

# A Scary Ghost Story

---

*1 Sam. 28:3-19*

## INTRODUCTION

- A. Charles Dickens once explained why he never believed in mediums.
  - 1. He once attended a séance and asked the medium to call up his friend, Lindley Murray, a man who was a great scholar and highly intelligent.
    - a. When the supposed spirit came, Dickens asked him if he were really Lindley Murray.
    - b. The spirit replied, "I are."
  - 2. "You are a liar," said Dickens, "because if you were Lindley Murray you would use good grammar."
- B. Mediums, sorcery, and fortune telling is quite popular in our current culture.
  - 1. John Edwards has made speaking with the dead popular through his Crossing Over series, J. K. Rowling has made much money with her Harry Potter series, you can read your horoscope in the daily paper, you can have your palm read at nearly any festival, and on and on we could go.
  - 2. I don't believe for a moment that God approves of such.
    - a. When Paul was preaching in Ephesus, "a number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly" (Acts 19:19) — they understood such was incompatible with Christianity.
    - b. "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Rev. 21 :8).
  - 3. But, on one occasion, God used a medium to teach Saul some vital lessons.
    - a. This morning, we want to look at that ghost story that we might learn those lessons, too.
    - b. We learn **GOD PREDICTS THE FUTURE, GOD PRESERVES HIS WORDS, & GOD PROMISES JUDGMENT.**

## GOD PREDICTS THE FUTURE, v. 3

- A. Samuel was dead and Israel had mourned and buried him — The author reminds the reader of Samuel's death, because that's going to be so important in this narrative.
- B. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.
  - 1. This information is also important for the role it's going to play in the narrative.
  - 2. "Wizards" as the KJV reads is not really a good translation.
    - a. We're not talking about witches and wizards who would attempt to cast spells, but we're talking about those who would talk — or at least claim to talk — to the dead.
    - b. "Medium" far better conveys the idea into modern English.
  - 3. Saul expelled the mediums from Israel.
    - a. I don't pretend to know why Saul took this action.
    - b. If David or Hezekiah or Josiah, a good king, had taken this action, we would rightly laud the expulsion.
      - 1) We would have lauded that expulsion, for God has never approved of witchcraft, sorcery, or attempts to communicate with the dead.
        - a) Moses told the Israelites, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD" (Deut. 8:10-12).

- b) When the author of Kings details the sins of the Northern Kingdom which caused their exile, he wrote, "They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger" (2 Ki. 17:17).
      - 2) But, one of those good kings — David, Hezekiah, Josiah — didn't expel the mediums from Israel.
        - a) Saul, a king who had abandoned walking in God's ways, expelled the mediums.
        - b) Did Saul think that by this action God would restore the kingdom to him? Did he expel them so that he could genuinely do the right thing?
- C. However, I think we know why God didn't want the mediums and spiritists in Israel — God is the One to whom we should turn for the answers of life.
1. Going to a fortune teller, going to a medium, going to a spiritists, and going to any other such individual is an attempt to circumvent God; it is an attempt to learn things God, in his wisdom, hasn't revealed to us, or to side-step God's revelation to learn things on our own.
    - a. Notice what Moses told the Israelites:
      - 1) Deut. 18:14-15.
      - 2) In other words, don't go listening to those who practice divination, you listen to God.
    - b. Notice carefully these words from Isaiah:
      - 1) Is. 8:19-20.
      - 2) In other words, go to God's law to learn what you need to know, don't go to others.
  2. The Israelites had no need to turn to divination or mediums, for God had revealed his will to them.
    - a. God gave Moses the law the Israelites were to follow: "These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess" (Deut. 6:1).
    - b. God also provided the Israelites with prophets who spoke the word of God to them: Samuel was one such prophet- "All Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD" (1 Sam. 3:20).
    - c. As we see in our text, God had also given the Israelites the Urim and Thumrnim.
      - 1) "Put the Urim and the Thimnmim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD" (Ex. 28:30).
      - 2) Urim and Thummim literally mean "lights" and "perfection."
        - a) What they looked like or how they functioned, we don't know.
        - b) But, Israel used them to make decisions — Joshua was "to stand before Eleazar the priest, who will obtain decisions for him by inquiring of the Urim before the LORD" (Num. 27:21).
  3. What are we going to do?
    - a. God has revealed to us his will in Scripture — "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us" (2 Pet. 1:3).
    - b. Are we going to turn to sources other than God's will to learn what we need "for life and godliness"?
      - 1) I doubt seriously that any of us would turn to mediums or fortune tellers or wizards — at least, I hope we wouldn't.
      - 2) But, will we turn to God and his revelation to light our way, or
        - a) Will we listen to the opinions about Scripture which run in our families and take those opinions as truth?
        - b) Will we listen to whatever any preacher says as truth?
        - c) Will we listen to what our coworkers say as truth?
        - d) Or, will we listen to the Word of God as our only truth'?

## **GOD PRESERVES HIS WORDS, vv. 4-6**

- A. The Philistines and Saul set up their respective camps. When Saul saw the Philistine camp, he was afraid.
1. On the one hand, Saul had every reason to fear — the Philistines were a fierce army, and Saul and Jonathan were going to die in the ensuing battle.
  2. But, on the other hand, God had promised victory for his people.
    - a. Notice what the Lord said to Joshua after he had taken control of Israel following Moses' death: Josh. 1:6-9.
    - b. Saul's fear tells us much of his spiritual state.
      - 1) "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur" (Rev. 21 :8) — Notice the cowardly or fearful are listed first.
      - 2) Notice the conditions God gave Joshua: "Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go" (Josh. 1:7).
      - 3) Saul had not been careful to obey the Lord's instructions; he should, therefore, have been fearful.
- B. Saul inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets, v. 6.
1. Saul knew that he needed divine guidance, and he set out to find that divine guidance, but God was silent.
  2. Don't you think the reason the LORD was silent goes back to Saul's spiritual state?
    - a. We know that God doesn't answer everyone.
      - 1) "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Ps. 66:18).
      - 2) Prov. 1:28-31.
      - 3) Is. 59:1-2.
        - a) We rightly use these verses to speak of the separation from God that sin brings.
        - b) Notice, however, in the context what the consequence of those sins is: "Your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."
    - b. God preserves his words, i.e. he does not answer the prayers of the ungodly.
      - 1) Does God hear your prayers?
      - 2) If you were facing some catastrophe in your life and you needed to call out to the Lord in prayer, do you have any assurance that God would hear those prayers?

## **GOD PROMISES JUDGMENT, vv, 7-19**

- A. When the Lord refused to answer Saul, he found a medium in Endor to bring up Samuel from the dead for him, vv. 7-11.
- B. The woman saw Samuel and she cried out, v. 12-14.
1. That the woman cried out at the top of her lungs when she saw Samuel has caused many to think this woman was a charlatan and had never really seen a ghost before — I tend to agree with that assessment.
  2. Some have wondered whether or not Samuel was really raised from the dead.
    - a. Some tend to think that God just caused some spirit to stand before this woman and Saul, but that the figure was not really Samuel.
    - b. I really think that we ought to take this passage at face value — that God allowed Samuel to appear to the medium and Saul and to speak words of judgment.
- C. Samuel and Saul have a conversation, vv. 15-19.
1. We generally think of the medium doing the talking for the dead — hence, the name "medium" — but here Samuel speaks directly to Saul.
  2. When Samuel asked why he has been disturbed, Saul says, "I am in great distress. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers

me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do," v. 15.

- a. Saul was truly in a predicament — things were going from bad to worse: the Philistine army had gathered against him and God was silent.
  - b. So, he turned to Samuel to know what to do.
3. Samuel said to Saul, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy?", v. 16.
- a. Imagine Saul's predicament- he was once chosen by God to be king of Israel. but now God's turned from him, and he's God's enemy.
  - b. When we reject God, God will wash his hands of us and allow us to do our own thing.
    - 1) "My people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices" (Ps. 81:11-12).
    - 2) Speaking of the Gentile pagans, Paul wrote, "God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another" (Rom. 1:24).
    - 3) How horrible for God to look from heaven and say, "He's a lost cause. He's not going to follow my ways, so I'm going to let him go his own way. I'm going to abandon him and not be involved with him anymore."
  - c. Saul had become God's enemy — No longer was he on God's side, but he was so opposed to the things of God he was considered God's enemy.
  - d. There's a very important lesson here for us — we can become rejected by God and God's enemy.
    - 1) You might be thinking, "Wait a minute, Justin. I'm faithful. I've been faithful for years. That's not going to happen to me."
    - 2) It happened with Saul
      - a) He was chosen by God, but he didn't continue to walk with God, was abandoned by God, and became God's enemy.
      - b) Let us spend time in Scripture and walk with God that we not be abandoned by God nor become his enemy!
4. God was doing what he had promised to do — he had torn the kingdom from Saul's hands and given it to David, vv. 17-19.
- a. The text reminds us why God was taking the kingdom from Saul: Saul did not carry out God's wrath against the Amalekites.
    - 1) When Saul went to war with the Amalekites, the Lord told him, "Go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1 Sam. 15:3).
    - 2) You know that Saul did no such thing — "Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs — everything that was good" (1 Sam. 15:9).
    - 3) The Lord through Samuel told Saul, "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king" (1 Sam. 15:23).
  - b. Here, Samuel says, "Saul, remember that word of the Lord I spoke to you when you didn't destroy the Amalekites? God's going to fulfill that word." And, he did — Saul and Jonathan died at the hands of the Philistines, just as Samuel said here.
  - c. There's a vital lesson for us here: God keeps his promises.
    - 1) God is greatly faithful.
      - a) "Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses" (1 Ki. 8:56).
      - b) "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful" (1 Cor. 1:9).
    - 2) Whatever God has said shall surely come to pass.

- a) When I speak about God's faithfulness, I usually speak of his faithfulness in keeping good promises: the promise to forgive us of sin, the promise to hear our prayers, and the promise to provide us with eternal glory.
  - b) This context speaks of that same divine faithfulness, but with a slightly different twist: God is the One who keeps those threats.
- 3) God isn't faithful just in those ways we might want him to be faithful, but he's faithful in his judgment.
- a) All that God has promised to bring upon the sinful – wrath, torment, eternal separation, hell- he's going to keep that word.
  - b) He kept that word to Saul.
    - a) 1 Sam. 31:2-6.
    - b) If God kept those "negative promises" toward Saul, he'll keep them toward you.
  - c) Do you need to come this morning and claim God's positive faithfulness?