

Finding God's Will Any "Witch" Way You Can

1 Samuel 28:1–25

Key Verse: 28: 6

"He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets."

How would you answer this question: Who decided the exact time when President Reagan and Premier Gorbachev would sign the intermediate-range nuclear forces treaty back in 1987? The treaty eliminated nuclear and conventional ground-launched ballistic and cruise missiles. (A) According to Time magazine's 1988 cover story "Astrology in the White House," the astonishing answer seems to be the astrologer Joan Quigley, a sixty-year-old Vassar graduate who has written three books on astrology. (B) Donald Regan, the former White House Chief of Staff, wrote: "Virtually every major move or decision the Reagans made during my time as White House chief of staff (1985-87) was cleared in advance with a woman in San Francisco who drew up horoscopes to make certain that the planets were in a favorable alignment for the enterprise." (C) The First Lady, Nancy Reagan, dabbled in astrology as far back as 1967 but her trust was bolstered in 1981 when Quigley showed her that the astrologer's chart predicted extreme danger for the President around March 30. It was on that date that John Hinckley had severely wounded the President with a handgun. From that time on Mrs. Reagan consistently consulted her astrologer to determine "propitious" times for her husband to travel, to make public appearances, and even to sign treaties. (B) I wanted to show that today's passage is not as outdated as some might have you believe. This practice is alive and well in our time. But I hope that instead of falling prey to such practices we may learn a better approach through today's message.

Take a look at verses 1-2. At first these verses seem out of place in this chapter. They're actually more connected with chapter 29 than 28. But they do give us background information as Israel's enemies are gathering against her. And as we'll find out later it wasn't a small army but a massive one with several allied kings. "Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land." (v3) Expelling the mediums and spiritists meant that they either killed them (v9), or deported them. Killing them would be in accordance with the law. Leviticus 20:6 says, "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people." And verse 27 takes it even further saying "A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads." A modern day equivalent of a medium might be a tarot card reader, palm reader, psychic, fortune teller, astrologer or Shaman. To the Lord, it was like committing adultery if they went to a spiritists. He took it very seriously because they lead people astray.

"The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart." (v4-5) Saul wasn't afraid until he saw the huge Philistine army. Sometimes we become like this as well. We may be doing good depending on our own abilities until we confront a crisis that is beyond our means. Then if we don't have anywhere to turn we fall into fear and despair. It can happen to anyone, even to good men like David. It happens when we only think to ourselves and don't inquire of the Lord. At this moment in Saul's life, he wasn't just afraid, he was filled with terror. Frantic with fear. All his confidence was gone and he panics. If we compare him now to what he was like in chapter 11 he's completely different. (1Sam 11:6-7) Back then, he was filled with the spirit of God and he became powerful and courageous, even though this was not his natural character, and he rallies the nation and wins a great victory. But now he's filled with terror and he is about to find out that he's going to lead his nation into a terrible defeat and a national disaster.

So what does he do at a time like this? Let's read verse 6. "He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets." Troubles are terrors to the children of disobedience. In his distress, Saul inquired of the Lord however he doesn't seek God in faith. (F) As a result God doesn't answer him. The Lord didn't answer Saul because Saul wasn't following God. Sometimes people wonder why their prayers aren't answered. But if they're not doing what God wants them to do now, they shouldn't be surprised when he doesn't give further guidance. In fact God refused to respond to Saul. The Lord doesn't give him any dreams, which was one way that the Lord spoke to his people; maybe the Lord gave him nightmares instead of hope filled dreams. He would be restless without a good nights sleep. I don't know how he tried to use the Urim. I think the original was with David and the Ephod. And he couldn't consult the prophets because after God rejected Saul as king, all the prophets followed Samuel and left Saul. Not only that, Saul killed all the priests in the city of Nob (1 Sam 22:18-21) and essentially cut himself off from God. So there is no one around to help him when he really needs it.

"Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said." (v7) Matthew Henry said, "Many speak out against sin they see in others, while they indulge it in themselves. Saul will drive the devil out of his kingdom, yet Saul harbors him in his heart through envy and malice." (F) Saul did good setting up the law, but he didn't obey it himself. Saul asks to find a medium. And of course this was illegal but he doesn't care because he wants to get answers anyway he can. He is now at his lowest point. He doesn't care where he gets his information from. I find it funny that Saul's advisors knew right where to find a medium. They knew where to go for something illegal. This is such hypocrisy. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." ⁹But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" ¹⁰Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this." (v8-10) And now Saul takes his final, and most grievous, step by putting himself above the Lord. He swears in the name of God to allow her to do an act that God commanded no one to do. It would be like me saying, "I swear to God that you won't be punished go ahead and steal that projector." Saul words are like the serpents' in the Garden of Eden.

"Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. (v11) It's sad, that this was only the second time that Saul had sought the wisdom of Samuel throughout his whole life and now he's dead. "When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" (v12) Maybe the woman screamed because she had never brought up a spirit before or maybe it was because of the appearance of Samuel — she knew too well that the spirits she usually contacted were either contrived or satanic. Somehow Samuel's appearance revealed to her that she was dealing with a power far greater than she had known. She did not call up Samuel by trickery or by the power of Satan; God brought Samuel back to give Saul a prediction regarding his fate, a message Saul already knew. (G)

"The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a spirit^[a] coming up out of the ground." ¹⁴"What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. (v13-14) In the footnote it says that she saw spirits or gods. This is interesting because as soon as she describes Samuel, Saul gets down on the ground and goes prostrate. Going prostrate means that he was worshiping the Spirit – which is Samuel. (prostrate 1 Ki 18:39; 1 Ch 29:20;) I think Saul was giving false praise and only wanted to get something out of Samuel in his time of need.

Saul is dying to find out what's going to happen to him. "Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "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.” ¹⁶Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy?” ¹⁷The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. ¹⁹The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.” (v15-19) In Samuel’s message to Saul he mentions the Lord 8 times (12x in the whole passage) and he reveals that God was now Saul’s enemy. And the Lord was planning on keeping his promise and was going to take the kingdom away from Saul. Unlike us, we can hardly keep a new year’s resolution for more than a month, the Lord is ALWAYS faithful to His promises. It didn’t matter if that promise is a blessing or punishment. Why did the Lord turn from Saul? It’s because Saul time after time after time refused to obey the Lord’s commands. How long will it take for God to turn away from us if we continue to refuse to follow His will? Do you want to end up as the enemy of God? Is that the place you aspire to be? If so you must have a death wish. I don’t think anyone sets out to become God’s enemy, but however we don’t like being told what to do, or that we are wrong. This comes from Satan who plants rebellion in our heart like seeds in a garden. Anyway Saul finds out his fate. His doom is sealed and within the next 24 hours, he and his sons will join Samuel in death. Not only that, the whole nation will suffer tremendously at the hands of their enemies, the Philistines. God’s judgment is upon Saul and the children end up paying for the sins of their father.

Upon hearing the news, immediately Saul falls to the ground filled with fear. (v20) If Saul was afraid before, now he went completely off the edge. His legs gave out and he fell to the ground. He was completely paralyzed with fear. Have you even been so afraid that you couldn’t move? Maybe when you were a kid and you thought there was someone or something in your room or under your bed. But Saul’s fear is the kind that takes your strength away. “When the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken, she said, “Look, your maidservant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do.”” (v21) Actually this woman was a good influence to Saul. If you look at verse 21, even though she was afraid, fearing for her life, she obeyed Saul and did what he commanded. How much more should Saul, the servant of God, have obeyed the Lord? The Lord can hand out eternal punishment while man can only hand out punishment for this lifetime. She wants Saul to go away because she’s afraid of him so she offers him dinner and then dejected, he walks off into the night. Actually Saul does everything under the cover of night. Symbolically this shows where Saul’s heart is just like Judas, in John’s gospel, when he betrays Jesus.

Even though Saul is terrified to the point of despair, still he doesn’t humble himself. Never once does he confess his sins, nor offer any sacrifices, nor present any supplications. He doesn’t even seem to care about his sons or his people. He does nothing to try and change his situation. He just disappears into the darkness of night waiting for his impending doom.

So what does this passage have to do with us? I’m not sure if many of us consult psychics. So here’s the question: What do you do, when you pray to the Lord and He doesn’t answer you? When God is silent, is that it for us? Do we just hang our heads in resignation and go away resigned to our fate of destruction? Is it once you have done something against God, you’re done for? I don’t believe so. There are many examples of those who sinned and God forgave. Take St. Paul for example. He was an enemy of God, chasing after God’s people to kill them and yet he was changed from Saul to St. Paul. While we may not go to a psychic, we might seek wisdom from someone who doesn’t believe in God, a friend or relative. Or worse yet some might go to the horoscope for their future. We have the privilege to come to the one who created the heavens and the earth, why wouldn’t we use it? Or what about when people deify their leader, taking their word over the Lord’s. The problem occurs when we value someone else’s opinion over God’s word. But sometimes when we do seek God and we don’t hear anything or get an answer we don’t like, we are tempted like Saul to try and get some idea anyway we can.

But let's take a look at Matthew 15:21-28. I believe that it gives us a good example of how to shine when God is silent. This woman is a great example. Let's read it. "Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.' ²³Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.' ²⁴He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.' ²⁵The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said. ²⁶He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.' ²⁷'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' ²⁸Then Jesus answered, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed from that very hour." In this passage a woman who was from the enemy's territory, came to Jesus desperate because her daughter was demon possessed. And when she cried out to Jesus, he was silent. He didn't say a word. But she kept crying out to him. And kept crying to the point His disciples got annoyed and want to send her away. Jesus seemingly agrees with them saying that he has come only for the lost sheep of Israel. It appears like a done deal but what does she do? She kneels before Jesus and cries "Lord help me!" Still Jesus replies with a rejection, "It's not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs." Now Jesus is insulting this woman adding insult to injury. And then she does something amazing. She says, "Yes Lord, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She humbles herself and agrees with Jesus, yes she is a dog, but even dogs have rights. And she keeps crying out humbling herself more and more. And amazingly Jesus heals her daughter because, as Jesus puts it, "she has great faith." The Lord said that if you seek Him with all your heart, you will find him. (Dt 4:29)

So what do you do if the Lord doesn't answer your prayers? Be humble, repent and cry out for His mercy. Repent of what? Maybe we have to repent of our doubt and lack of faith in God. Maybe we have to repent of our impatience and wanting things in our own time and not God's. Maybe we have to repent of treating God like our employee telling him to do this or do that. The point I am trying to make is that during these times of silence from God, we have to search our heart and see if we are right before God. And repent of all our sin and then come to Him in humbleness. But what if you don't hear anything? Continue to be humble, repent and cry out to Him. But what if you still don't hear anything? Continue to be humble, repent and cry out to Him. Get the picture. We have two choices, either we can live in fear of the future or we can turn to God with ALL our heart, not half. Nancy Reagan later wrote, "Astrology was simply one of the ways I coped with the fear I felt after my husband almost died in the assassination attempt." (E) And this was coming from the President's wife probably the most protected woman in the world. If she can succumb to fear like this, how much more everyday people can. This kind of fear comes from Satan who leads the whole world astray. Let's learn from Saul of what not to do. I pray that God may hear your persistent humble, crying out prayers.

Sources

- (A) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermediate-Range_Nuclear_Forces_Treaty
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- (C) Regan, Donald T. 1988a. For the Record. *Time* (May 16): 26-40. [*For the Record: From Wall Street to Washington* (ISBN 0-15-163966-3)]
- (D) <http://www.missiology.org/folkreligion/chapter1.htm>
- (E) Zuckerman, Laurence. 1988. The First Lady's Astrologer. *Time* (May 16): 41.
- (F) Matthew Henry Concise commentary
- (G) Life Application Bible Notes