

BIBLE SERIES: *"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"*

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1 SAMUEL 25-31 NABAL; WITCH OF ENDOR; DEATH OF SAUL



We enter the last period of Saul's tragic life. David doesn't trust him anymore, and continues to hide from him, now in the Wilderness of Paran (1 Samuel 25:1). At this time, Samuel the prophet dies and all Israel sends representatives to his funeral. He was Israel's last judge and its first formal prophet.

While David was in the wilderness, he had protected the flocks of a rich man. The Bible says, "The man's name was Nabal (means Fool), a Calebite, and his wife's name was Abigail. The woman was intelligent and good-looking, the man brutish and mean" (1 Sam. 25:3).

When the shearing of sheep began, David sent some men to receive a payment for services rendered as was a custom of the times. Yet, Nabal lives up to his name and is not willing even to give them some bread and water, and then insults David. When David hears of this offensive treatment, he is ready to wipe them out. Fortunately, some of Nabal's men tell Abigail of his foolish actions and Abigail goes to calm David down. When she met them, she apologized for her husband's rash behavior and David was very impressed with her feminine and diplomatic skills. The Bible states, "Then David said to Abigail: 'Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! For indeed, as the Lord God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal. So David received from her hand what she had brought him, and said to her, 'Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person.' When Abigail got home she found Nabal presiding over a huge banquet. He was in high spirits--and very, very drunk. So she didn't tell him anything of what she'd done until morning. But in the morning, after Nabal had sobered up, she told him the whole story. Right then and there he had a heart attack and fell into a coma. About ten days later GOD finished him off and he died. When David heard that Nabal was dead he said, 'Blessed be GOD who has stood up for me against Nabal's insults, kept me from an evil act, and let Nabal's evil boomerang back on him. Then David sent for Abigail to tell her that he wanted her for his wife...She got up, and then bowed down, face to the ground, saying, 'I'm your servant, ready to do anything you want. I'll even wash the feet of my master's servants!' Abigail

didn't linger. She got on her donkey and, with her five maids in attendance, went with the messengers to David and became his wife. David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. Both women were his wives. Saul had married off David's wife Michal to Palti, son of Laish" (1 Sam. 25:32-44, Message Bible).

David then returns to the Wilderness of Ziph, and some of the inhabitants again betray him, notifying Saul of his presence. Saul gathers another large army and pursues David in this mountainous region.

But God intervenes to save David by placing Saul's entire camp in a deep sleep (1 Sam. 26:12). David and his nephew, Abishai, enter the camp and come up to the sleeping Saul. Abishai urges David to let him kill Saul, but David again declines. He tells his nephew, "As the Lord lives, the Lord shall strike him or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go.' So David took the spear and the jar of water by Saul's head, and they got away and no man saw or knew it or awoke."

When they woke up, David called out from a hill and asked Abner, Saul's general, why he had allowed Saul to be so defenseless that they had taken his spear and water and then showed them to him. Saul again repents of his actions and says, 'I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.' So Saul returns to his house, and this would be the last time David would see him alive.

It has been some 10 years that David has heard these same words from Saul about leaving him alone, but the good will never lasted. David thought the only way to be safe was to leave the territory and become a mercenary of the Philistines. This might appear foolhardy, but in those days, great warrior groups were highly prized, even if they came from the enemy. For instance, Greek mercenaries were common and highly prized during the Persian Empire although the Greeks and Persians were enemies.

So David begins to work for Achish, the Philistine king. He is given a town for his army and begins to raid the remnant Canaanite population, but tells the king the spoils came from the Israelite population. The king believes David and is so

impressed with David's spoils, he thinks of promoting him to his personal guard. As *The JFB Commentary* mentions, "The deceit practiced upon his royal host and the indiscriminate slaughter committed, lest any one should escape to tell the tale, exhibit an unfavorable view of this part of David's history." This would be one of the reasons God called David, "a bloody man" and did not allow him to build the Temple. David, forced by Saul, was in survival mode, and was barely keeping all of his group alive.

But now, the Philistines unite against Saul, and gather in the famous valley of Armageddon, the Philistines meeting at Shunem and the Israelites at Gilboa (1 Samuel 28:4). When Saul saw how a great an army the Philistines fielded, "...he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either in dreams or by Urim or by the prophets. 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 séance 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 the Lord saying, 'As the Lord 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!' And the king said to her, 'Do not be afraid. What did you see? And the woman said to Saul, 'I saw a *spirit* ascending out of the earth.' So he said to her, 'What is his form?' And she said, 'An old man is coming up and he is covered with a mantle.' And Saul *perceived* that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. Now Samuel said to Saul, 'Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up? And 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.' Then Samuel said, 'So why 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 nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, 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'" (1 Sam. 28:3-19). Saul was so distraught by the news he fainted and was unable to eat for an entire day. Finally, upon urgings by his servants, he ate and returned to the Israelite camp.

What did the medium actually see? Was it the dead prophet Samuel? What does the Bible say about the dead? Can they be brought up by a medium? All the scriptures clearly indicate the dead do not rise until a future resurrection. Notice Eccl. 9:5, "For the living know that they will die; but *the dead know nothing*. And they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten." Psalms 146:3-4, 'Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth, *in that very day his plans perish*."

God also prohibits consulting with mediums because they use deceiving spirits. Notice Deut. 18:10, "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." In Acts 16:16 we read, "Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl *possessed with a spirit of divination* met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling." Also 1 Tim. 4:1 speaks of "giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."

Now, why would God impose the death penalty for communicating with dead friends and relatives if that were really possible? One scholar explains: "The reason the death penalty was inflicted for consulting 'familiar spirits' is that these were 'evil spirits,' or fallen angels impersonating the dead....God hardly could have prescribed the death penalty for communicating with the spirits of deceased loved

ones if such spirits existed and if such a communication were possible. There is no moral reason for God to outlaw, on pain of death, the human desire to communicate with deceased loved ones. The problem is that such communication is impossible, because the dead are unconscious and do not communicate with the living. Any communication that occurs is not with the spirit of the dead, but *with evil spirits*" (Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection?*, 1997, p. 168).

After Saul returns to the camp, the Philistines are now gathered at Aphek, getting ready for the battle. David and his men, as mercenaries, also were there. Assuredly, he would have entered the battle with the Philistines, but knowing his loyalty to Israel, would have turned against the Philistines. Fortunately, the Philistine rulers did not trust him and sent him back to his town of Siklag. David feigns being disappointed, but realizes how lucky he was to have avoided being placed in this quandary.

Yet, tragedy had struck at Siklag while David and his men were gone. The Amalekites, those ruthless bandits, invaded this town and many others, even in Judah. They burned Siklag, and took all of its possessions, including David's two wives. Here we see why God wanted Saul to exterminate this treacherous tribe, since they were incorrigible.

David and his men were in a state of shock. The Bible says, "Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David *strengthened himself in the Lord his God*" (30:4-6).

Here we see the greatness of David despite facing failure and gives us a fine example of how to deal with it. First, he took the full responsibility and grieved with his men. Secondly, he sought strength from God. Thirdly, he consulted God what to do, and he had the Urim of the priest to do it, as we have God's spirit in us for help and guidance (Rom. 8:26). God told him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all" (30:8). David found an Egyptian servant of the Amalekites that led them to the enemy. They were feasting and drunk when David attacked them. The Bible says, "Then David attacked them from twilight until evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four

hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away; and David rescued his two wives. And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all" (30:17-19). He showed his generosity by including in the spoils the 200 men who had not fought, and this sharing became an Israelite law. He also shared the spoils with Judean towns which had helped him.

We now come to Saul's final battle. The Bible says, "Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled 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 Malchi-shua, Saul's sons. The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armorbearer, 'Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me.' But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him...And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley, and those who were on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them" (31:1-7).

The Philistines fastened Saul's body and that of his sons on the walls of Beth Shan, but some Israelites from Gilead valiantly traveled all night and stole the bodies back to give them a decent burial.

As we end the book of 1 Samuel, things look very dire for Israel. The first king was dead, the Philistines had utterly defeated the army and were conquering more Israelite territory. Who would God raise to save Israel? You guessed it—David, who would be the best of all the Israelite kings. We'll read about the beginning of Israel's golden era the next time.