

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Thirty-Fifth Week - Wednesday

### SAUL AND THE MEDIUM AT EN-DOR

*"Then Saul said to his servants, 'Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.' And his servants said to him, 'In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En-Dor.' So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, 'Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you.' Then the woman said to him, 'Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?' And Saul swore to her by Yahweh, saying, 'As Yahweh lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.' Then the woman said, 'Whom shall I bring up for you?' And he said, 'Bring up Samuel for me.' When the woman saw Samuel she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, 'Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!'" (1 Samuel 28:7-12).*

With the storm of war approaching, Saul has an anxious spirit full of misgiving. The counsels of God, of which he made so light of in the day of his pride, he vainly seeks in the time of his distress. He craves a token for good but none is granted to him. His crimes now bear their fruit and the burden of old sins press heavily upon his soul. The blood of God's slaughtered priests cries not in vain to heaven; thus Saul gets no answer from the sacred oracle. Samuel had been treated with disdain, and the prophets now have no message of encouragement for him. Saul had scorned the precious gifts of God, and now no heavenly visions point out the path he ought to take nor give any assurance of victory.

What resource is left to him? Samuel is dead. Had he been living, he might have uttered stern and awful truths. But still Saul would have sought him out, for any certainty was better than the terrible doubts which now assailed him. But was there indeed no access to Samuel's counsels? Were there not powers that might for one brief moment call him from his rest to give the required answer, be it for good or evil? The general belief was that such powers did exist, and that they were held by those who possessed mysterious knowledge and were versed in the practice of the diabolical arts. However, these arts--real or pretended--were sternly forbidden by the law and the profession of them declared a capital offense. This law had been enforced by Saul, and thus none of these wizards and necromancers were known to exist in the land.

When, therefore, the king had been repulsed from every lawful means of acquiring the knowledge he craved, his mind turned to this secret and forbidden alternative. By diligent search it was at length learned that there was a woman living in retirement at En-Dor, near Mount Tabor, who had eluded the search of Saul's officers and was believed to possess these forbidden powers. Saul disguised himself and went to her with two faithful servants.

At first she refused to listen to his proposal, alleging her fear that it should come to the knowledge of the king. But Saul pledged himself by oath that no harm should befall her; and it seems to us that this assurance from a stranger could not have been of any value to her unless she suspected who her visitor was. His distinguished stature, impossible to be disguised, was notorious to everyone in Israel, even to those who had never seen him. However, she was too shrewd to betray her suspicion.

Apparently satisfied, she asked whom she was to summon. We are not to ponder what trick she meant to play upon the king or what art to practice, for the name of Samuel had scarcely passed the king's lips when, to the utter amazement of the woman, Samuel himself appeared. It is not to be thought that because Samuel was really permitted to appear he came at the command of this miserable woman, that her incantations were anticipated. Rather, the apparition appeared at the demand of Saul, and this confirmed her suspicion that the tall stranger was no other than the king.

The king pacified her and eagerly demanded what she saw. She replied that she beheld a great and venerable person, like the gods or judges and civil magistrates to whom that title was sometimes given. Either this took place in her inner room or the apparition had not yet become visible to Saul, for he asked, "What is his form?" She answered, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." There could be no doubt that this was Samuel, and the king discerned the figure she described taking visible form before him.

It has been thought that the king did not see the apparition but merely deduced it was Samuel from the woman's description. But on looking more closely at the text, it becomes more emphatic than at first appears. It is really stated that "Saul perceived (knew, or assured himself) that it was Samuel *himself*." This is not what the woman saw, but what Saul saw. And as the sacred writer gives us the authority of his own declaration for the fact that it was "Samuel himself" who Saul perceived, we do not feel at liberty to suppose that it was anything else

The narrator all along says it *was* Samuel, which is better authority for the fact than the assertion of the woman or the impression of Saul. Saul, indeed, bent himself low in humble obeisance, which he was not likely to have done unless he saw the figure visibly before him and knew it was Samuel. And the woman had no time to make arrangements with a willing accomplice to deliver a speech through ventriloquism, for Samuel foretold not only the defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines but that Saul himself together with his sons should perish, something she could have no way of knowing. Also, would it not have been entirely in her best interest to predict success? For if success were foretold, then the prediction if fulfilled would

bring her credit, and if it proved false, then there would be no one to bring her to account. But if she predicted calamity and it did not come to pass, then she would be sought out and punished as a deceiver.

One cannot help being affected by the words the unhappy king used in addressing the apparition of Samuel: "God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do." Neither had he been answered by Urim, as we have before learned, which was the more important of the regular modes of obtaining an answer from God. Why does he not mention that? It may fairly be reckoned that he shrank from naming to Samuel that which could not but bring to mind his slaughter of the priests at Nob.

The answer of Samuel was greatly moving: *"So why do you ask me, seeing Yahweh has departed from you and has become your enemy? And Yahweh has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For Yahweh has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of Yahweh nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore Yahweh has done this thing to you this day. Moreover Yahweh will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me"* -- that is, dead like him.

These dreadful words laid Saul prostrate upon the ground as one void of life. Exhausted by long abstinence and worn out by anxiety, this announcement, which left him without hope and assured him that all was lost and his doom accomplished, laid him in the dust. Revived by the kind solicitude of the woman and his own attendants, and prevailed upon to take some food, the king then departed before the morning dawn with a riven heart--but with composed and resolute demeanor--to meet his doom.