

The Witch of Endor and the death of Saul. 1 Samuel 28:3-11, Deuteronomy 18:9-13

Disclaimer: Material from this message was adapted in part from messages found on the Sermon Central website.

*What do you call a psychic midget who has escaped from prison?
A small medium at large!*

A woman went to the local psychic in hopes of contacting her dearly departed grandmother. The psychic's eyelids began to flutter and she began to moan, and eventually, a voice came, saying,

"Granddaughter? Are you there?"

The granddaughter, wide-eyed responded, "Grandma? Is that you?"

"Yes granddaughter, it's me."

"It's really you, Grandma?" the woman repeats.

"Yes, it's really me, granddaughter."

The woman pauses a moment, "Grandma, I have just one question for you."

"Anything, my child."

"When did you learn to speak English?"

Here in 1st Samuel, chapter 28, we have the unusual story of King Saul consulting a psychic. What's so unusual about him doing so is that previously, in accordance with Mosaic law, Saul had expelled all the psychics and sorcerers from Israel (Leviticus 20:27).

You see God labels such occult practices – fortune telling, divination, sorcery, necromancy – as "*abhorrent*," as a shameful form of spiritual prostitution that is intensely disgusting to Him. God further declared that both those who practiced such occult arts along with those who sought their guidance would be "cut off" from His presence and when discovered should be immediately "*put to death*" (Leviticus 20:27).

As you heard in this morning's scripture lesson, God is so serious is about this matter that just before entering the Promised Land, He again warned Israel not to imitate the other nations who were following these occult practices, which was the main reason why He intended to drive these other nations out of the land. (Leviticus 20:6, Deuteronomy 18:9-14)

Even in the New Testament, God hasn't changed His mind, declaring that along with other sins, those who practice sorcery will not inherit the Kingdom of God; their only future home being in the "*lake of Fire and the second death*" (Galatians 5:19-21, Revelation 21:8).

So, occult practitioners live under serious condemnation by God. But let's first explore Saul's final story, before coming back to learn the reasons why God labels all such occult practices as abhorrent.

As he watched the Philistines gather an overwhelming force for yet another battle, Saul was having an emotional melt down and desperate for any guidance he could get. He had been anointed king specifically to drive the Philistines out of Israel, but because of disobedience to God's commands, the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. God was no longer guiding him. As far as Saul was concerned, God had gone silent. (1 Samuel 9:16, 13:13-14).

Since the prophet Samuel had died and all the approved ways of seeking God's guidance were now not working, Saul knew of only one other way for getting spiritual advice. So, disguising himself, Saul sought out the last known medium left in the land – the "witch of Endor" – asking her to summon up for him the spirit of Samuel from the dead.

Now, the next odd thing about this story, is that while she was performing her usual shtick, the witch was actually shocked to see Samuel appear. "*When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and said to Saul, 'Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!'*" (Verse 12)

Why was she so shocked to actually be seeing the spirit of Samuel? Because, like most mediums – ancient and modern – this psychic was a fake. She had never really talked with the dead before. She usually just put on a bit of a show and then told the client what they wanted to hear; but not this time!

Master magician Harry Houdini often visited with psychics in the hopes of talking with loved ones who had died. But time after time he would see through their trickery and expose them as fakes. He finally came to the conclusion that all occult practitioners were frauds and spent the rest of his life both debunking their tricks and unsuccessfully trying them outlawed.

The reason why the Witch at Endor could not have talked with the dead before is because, as the Bible repeatedly tells us, once a person dies... without God's personal permission, they don't come back.

The prophet Isaiah said, *The dead do not live; shades do not rise...* (26:14)

This is also confirmed by the New Testament where we are told, "...*mortals are destined to die once, and after that [to face] judgment*" (Hebrew 9:27).

This is also why – because he knew where he was headed – that that the Apostle Paul yearned to be *absent from the body and present with the Lord* (2 Corinthians 5:9 KJV).

So there are NO human spirits just floating around, waiting to visit with living ones they've left behind

Remember Jesus' story of "The Rich Man and Lazarus?" (Luke 16:19-31). After both of these men had died, Lazarus was escorted to Paradise and the rich man to Hell. Hell being such a terrible place, the rich man called out to Abraham "*Father Abraham, I beg of you, send Lazarus to my five brothers who are still living so he can warn them not to come here!*" Among the reasons why Abraham denies his request was "*...between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you **cannot** do so, and **no one can cross** from there to us.*" (Luke 16:26)

Thus, only by God's power and for God's purposes are the dead ever allowed – in spirit or body – to communicate with the living. Those who have actually been allowed to do so form a very small, exclusive club: Moses, Elijah, and Samuel.

So, if you want real spiritual advice, don't expect a dead person to provide it, they are not available to do so.

Which is why the witch of Endor was so surprised when Samuel actually appeared, she knew this was NOT accomplished by her magic.

The next question to answer then would be, did the spirit of Samuel actually appear and speak with Saul at this time? Yes he did and he seemed quite grumpy about it. Samuel said.

'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. (28:15).

Not because of the witch's magic, it was God who called Samuel's spirit back to deliver one last message to Saul. In answer to Saul's question, Samuel curtly replied, ***why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?*** (1 Samuel 28:16). In other words, "if God has cut you off, what advice do you think I could give you?"

But then Samuel does give Saul this much of a future vision; that by this time tomorrow, not only would Saul and his sons be dead, but his army would also suffer a great defeat at the hands of the Philistines; which was exactly what happened. In the next day's battle, after Jonathan and two other of his sons were killed, an archer's arrow mortally wounded Saul. Seeing the enemy closing in, rather than be captured alive, Saul then fell on his own sword and died.

Having been head and shoulders taller than most men, Saul had looked like a king, but in his heart he was a coward. Fearing his own soldiers more than he feared God, Saul had disobeyed direct Divine orders and then at the end of his life, rather than accept the silence of God, he had turned to abhorrent means for getting spiritual guidance. According to the book of Chronicles, these are the reasons "*God put him to death*" (1 Chron. 10:13-14).

Now that we have concluded Saul's story, let's look into why God has declared the consulting a mediums and all other such occult practices as "abhorrent."

- What's the problem with using a Ouija board for a party?
- Why would God be upset with following horoscopes or getting palm readings?
- Where's the harm in an innocent visit to a medium, or in phoning a California psychic?

The first and most important reason is **because any form of going to the occult is an attempt to gain spiritual advice, or power, from someone other than God.**

Only God really knows the future, because He created it just like He created everything else. And when God wants us to know something of our future He will either share it with us personally like with Moses, or in a dream like King Nebuchadnezzar, or send us a prophet like Samuel. Attempting to get knowledge of the future any other way is an attempt – metaphorically speaking – to go behind God's back. As the prophet Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar,

No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or diviners can show the mystery that the king is asking, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries,
Daniel 2:27-28

Only God knows the future, and He has clearly warned anyone who would try to gain future knowledge from any other source, that there is no other source. Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God says...

*I am God, and there is no other; **there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention'**,*
Isaiah 46:9-10

Isaiah further advised anyone who would be so tempted....

*When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, **should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living?***
Isaiah 8:19 NIV

That is also why God told the people of Israel that, "*whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such abhorrent practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you..*" (Deut.18:12)

So, the first reason why occult practices are abhorrent to God is because **they are an attempt to gain knowledge or power from sources other than God.**

The second reason is that **when you attempt to access to such supernatural knowledge or power from sources other than God, you are actually opening yourself to the Devil's influence.**

You need to always remember, that **The Spirit World Is REAL!** Behind what you see as the everyday events of human history – whether it's troubles with your cranky neighbor or Putin's current land grab – there is a continuing spiritual contest going on for control of yours and every other human soul. As C.S. Lewis has said ***there are no mere mortals. We are all either angels or devils in the making.***

You also need to clearly understand this morning that there are only two sources of spiritual knowledge or spiritual power; there are only two sides in the spirit realm... You have God and the angels, or you have Satan and his fallen angels... demons.

The Bible exposes Satan as a consummate liar; just as he disguises himself to appear as an *angel of light*, so also his messengers masquerade as "*servants of righteousness*" (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Satan's servants will eagerly take on any form and say anything they need to say to deceive you, to make you think they are harmless, to desensitize you to the truth that these demonic forces want to enslave you, not set you free.

So when you think you are talking with Uncle Ned at a séance, you are not; but you may actually be talking to another spirit – an evil one with an evil intent for your soul.

The devil's side does have some form of spiritual power, but it is mostly the power to delude and ensnare you. It is not the power to set you free from sin or a guilty conscience.

Take for example Moses' contest with Pharaoh's magicians. The first three signs that Moses performed, Pharaoh's magicians could duplicate; turning their staffs into snakes, turning the water's of the Nile into blood, and bringing a plague of frogs onto the land. But Moses' snake then swallowed up all their snakes (*I guess they had to find themselves new staffs after that*). And by the fourth and following miracles, the magicians could no longer compete; they told Pharaoh, *this is truly the finger of God* (Exodus 8:19).

As the New Testament recounts, when the young church was growing, it had a similar confrontation with a powerful magician. In the city of Samaria there was a magician calling himself **Simon the Great**. His magic must have been very convincing because people thought that he was demonstrating the "*power of the Great God and everyone small and great sought his advice*" (Acts 8:10).

That is until Philip the Deacon started a revival in town. After seeing the miracles that Philip performed in the name of Jesus, even Simon believed and became something of a follower. Later when Peter came to town and laid his hands on the believers so they might receive the Holy Spirit – which they did – Simon attempted to purchase this “laying on of hands” power for his own use. All he got from Peter was a stern rebuke:

‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God’s gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness.’ Acts 8:20-23

Simon’s only reply was to humbly ask Peter to pray for his deliverance, so that these things might not happen to him (Acts 8:9-24).

So don’t be fooled, the occult does have the power to deceive, to possess, to destroy, but it has nothing compared to the power of God to heal and forgive.

The question then is, when you play with Ouija boards, tarot cards, or call the California Psychic Hot line ...who are you actually inviting into your life, into your home, into your family?

If you dabble with fortunetelling, horoscopes, Ouija boards, or witchcraft, know that you have been deluded, you are on the wrong side of the battle, you are closer to hell than to heaven, and like Simon the sorcerer, you need to get your life right with the Lord. You need to repent, to change your mind, and to turn from such powers of darkness to the only true source of light and life – Christ Jesus, God’s Son our Savior, who the darkness has never been able to overcome.

Fortune tellers, psychics, palm readers: theirs is a lucrative business largely built on deception. They will tell you what you want to hear. And if you go back and say it didn’t work, they will turn it back on you, saying you must’ve done something wrong or come up with some other excuse to hide their falsehood. But **God will never tell us what we want to hear only what we need to hear.** God is not after our money. We can trust Him to give us all the answers we need, all the insight we need and all the help we need to face whatever comes our way.

The Bible’s story of Saul and the witch of Endor is not to communicate that witchcraft is okay but to expose both Saul’s hypocrisy and the hazards of turning to the occult. His story concludes with these remarks.

Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14)

This is the lesson for us today. If you are ever tempted, casually or seriously to dabble in any occult practices, what Jesus said about money also applies, "*you cannot serve two masters, choose this day who will serve*" (Matthew 6:24).

We don't look to mediums, psychics, fortunes tellers, palm readers, Ouija boards, horoscopes or any of that. If we seek guidance, go only to the Lord. There's no need to look anywhere else because God knows all and sees all and He will never mislead us,

Let's pray about this.