

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 19A
FIRST SAMUEL
CHAPTER 28**

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 28 describes how Saul lived his final days in a state of depression, despair and desperation. He was chosen and anointed by the LORD to be the first king of Israel. He began very well but he held onto Israel as if Israel was his own personal nation and ministry. He refused to let go even when God said that his kingdom would end and would be given to a neighbour. When he found out that David was his God-appointed successor, he tried his utmost to destroy him, even at the expense of neglecting to protect Israel.

If only he had repented, things would have been so different for him. But as long as he regarded Israel as his own and not God's, he would not repent.

David was in Philistine territory. He was in a dilemma as he did not wish to attack Israel his beloved country. But if Achish come to know about it, he would surely order that David, his family and men be killed. This particular mention of David will continue in the next chapter.

The scene shifted to king Saul. Saul was desperate as the Philistines had amassed themselves for a great onslaught against Israel.

Saul realized that his life and that of his sons and the people of Israel were in danger. He needed God's help but God had shut his ears from him. As long as Saul regarded iniquity in his heart, God would not hear him.

This chapter revealed a desperate man who was forced to stare death in the face because of what he had done. His reaction to the darkest hour in his life and the consequences of his actions on himself, his people and sons are lessons that we need to take to heart in today's materialistic world.

COMMENTARY

David's Dilemma—28:1-2

The Philistines grouped their armies together to go to war against Israel. They had suffered a number of defeats previously in the hands of the Israelites. But they must have thought that this was the best time to attack and conquer Israel as Samuel, Israel's prophet, was dead and David, their prized warrior who had killed Goliath, had defected and joined them. Achish, the Philistine king who would be leading the Philistine armies made it clear to David that he and his men should be fighting on the side of the Philistines.

David answered Achish, *"Surely thou shalt know what thy servant can do"* (28:2a). David did not give a firm and straightforward answer. Instead of saying, "Yes, I will fight with you against the Israelites", his answer was deliberately vague. It could mean that he would prove himself to be a faithful ally of the Philistines, or it could mean that he would spring a surprise and turn against the Philistines – *"thou shalt know what*

thy servant can do.” It was unimaginable that David would join hands with the enemies and fight against his fellow countrymen. Achish, however, trusted David. He immediately responded and promised David that he would make him his personal bodyguard forever.

**Saul’s Prayer Door was closed
—28:3-6**

The fact that Samuel was dead and buried meant that Israel was in a delicate situation – the absence of a faithful prophet of God. The Philistines seized the opportunity to attack. They gathered in Shunem which was about 11 kilometres east of Megiddo on the southwest slope of the hill of Moreh. Saul gathered all Israel and they pitched in Gilboa, a range of hills.

From one of these hills, Saul surveyed the armies of the Philistines. He was so afraid that “his heart greatly trembled” (28:5). Saul sought the LORD for guidance and direction but the LORD did not answer him - 1 Samuel 28:6, “*And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.*” God is no respecter of persons. Sin is sin. When a sinner commits a sin and there is no genuine repentance, he is cut off from God.

Samuel had always been there for Saul in the past to seek out God’s will. Although he had not been communicating with king Saul for some time, at least he was still there and alive. The opportunity for a change of mind and heart remained a viable option. But now that the prophet was dead, the floor had collapsed under Saul’s feet. He

was at a loss. He wanted to find out God’s will before the battle.

The door to God’s grace and mercy had been slammed shut a long time ago. All the usual known avenues of access to God were closed. It would remain closed unless Saul humbled himself and repent of his sins and return to God. This is the only way. Trust and obey or else travel the path of life alone without God!

**Saul’s Desperate Search for
God’s Direction—28:7-14**

Saul told his servants to search for “a woman that hath a familiar spirit” (literally a woman in whom there is a divining demon), a necromancer, one who can contact the dead. Saul wanted to contact Samuel so that he might ask him for guidance and direction from the LORD (28:7). Saul was evidently desperate. He had banned these necromancers because the LORD detested them and those who consulted them (Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10, 18:11), but he was now reduced to approaching one for help!

His servants found a female necromancer at Endor. Saul disguised himself so as to avoid being recognized. He had to make his way round the Philistine camp to get to Endor. Secondly, he had to conceal his identity from the necromancer. He took off his royal robe and put on other clothes. He went during the night with two of his men. When he met the necromancer, he asked her to divine for him. Not recognizing that it was Saul himself, she replied that Saul had disallowed necromancy and had cut off those who practised it. She wanted to know if his request

was a trap to destroy her. Saul immediately swore in the name of the LORD that no such harm would come to her. This swearing by Saul in the name of the LORD was ironic because the LORD had forbidden such practices. Saul was using the Scriptures to get what he wanted – manipulating theology to achieve his ends.

Having been assured that no harm would come to her, the necromancer asked Saul for the identity of the person whom he wanted to bring up. Saul replied, “*Bring me up Samuel*” (28:11). Almost instantly, the woman saw Samuel. She screamed loudly and charged Saul for deceiving her by not revealing his real identity. Evidently, she was shocked when she saw “a godlike person” or “a spiritual being” approaching her. Normally, the dead person whom she was supposed to contact would speak through her but this time before she had even started the ritual, she saw Samuel coming to her. The fact that Samuel appeared before the witch did anything revealed that this whole incident was not of her doing.

She was terribly frightened and obviously not in control of the situation. She was stunned by the whole incident. When Saul saw her screaming, he said to her, “*Be not afraid; for what sawest thou?*” (28:13). The woman said that she saw “gods (Hebrew, Elohim) ascending out of the earth.” This indicated that Samuel was accompanied by angels. Saul did not see Samuel but from her further description, he knew that it was Samuel. Saul greeted Samuel with great respect and made obeisance

– “he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed himself.”

Rejection and Death for Disobedience—28:15-20

Samuel addressed Saul. His opening question: “*Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?*” suggested that Saul had interrupted Samuel’s restfulness which he had enjoyed. Saul answered that he was utterly distressed. The Philistines were waging a war against him. God had departed from him and would not answer his prayers. Therefore, he had called up Samuel for advice.

Samuel said that it was of no use asking him since, as Saul had stated, the LORD had departed from him. Samuel used the covenant name of the LORD (YAHWEH) while Saul used the name of GOD (ELOHIM). Samuel was still the prophet of the LORD – he used the covenant name seven times thus reminding Saul that he had not been obeying the LORD. Saul had no one to blame but himself for his present state of rejection and desperation!

Samuel repeated what the LORD had earlier told Saul through him. First, he had disobeyed the LORD by not destroying the Amalekites as the LORD had commanded so the LORD had taken the kingdom from him and given it to David. Second, the armies of Israel would be defeated. Third, Saul would meet his death together with his sons. Samuel had only bad news for Saul. This was the final word of rejection of Saul by the LORD. Saul straightaway fell prostrate on the ground and was dreadfully afraid. He was totally without strength for he had not

eaten all day and all night. It was a very sad picture of despair and hopelessness.

Self Preservation First
—28:21-25

An interesting thing happened. The necromancer saw that Saul was utterly troubled, physically weak and exhausted. She voluntarily offered to cook a meal for Saul so that he could regain his strength and go on his journey. Saul refused the offer but his servants and the woman managed to persuade him. Saul sat up and watched the woman prepare the meal for him and his servants. After eating, Saul and his men left the place that night.

To accept an invitation to eat at a person's home was the highest honour bestowed upon a person in biblical times. The witch had heard what was said by Samuel. It was not good news for the king. The king could easily kill her in anger if he chose to do so. To avoid such an eventuality, the witch quickly offered to cook for him. His refusal to eat was not good. After he was persuaded into eating, the witch knew that she was safe from the wrath of the king. NOTE the kind of food that was prepared for the king. The best of all the clean animals was a fatted calf which was fit for the LORD. Unleavened bread was only eaten during the Passover, the most celebrated time of the annual Jewish calendar. It was a symbol of no sin in the house.

At this juncture, it is expedient to examine the practice of necromancy in the light of Scriptures. Necromancy is not an uncommon practice among some people especially the Chinese. This

writer witnessed such a session when he was a teenager; how his mother and aunties engaged a woman to call up their deceased mother. The woman was a typical Chinese lady who practised ancestral worship and Taoism. She went into a trance and after about 15 minutes she asked in Chinese for the name of the person who was to be called up. She was given the name, the date of her birth and the date of her death. After a few minutes, she announced that the deceased had been located. A few questions were posed to her to ensure that it was the right person – the number of sons and daughters she had and the name of her husband. When that had been ascertained and the dead rightly identified, the medium spoke in Malay. That was the language that the deceased spoke. They began to communicate through the medium. So, was this real or merely a deception? The answer can be found in the Bible which stated clearly that when a person dies, his spirit returns to his Creator God.¹ In Old Testament time, those who were God's people went to Abraham's bosom and those who were not went to a place of torment.² After the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are believers will be present with the Lord³ when they

¹ Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

² Luke 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the

die, and those who are non-believers will be in Hell (Greek, Hades) and kept there until they have to appear before God at the Judgment of the Great White Throne.⁴ The spirits of departed souls, whether they be in paradise with the Lord Jesus Christ or in Hell, cannot come back from the dead or be contacted spiritually (Luke 16:19-31) unless God raise them back from the dead. Samuel's return to meet Saul was an exceptional case permitted by the LORD to pass His judgment on Saul.

There were some who returned from the dead because they were raised by the Lord Jesus Christ, for example, Lazarus the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11:43, 11:44). The biblical record shows that God has only raised from the dead those who were believers.

Satan and his demons have the power to impersonate as angels of light. They have thus managed to deceive many.⁵ Therefore, we

Lord: 7(For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

⁴ Revelation 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 11:13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers

define a necromancer as one who "hath a familiar spirit" or one who has "a divining demon" who can impersonate the character of the dead.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Samuel died and the people mourned for his death. It was a great loss for the people as they were deprived of a righteous judge and a prophet of the LORD. For Samuel, it was a blessing for he was taken into "Abraham's bosom" and ushered into the presence of God! It will be the same experience for every born again and blood-bought Christian. Psalms 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Saul's rejection by the LORD is a lesson for us. He disobeyed the LORD and the LORD did not answer his prayers. The LORD permitted Samuel to relay the judgment on him and his sons. Thus one reason why God does not answer our prayers could be that we have been disobedient to Him, or that we have some sins in our heart. Was not Saul envious and jealous of David? Did he not seek to kill David who had been chosen by God to be the next ruler of Israel?

Do not be deceived by modern day necromancers. The prevailing spiritual craze today is to connect with the spirit of old "gurus" – to connect with the "Force" so that one can be empowered. But who are these spiritual personalities? They are but demons masquerading in human form to deceive the unwary.

also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

It is a sad truth that many of us are deceived because we want so badly to believe.

Christians must exercise greater spiritual discernment when evaluating a character. We should be aware of holy and pious scriptural phrases which may be quoted out of context – we call this manipulative theology.

AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 28:1-6; Isaiah 59:1-8.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 28: 7-14; Deuteronomy 18:1-14.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 28:15-20; Hebrews 3:10-19.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 28:21-25; Proverbs 14:21; Matthews 25:34-40.

Friday: 1 Samuel 28:1-20.

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 28:1-6	
1 Samuel 28:7-14	
1 Samuel 28:15-20	
1 Samuel 28:21-25	

Discussion Questions

1. What can you say to someone who says that he is too sinful to come for prayer meeting –“when I am less sinful and more worthy then I will attend”?

2. Would a genuine believer of the LORD consult a witch?

3. Did Samuel really return from the dead to speak to Saul?

4. What was the root cause of Saul’s fall and his rejection by the LORD?

5. “Death to a child of God is never a curse but a blessing” -- do you agree with this statement?
