

BOOK OF 1 SAMUEL
LOOKING FOR HELP IN THE WRONG PLACE
1 SAMUEL 28:1-25

Introduction

In this passage before us tonight, we see Saul coming to the end of his rope. He has been self-destructing ever since the LORD told him he was done with him.

The book of 1 Samuel from Chapter 8 to Chapter 31 is basically the story of the rise and fall of King Saul along side of the rise of King David. We saw that Saul was Spirit led early on as he came to the throne. Then we saw Saul's foolish choice to not fully obey the LORD. In doing so, he removed himself from God's protection. We have seen God's decree to remove Saul from his kingship and put David on the throne in his place, but Saul doesn't do the right thing in stepping down on his own. But his removal and David's ascension is certain because God has decreed it!

What we are about to read is the account of the final straw that breaks Saul's back. Saul pays a visit to a woman with a familiar spirit, a witch—one who claims to consult with the dead. And while this passage is not focused on the subject of the spirit world, we can certainly learn some things about the subject while we are here. (The timing is perfect with Halloween so close!)

So let me turn to that subject for just a minute and offer some introductory observations:

It is no secret that a growing number of people are becoming engrossed in various forms of magic, spiritism, astrology, witchcraft, and sorcery.

Disney studios, with all its animated cartoons often depicts of the use magic. Growing up, I remember watching the show Bewitched.

We all heard about the Ouija board, which is a game of communicating with the dark spirit realm. (That's not a game by the way!) I saw that the Ouija board has surpassed Monopoly as the top selling board game on the market.

These days parents have to be extra careful about the video games that their kids are playing and the TV shows they allow them to watch because so many of them involve wizards, witches, spells, violence, and evil characters.

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Witches are still around today, but they have changed the names they go by. Today, they are called "*Channelers*", and they act as intermediaries or mediums in the spirit realm.

Out on Blanding Blvd, a few miles up the way, you can stop by and get a quick reading of your tarot cards or get your palm read.

Astrology is everywhere today. Millions of people follow the teachings of various astrologers. Many won't step outside their house in the morning unless they have read their horoscope.

Tabloids are full of the predictions of various psychics which have a miserable success rate in their predictions of less than 5%. Yet people continue to go down that road.

Tonight, as we read this account of Saul, he is heading down the wrong road. We'll study this passage and then I'll make some general remarks about magic, the demonic world, and what we, as Children of God, should know.

Before we read, let's set the context here. David is still on the run from King Saul, but King Saul's days are coming to a close. The Philistines, Goliath's family, are pressing in on Saul, and he is in a state of panic. The Philistines have assembled at Shunem, which Bible scholars say was a very flat land. Israelites fought best in the hills because they did not have the advantage of chariots, but this battle was going to happen on smooth terrain and Saul knows that death knocks at his door. This will be a bloody defeat and he is in panic mode. What do people do when they are in panic mode? They get desperate. Watch this man self-destruct...**Read 1 Samuel 25:3-20.**

A missionary from Africa tells a story of a follower of Mohammed who became a follower of Jesus. Some of his friends asked him, "Why have you become a Christian?" He answered, "Well, it's like this. Suppose you were going down the road and suddenly it forked in two directions, and you didn't know which way to go, and there at the fork in the road were two men, one was lying dead and the other standing alive—which one would you ask which way to go?"

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In the text we just read, Saul has done the unthinkable. He no longer has the ear of the Living God so he disguises himself and breaks his own law in order to consult with a dead man.

He goes to see this medium, and he knows this is wrong. The Bible says in v.9 that Saul had cut off the mediums and spiritists, yet he now seeks the advice of one.

Now it's important to notice why he did that. Look what **verse 6** says... Saul had inquired of the Lord.

There were three basic ways that God communicated with this people back then. **One**, he spoke through dreams. Joseph had a dream where God told him that his brothers would one day bow before him. God used visions and dreams.

Two, God spoke through Urim. Now, we don't know exactly what the Urim was but the priest could use it as a tool for discerning the will of God. But Saul didn't have the Urim because the priest had left him and gone with David. So, no dreams, no Urim.

What's left? The **third** way God spoke was through His Prophets, but there were no prophets talking to Saul. And he was desperate to hear from God.

Understand this well: Disobedience will turn the ear of God. If you are choosing to deliberately sin against God, do not expect to hear his voice.

And Saul knew that he had made some really bad choices and God wasn't pleased with him, but he also heard the rumble of the Philistine chariots and he was desperate for help. Just like so many people today, he went running to some woman in a shop that claimed to be able to call upon the dead.

Now it's important that you understand that God had outlawed the use of mediums and magic. In the Old Testament, if you consulted with a spiritist, God called it "playing the harlot" and it was punishable by death with stones. Just like an unfaithful woman who puts herself in the arms of another man, Saul was uniting himself with another power.

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It was idolatry, and God has little patience with idolaters.

When you make someone else your sole fountain of wisdom—whether that is Dr. Phil, Oprah, or a witch doctor—you put someone else in the place of God. And God will not compete for your affection. You are headed down the wrong road.

Now let's follow Saul. Beginning in **vs. 8**, the scene is as eerie and dark as any ghost story you've ever heard. Saul creeps out at night to meet with this witch or medium to call up the spirit of a dead person.

This woman is at first suspicious, but Saul promises her his own personal vow of protection. The irony is heightened by his promise in **vs. 10**. Saul swears by the Lord! Say what?

What happens next has been the subject of speculation and debate among Bible scholars for many generations. It looks like this séance works: The woman sees a spirit being. In the form of an old man wrapped in a robe it rises from the ground like a ghost rising from the grave. In some way the medium suddenly sees past Saul's disguise, and only another promise of protection keeps her from calling the whole thing off.

Through the medium, Saul speaks to Samuel with a tone of pitiful urgency. Saul cries out in so many words, *"I don't have anyone else to turn to, Samuel! Please tell me: What should I do?"*

So, what really happened here? Did this woman call up Samuel's ghost, or was it a demon? Can a person really communicate with dead people? Scholars disagree. Some say this ghost was not really Samuel but a demon disguised as Samuel. Others say that God allowed the spirit of Samuel to reappear and communicate with Saul (which is what I believe). It's really not easy to say for sure one way or the other. What is plain is that Saul has put another nail in his own coffin by attempting to consult the dead.

I want you to notice what Samuel says in **vs. 16**. He is like a father who visits his son in jail.

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He says, “*Son, I’m sorry. There’s nothing I can do. You have made your bed and now you have to lie in it.*”

Listen to me, I cannot warn you enough! The Bible says, “*Seek the Lord while he may be found.*” In other words, don’t wait to obey God.

Delayed obedience is disobedience and you are gambling when you continue to live that way. If you have known sin in your life, confess it, make it right, and be right with God. Saul waited too long and it was too late. This passage explains why God finally took his life.

Now, let me deal with a few questions concerning magic...

Questions about Magic and Ghosts

1. Does the Bible support the idea that the dead can readily return to interact with the living?

The answer to that question is “No.” The Bible does not support that idea. In fact, this is the only time in Scripture, here in 1 Samuel 28, that this idea of consulting with the spirits of the dead is mentioned.

The Bible tells us that the ghosts or spirits of people who have died are located in one of two places. They are either in hell awaiting their Day of Judgment at the Great White Throne. Or they are in the presence of their Savior, Jesus Christ, in heaven. There is no holding tank for souls like purgatory.

The dead do not decide to hang around on earth to solve murder cases or to handle unfinished business. Once a person dies, there is no unfinished business. You can’t change your eternal status after you die. That must be taken care of before you die.

If you remember in **Luke 16:19-31**, Jesus tells the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Both of these men die. Lazarus was escorted to Paradise and the rich man to hell. And you remember, hell is such a terrible and final place, that the rich man calls out to Abraham who is in heaven, to send Lazarus back to warn his five brothers about hell.

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Vs 29 “Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

The magician and escape artist, Harry Houdini, visited so-called spirit mediums in every city where he toured, hoping to contact his deceased loved ones; but invariably he recognized that those “mediums” were using stage-magic, and he exposed them as frauds. We can safely assume that the same is true today; these people are hucksters, a few might use demonic power, but none are what they say they are. The only way to see your dead loved ones again is to meet them in the Kingdom of God.

The dead are still alive—but they aren’t found on earth. They are in heaven or hell, and those places are not fairy tale.

2. Is it possible to see a spirit?

Yes. I think the Bible does suggest that there are two invisible forces at work today. There is the host of God’s angelic army, which I could show you countless verses in the Bible that they not only exist but they are everywhere.

Hebrews 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

So angels are visible at times. But not only that, but consider the passage on spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6. Christians are warned to *Ephesians 6:11-12 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

Today, there are many who dabble in the mystical, occultic arts. Is there anything wrong with being involved in these practices?

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Yes, the Bible takes a clear position on this subject, strongly denouncing these practices. God's Word indicates that these practices are part of Satan's strategy of evil tricks and deception, designed to lead folks astray. Satan and his demons are real beings set on our destruction. And since demons are nothing more than fallen angels, it seems logical that they have the ability to take human form.

3. How should we respond when we are confronted with dark magic?

Understand that just like King Saul, all those who follow the path of the magic arts are on the wrong path - a road that leads away from God, not toward Him. In one way or another, the end will be disaster.

The evil Queen Jezebel practiced witchcraft (2 Kings 9:22) bringing catastrophe on herself and all Israel. Over and over, God denounces those who practice witchcraft and sorcery. The Bible says that anyone who does these things is an abomination to the Lord!

(Deuteronomy 18:10-12; 2 Kings 21:6; Micah 5:12; Isaiah 47:12; Ezekiel 13:18, 20; Acts 8:11-24; Leviticus 20:27; Exodus 7:11; Revelation 9:21; 22:15)

God warns of the ultimate punishment.

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

*Galatians 5:20-21 20 Idolatry, **witchcraft**, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

These practices are anti-God and are in rebellion against Him. You are playing the harlot when you open yourself up to another power other than God.

Now, let me deal with two very practical questions...

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4. Is Harry Potter harmless?

Let's talk about Harry. Harry Potter is a household name all across the world. This has become a reading phenomenon known and it truly has an international presence as readers in 200 nations, in over 40 languages, indulge in this series.

A U.S. consumer research survey reports that "over half of all children between the ages of 6 and 17 have read at least one Harry Potter book".

Public school educators and many parents in America are thrilled with a series that has captured the imagination of children like no other in history, prompting a revived interest in reading. Reading is a good thing, but should our children be reading about witchcraft.

You are playing with fire if you encourage your children to develop an interest in occultic practices. And there is something to be said for this argument. One headmaster of a school said this:

"With the growing popularity of youth-oriented TV shows on witchcraft -- 'Sabrina, the Teenage Witch,' 'Charmed,' 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer' -- a generation of children is becoming desensitized to the occult. But with Hollywood's help, Harry Potter will likely surpass all these influences, potentially reaping some grave spiritual consequences." --John Andrew Murray

In the same way that Hollywood is normalizing homosexuality, is the media also taking something evil like sorcery and repackaging it to make it seem less dangerous? Certainly we must recognize this is possible!

One final question...

5. Should we have Christian magicians and illusionists?

Someone asked John MacArthur that once. On a website, I read his response. Let me read it to you:

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“It depends on what you are doing. Magician is the wrong word in a sense, because that conjures up the occult, and mysticism, and all of that. What we know today as magicians are not functioning with supernatural power—they have a technique. They have just mastered a certain technique and they deceive you...When they do a disappearing trick that is all a technique...When you are talking about Satanic activity and how much power Satan has—that’s a very difficult question for me to answer. We know that during the time of the end, certainly 2 Thessalonians talks about it, that there is going to come certain powers.

Jesus in the Olivet Discourse talked about antichrists who would deceive, and even deceive the whole world. You know in Revelation we find the Antichrist with an amazing ability to deceive people. Just how extensive and how that functions and so forth from a Satanic perspective I am not sure I really know. The Bible doesn’t really give us what you could call a breakdown of how that works, but I really think, for the most part what we are dealing with, with magicians is just really a technique.” –John MacArthur

When the Bible says that the endtimes will demonstrate all powers and signs and lying wonders, is that speaking about modern magicians?
2 Thessalonians 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

Most of the magic that we see today has nothing to do with supernatural power. It’s a guy that has learned how to do a trick, and it’s fun to watch.

However, there are some magicians (one I’ve seen in particular) that appear to be using some sort of satanic power. (David Blaine)

So, what’s the final verdict? Stay away from any form of magic that has even the appearance of evil. If you want advice, don’t go to a psychic, go to God. And put on the whole armor of God so that you can stand against the wiles of the devil. They are real!