, exchanging God’s approval in order to fulfil his own desires. He spared Agag, hoping to appear magnanimous in the eyes of others. He spared the best of the livestock in hopes of enriching himself. In these acts he displeased God. Now, at last, divine justice would be exacted. Longfellow, translating Friedrich von Lagau, has written

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all.”²

The death of Saul is recounted in the final chapter of this book. “The Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, ‘Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.’ But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore, Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them.

“The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days” [**1 SAMUEL 31:1-13**]. Saul died by his own hand. I must believe that his character at last expressed itself in this dreadful act.

² **The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Quotations** (Merriam-Webster, Springfield, MA 1992) 169; Herschel H. Hobbs, **My Favorite Illustrations** (Broadman Press, Nashville, TN 1990) 158

How is it possible that a saved individual would dabble in the occult? The best case scenario is that Saul was disobedient. God does not tolerate disobedience in His children. Someone has said, “God never spans the devil’s kids.” Though they are ultimately judged, they do not experience discipline. Remember the plaint of the Psalmist.

“Truly God is good to Israel,
to those who are pure in heart.
But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,
my steps had nearly slipped.
For I was envious of the arrogant
when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

“For they have no pangs until death;
their bodies are fat and sleek.
They are not in trouble as others are;
they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.
Therefore, pride is their necklace;
violence covers them as a garment.
Their eyes swell out through fatness;
their hearts overflow with follies.
They scoff and speak with malice;
loftily they threaten oppression.
They set their mouths against the heavens,
and their tongue struts through the earth.”

[PSALM 73:1-9]

The Psalmist continues complaining that God isn’t fair, until he pauses and thinks.

“When I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
until I went into the sanctuary of God;
then I discerned their end.”

[PSALM 73:16, 17]

The wicked appear to get away with evil. They can play pagan games with seeming impunity. Not so for the child of God! God does not tolerate wickedness in His own child. God holds us accountable so that we neither ultimately dishonour Him nor injure ourselves.

We know very well the admonition that is written in the Book of Hebrews. “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

‘My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live” [HEBREWS 12:5-9]?

God does discipline His own. He condemns our conscience when we sin. Like “righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked” our righteous soul will be tormented over lawless deeds we witness [see 2 PETER 2:7, 8]. This is God’s mercy, for He is disciplining us as children. Surely this is seen in Saul’s life when a “harmful spirit from God” tormented him [see 1 SAMUEL 16:14, 15].

If we do not respond to God’s discipline, He will take from us that which is displacing love for Him, whether health or loved ones or material things [cf. 1 CORINTHIANS 5:3-5]. God will teach His child what is truly valuable.

If we continue to rebel, God will at last call us home. He will not permit His child to disgrace His Name. This is divine mercy. James writes, “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [JAMES 5:19, 20]. The context is correction of a saint wandering from the way of righteousness.

Even more pointed are the words of the Apostle of Love. “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death” [1 JOHN 5:16, 17].

Saul had reached the point that there was nothing left but extreme mercy. The horrible thing about sin is that others always pay the price for our sin. Achan’s greed required that he would pay the ultimate price, but his sin also condemned his sons and his daughters, his oxen and donkeys and sheep and all that his possessions [see JOSHUA 7:22-26]. Ten spies brought an evil report that discouraged Israel. When God rebuked them and pronounced their punishment, the people attempted to correct their sin by attacking the enemy in their own strength, resulting in defeat before the enemies of the LORD [see NUMBERS 13:25-14:45]. And Saul’s sin cost Israel defeat and the death of numerous brave men. Just so, if you are a Christian who chooses to disobey the Lord, pursuing your desires to the exclusion of doing what is right, know that the cost of your wilful actions will be exacted of you, of your family and even your church family. You do not sin in isolation; judgement will fall on many people because of you.

Professing Christians watch television shows displaying the “abilities” of mediums and practitioners of the dark arts. They imagine this is merely entertainment. However, these people are playing with fire. There are professing Christians who will pay large sums to see a medium put on a show, imagining it is nothing more than entertainment. I warn you as one who seeks your good and God’s glory, you are opening yourself to disaster. The first leading to divine judgement is to treat the evil of the pagans as though it is nothing.

God called us in holiness. The Apostle opens the Letter to the saints in Ephesus, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” [EPHESIANS 1:3, 4]. God called us to be holy. That means that we who are believers must eschew all pagan practises, including even appearing to give approval of the occult arts.

1 SAMUEL 28:1-25

CAN A SAVED PERSON DABBLE IN THE OCCULT?

Remember Peter's warning delivered to the believers of the Diaspora and therefore to us, "As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" [**1 PETER 1:15, 16**]. Let us be holy in all things. Amen.