

WITCHES, WARLOCKS, AND WICKED KINGS

Presented by

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Witches. Warlocks. Soothsayers. Sorcerers. When you hear words like these, what comes to mind? Do you think of Halloween trickery, *Harry Potter* movies, or the old television show *Bewitched*? If so, think again. Witches, warlocks, soothsayers, and sorcerers are all people who are mentioned in the Bible. But then, you already knew that, didn't you? Oh, you didn't? Well then, you must not be familiar with the story of King Saul and the witch of Endor.

The story of Israel's first king and his association with this evil witch is found in the book of 1 Samuel. But before I introduce you to these two famous characters from God's Word, I first want to give you some background information to help you understand the events of 1 Samuel 28.

The story actually begins thirteen chapters earlier in 1 Samuel 15. There, God had given King Saul specific instructions through the prophet Samuel. God told Saul to utterly destroy the pagan nation of the Amalekites. Saul was to kill all of the people and all of the livestock. No human or animal was to remain alive. Saul, however, rebelled against God by allowing Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and some of the Amalekites' livestock, to remain alive. As a result of Saul's sin, God told the king that He was going to take his kingdom away from him.

The text of 1 Samuel 16:14 tells us that from that day forward, God never spoke to Saul again. And Saul was no longer able to speak to the prophet Samuel, of course, because Samuel had died some time earlier. As 1 Samuel 28 begins, we learn that the Philistines had assembled to go to war against the Israelites. Verse 5 tells us that King Saul was afraid and that "his heart trembled greatly." Saul asked God what the outcome of the battle would be, but God still refused to communicate with the sinful king.

By this time, Saul was absolutely terrified, and had no idea what to do. In an act of sheer desperation, Saul commanded his servants to locate a witch with whom he could talk in order to seek assistance. Seeking advice from a witch certainly was an odd thing for Saul to do—for two reasons. First, Saul knew that God had **always** condemned witchcraft and sorcery. As far back as Leviticus 20:27, Moses had told the people of Israel: "A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; the people shall stone them with stones." Later, in Deuteronomy 18:10, Moses wrote:

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God."

Second, the fact that Saul was willing to seek advice from a witch was strange because not long before, Saul himself had banned all witches and sorcerers from his kingdom. In 1 Samuel 28:3 we read that Saul “had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.” Saul knew that consorting with warlocks and witches represented an act of severe disobedience toward God. Thus, he did not want the subjects of his kingdom to do such things. Yet when God refused to speak to Saul because of his sins, Saul did the very thing he had commanded his subjects **not** to do: he sought out a witch to seek advice.

In reality, however, it was not **the witch** from whom Saul actually wanted advice. Saul wanted to speak to **Samuel**. The problem was, **Samuel was dead**. So, King Saul commanded the witch of Endor, “Bring up Samuel for me” (1 Samuel 28:11). The witch knew, of course, that she could not bring back a dead spirit. She—like all warlocks, witches, soothsayers, and spiritists—was a fraud. But she hardly could **admit** that! So, she apparently went through whatever fake routine she normally used to trick her paying customers in an attempt to allegedly “conjure up the dead.”

But this time, something **very** unusual happened. **God sent Samuel back from the dead!** And what was the witch’s reaction to this unexpected happening? We are given the answer in 1 Samuel 28:12, which says simply, “When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice.” **I bet she did!** Imagine her surprise at finally being able to do something that she had never been able to do before. Saul, seeing her reaction, asked, “What did you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth.” Saul said to her, “What is his form?” The witch replied, “An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle.” Saul then realized that she was talking about Samuel, and according to 1 Samuel 28:14, Saul “stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down.” Samuel then spoke, and said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Saul answered, “I am deeply distressed, for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do” (1 Samuel 28:15). Then Samuel said to Saul:

“Why then do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the Lord has done for Himself 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 or execute His fierce wrath upon the Amalekites, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”

Saul hardly could believe what he was hearing. Samuel’s spirit had not only told Saul that he was going to lose the battle the following day against the Philistines, but also had informed him of the fact that the army of Israel would be lost and that Saul and his sons would be killed! The text of 1 Samuel 28:20 then records, “Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel.”

Sure enough, Samuel's prophecy came true just as he had spoken it. In 1 Samuel 31:1-2 we read, "Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons." Verse 4 of that same chapter records Saul's death as well. And verse 5 then says, "So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day."

This was a **terrible** loss for the people of Israel. In a single day they lost their king, the king's sons (who would have been the heirs to his throne), and their entire army. Why did this happen? **It was because the Israelites and their king had disobeyed God!** Samuel warned Saul, "To obey is better than to sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). But Saul ignored Samuel's warning and sought out the witch of Endor anyway—in spite of God's commands that no one was to have anything to do with warlocks, witches, mediums, or spiritists. In the end, Saul not only paid for his disobedience with his own life, but also with the lives of his three sons.

As with many other historical stories that are contained within the pages of the Bible, this story has a moral to it. The moral is that **no one disobeys God and gets away with it.** As the apostle Paul said many years later in Romans 2:8-9, "To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but who instead obey unrighteousness, indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish shall come." Saul is the perfect example of such a person. His life—which had started out in such a glorious manner—ended in "indignation, wrath, tribulation, and anguish." He watched his own sons die, and then he committed suicide. He **could** have obeyed God. But he chose instead to disobey. And when he did, even a witch couldn't save him. **No one disobeys God and gets away with it. No one!**