

## Prayer

Lord God, I offer my all to You in worship. May I honour you with my mind, sing to You from my heart, speak with You from within my soul, praise You with all my strength, raise You up with my spirit, and know and feel Your presence through all I do. This is my prayer, Lord God; fill my life today I pray. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Community Spirit

*'Community' is important for us all, and we all chose whether our lives are lived around work, family, church, social clubs or pubs. Pray for God's guidance for your own choices.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray against hatred in the world, and pray for peacemakers*
- *Pray for athletes at the Olympic Games*
- *Give thanks to God for those who enrich your life*

## Meditation

I heard a voice say; 'Child, your simple faith will make you whole.'

I said 'Thank You' and did my best whilst asking for His help.

I heard a voice say, 'Child, as you trust me, I will give you strength.'

I said 'Thank You' and prayed, awaiting the Holy Spirit.

I heard a voice say 'Child, my love will make you into a bright light!'

I said 'Thank You' and wondered how He might use me.

I heard a voice say 'Child, my patience towards you will never end.'

I said 'Thank You' and realised what was going on.

You see;

Jesus was reaching out to me but I was always one step behind;

I was trying to do things for myself to bring about what He had said.

But what I had to do was receive the gifts He gave me there and then,

And keep going on. I was not waiting for Him; He was waiting for me!

## Bible Study - 1 Samuel 28:11-16

<sup>11</sup> Then the woman said, 'Whom shall I bring up for you?' He answered, 'Bring up Samuel for me.' <sup>12</sup> When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!'

<sup>13</sup> The king said to her, 'Have no fear; what do you see?' The woman said to Saul, 'I see a divine being coming up out of the ground.' <sup>14</sup> He said to her, 'What is his appearance?' She said, 'An old man is coming up; he is wrapped in a robe.' So Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground, and did obeisance. <sup>15</sup> Then Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?' Saul answered, '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; so I have summoned

*you to tell me what I should do.'*<sup>16</sup> *Samuel said, 'Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy?'*

## Review

I have chosen a reading today that is from the middle of one of the most extraordinary stories in the Old Testament. If you wish to understand it further, then please read 1 Samuel 28:8-25. Saul was faced with a deciding battle with the Philistines and desperately needed help. Saul would have loved to receive help from Samuel, but he was now dead, and this gave Saul the idea that as Samuel would not speak to him whilst alive (1 Sam 15:34,35), perhaps he would speak when obliged to do so by a medium! It is not simply that a King needed consultation before a battle for personal reasons; troops would expect that their leader had obtained divine sanction for action. They wanted to know whether their God was with them, and they might not be prepared to go into battle without divine protection! So for all these reasons, Saul needed to be able to say he had consulted the gods of Israel, and with little spirit left in his soul, he decided to consult a medium, and had no difficulty finding one.

It is obvious that this whole story presents massive problems for Christians. The Bible speaks frequently against the practices of spiritualism and necromancy, but in this instance, it implicitly accepts that such evils 'work', because according to the text, the medium did indeed raise up the 'spirit' of Samuel and talk to him (28:14f.)! Most scholars avoid making any comments about what happened and describe it as an ancient text with little religious significance. Other evangelical scholars (e.g. Keddie – 'The Message of 1 Samuel') simply miss out the story and say nothing about it! Yet here it is; a story of an anointed King of Israel calling up the spirit of one of the most famous prophets of the Old Testament and obtaining an accurate prophecy of a battle! What are we to think?

I suggest three ways of handling this. Firstly, the story may have some elements of literal truth insofar as Saul did seek divine knowledge through a medium. However, scripture includes it on the assumption that we know it is nonsense to think that Samuel could be raised from the dead, and it simply describes the extreme manic state of Saul before he died, in which he believed he had a real conversation with Samuel.

Secondly, the medium was a fraud, as many are today. It was easy for the medium to research what a 'spirit' of Samuel would have said to Saul, and it was easy for her to hoodwink Saul into believing her. The feigned surprise at the appearance of Saul (28:12) would have been part of the act, and even the prophecy at the end was a straightforward assessment of the situation facing Israel at the time.

Thirdly, once evil has come into the life of one like Saul, it has an easy route to manipulate and deceive. Every generation has its mediums and wizards who summon evil spirits from the dead, and who play spiritual games with the truth in order to pursue evil. I do not talk of Satan here because the Old Testament does not mention him in 1 Samuel, but the Old Testament never shies away from talking about the manipulative and demonic nature of evil (Gen 3, Judges 9:23) which always seeks to destroy God's work, as it did in Saul's life (1 Sam 16:14f.).

It seems to me that this whole story in 1 Samuel 28 is intended by scripture to represent the utter scandal of Saul's descent into evil. Evil and even the details of how it is practiced had become so real to him that it was utterly real to him, whatever the literary rights or wrongs of the story we now read. The rest of 1 Samuel describes Saul as a heroic but deluded man, one to be pitied and who was virtually mentally ill. The rest of his life is recorded with pathos and sadness, because this first great king of Israel ended his life as a slave to the enemy, trapped into evil and with no-where to go but death (2 Sam 31:4). His suicide on the battlefield was the action of one who was not of sound mind.

Our general conclusion is simple. Once someone has walked a long way from the Lord, as Saul did, sin compounds in that person until the enemy is able to manipulate them with any and every kind of evil practice. They are drawn into a spider's web of evil intrigue from which it is extremely hard to escape; see how Saul receives succour and moral sustenance at the end of his experience with the medium not from Samuel or from the Lord, but from the medium herself (28:19-25). It is a salutary tale, with some clear warnings for us.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What was your initial reaction to this story of Saul and the medium at Endor? Did you just accept it because it is what scripture says, or find it a problem?
2. If you had to pick one, which of the three explanations I have given do you find most attractive?
3. What do we learn about Saul in this story? Check back through the history of Samuel and Saul to help answer this question.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Over the years, I have become aware of people who practice various black or magic arts wherever I have lived, and I have been surprised at the connections I have discovered between Christian communities and the occult; either because of ignorance or because of people who have been badly served by the church. We must be very careful not to dismiss the occult without seeking to deal in a godly way with the evil it represents.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you had any experience with what may be called the 'occult'? Try exploring the subject on the internet and you will be appalled at what you can find from a mere Google search. Ask the Lord to help you understand this disturbing aspect of human life and experience so that you have an answer for it, when questioned.*
- *If there is anything in your past connected to the occult, then seek to talk about this to someone in your church who is an experienced leader. Take their advice about committing past memories and events to the Lord.*

## Final Prayer

Jesus, You won a comprehensive victory over all sin, evil and death itself by rising from the grave on Easter Sunday morning. Halleluiah! May we live our lives in such confidence of Your victorious love, that we are never tempted to follow Satan's pathways. We have defeated him in Jesus' name! AMEN