

The Witch of Endor: Truth in the Wrong Place

Key Verse: "And Saul said unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor." (1 Samuel 28:7, KJV)

The story of King Saul's clandestine visit to the witch, or medium, of Endor, recounted in 1 Samuel 28, is one of the most chilling and spiritually instructive episodes in the Old Testament. It is a portrait of desperation, a case study in forbidden knowledge, and a stark warning that echoes powerfully into our modern age. Here we find a man who was once anointed by God, now utterly forsaken, seeking guidance from the very darkness he had previously outlawed. His tragic journey to Endor teaches us that when we abandon the true Source of light, we will, in our panic, grasp at any glimmer in the dark—even if that glimmer is hellfire itself. This narrative compels us to examine the subtle and not-so-subtle ways we, too, may seek truth from forbidden sources, trading a relationship with the living God for a consultation with the counterfeit.

I. The Anatomy of Desperation: Saul's Downward Spiral

To understand the gravity of Saul's act, we must trace his spiritual decay. Saul's disobedience began with small presumptions (1 Samuel 13:8-14) and escalated into direct defiance of God's command through the prophet Samuel regarding the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15). His famous declaration, "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice" (1 Samuel 15:24, KJV), reveals a heart that prioritized human approval over divine instruction. The consequence was severe: "And Samuel said unto Saul... the LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou" (1 Samuel 15:26, 28, KJV). The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, replaced by a distressing spirit (1 Samuel 16:14).

By the time we reach 1 Samuel 28, Saul is a hollow man. The Philistine army encamps against him, and "when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart greatly trembled" (1 Samuel 28:5, KJV). In this terror, he does what he should have done

from the beginning: “And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets” (1 Samuel 28:6, KJV). God was silent. This divine silence was not capricious; it was the culmination of Saul’s lifelong pattern of seeking God only as a last resort, a divine consultant for crises, rather than as the Sovereign to be obeyed. His desperation did not lead to repentant humility; it led to a brazen violation of his own edict and God’s clear law.

The Law of Moses was unambiguous: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD” (Deuteronomy 18:10-12, KJV). Saul knew this. He had even “put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land” (1 Samuel 28:3, KJV). Yet, in his crisis, the very evil he outlawed became his last hope. This is a profound lesson: unredeemed sin and unrepentant hearts create a spiritual vacuum, and nature—especially our fallen nature—abhors a vacuum. If God’s presence and guidance are spurned, something else will fill the void.

II. The Consultation: A Glimpse into the Forbidden

Saul disguises himself and journeys by night to Endor. His request to the woman is direct: “I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee” (1 Samuel 28:8, KJV). The woman, wary of a trap, reminds him of the king’s decree. Saul, in a tragic oath, swears by the Lord—using the very name of the God he is defying—“As the LORD liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing” (1 Samuel 28:10, KJV).

When she proceeds and sees Samuel, she cries out in fear, understanding her client’s true identity. What rises from the earth is not summoned by her power; the text strongly implies it is a divine act of judgment, allowing the real Samuel to pronounce Saul’s doom one final time. Samuel’s message is one of terrifying finality: “And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David... Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with

me” (1 Samuel 28:17, 19, KJV). Saul sought knowledge to control his fate; he received a confirmation of his inevitable destruction. The witch’s parlor did not provide an escape hatch; it was merely the site of his final sentencing.

This episode reveals several truths about the occult: First, it may offer a facade of knowledge or contact, but it is ultimately under God’s sovereign control. Second, what it reveals is often despair, not hope. Third, it marks the absolute end of the line for a soul that has turned its back on God’s ordained means of grace.

III. Modern Endors: The Allure of Forbidden Guidance

1. The Occult as Idolatry and Unbelief.

Saul’s sin was fundamentally one of idolatry and unbelief. Idolatry is not merely bowing to a statue; it is trusting in any power other than the one true God for guidance, provision, or protection. When Saul chose the medium over prayer, over waiting on the Lord, over seeking a true prophet, he was declaring, through his actions, that God’s prescribed channels were insufficient. He placed his faith in a forbidden spiritual mechanism.

Our modern world is saturated with its own versions of the witch of Endor. Many dabble in astrology, checking horoscopes for daily guidance, seeking meaning in the alignment of stars rather than the will of their Creator. Others consult psychics, tarot cards, or mediums, craving a peek into the future or contact with the departed. Even within some church circles, false prophets arise, offering personalized “words” that tickle ears and promise prosperity without repentance, bypassing the sufficiency of Scripture and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Each of these is a form of idolatry because it seeks knowledge, comfort, or control from a source other than God. It is unbelief because it implicitly states, “God is not speaking, is not enough, or cannot be trusted, so I must find out for myself through other means.”

The Bible condemns this unequivocally. Isaiah thunders against those who look to the world’s wisdom: “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?” (Isaiah 8:19, KJV). The rhetorical answer is a resounding no. We are to seek the living God, not whispers from the grave. The practice is linked to

the rebellion that led to Israel's exile: "Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees... and they slew the young men with the sword... and all their vessels... And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon... to fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah... because of their sins: and they provoked him to anger. And they... used witchcraft, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger" (2 Chronicles 36:17-18, 20, 14, 16, KJV, emphasis added). Witchcraft is not a harmless alternative; it is a provocation of divine anger, a selling of oneself into spiritual bondage.

2. Demonic Invitation: The Enemy's Design.

Engaging with the occult is not a neutral exploration of "spiritual energy." It is a way of inviting demonic influence to guide our lives. The "familiar spirit" (ob in Hebrew) was not a neutral ghost; scripture associates it with demonic entities that impersonate, deceive, and destroy. Demons are not curious guides; they are the enemies of God and, by extension, the enemies of human flourishing. Their agenda is explicitly stated by Jesus: "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10, KJV).

When Paul encountered a slave girl with "a spirit of divination" (literally, a python spirit, associated with the Delphic oracle) in Philippi, he did not celebrate her accurate proclamation of his mission. After many days, "Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour" (Acts 16:18, KJV). Her fortune-telling ability was demonic, and Paul exorcised it. The New Testament consistently lumps occult practices with the works of the flesh: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these... idolatry, witchcraft... 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" (Galatians 5:19-21, KJV). Witchcraft (pharmakeia, also linked to sorcery and drug-induced enchantments) is a kingdom-excluding sin because it aligns one with the kingdom of darkness.

Revelation describes the fate of those who persist: "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” (Revelation 21:8, KJV). The sorcerer stands in the same category as the murderer and idolater, for their sin springs from the same root: rejection of God’s authority.

3. The Ultimate Deception: Sorcery in the Last Days.

This is not a minor issue; it is central to the enemy’s end-times strategy. The Apostle Paul warns that before Christ’s return, a great apostasy will occur, and “the man of sin” (the Antichrist) will be revealed. His rise will be accompanied by “signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:9, KJV). The book of Revelation expands on this, showing that the entire world system will be seduced by occult power. Speaking of the end-times false religious system, it says: “For by thy sorceries were all nations deceived” (Revelation 18:23, KJV). The word for “sorceries” here is again pharmakeia—a reference to enchantments, spells, and deceptive spiritual powers. The Antichrist’s right-hand man, the False Prophet, performs great signs, even making an image speak, “And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (Revelation 13:15, KJV). This is the pinnacle of demonic sorcery: a counterfeit of God’s life-giving power used to enforce idolatry.

This is why we must reject the occult in all its forms now. It is not merely a personal spiritual danger; it is a training ground for the very deception that will engulf the world. To dabble in it is to desensitize ourselves to the enemy’s signature tricks. It is to play with the matches that will one day ignite the global conflagration of satanic worship.

IV. Our Triumphant Authority: No Fear in Christ

Yet, the story does not end with the power of darkness. We are not called to a fearful avoidance of the occult, but to a triumphant confidence in the superior power of our God. The same God who judged Saul is the God who triumphs over all sorcery. We see this first in Egypt. Pharaoh’s magicians, Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8), replicated some of Moses’ miracles through their “enchantments.” They turned rods into serpents and water into blood. But there came a point where their power was broken: at the plague of lice, “the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not... Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God” (Exodus

8:18-19, KJV). God's power surpassed and humiliated the occult. The culminating act was the Passover, where the Lord executed judgment "against all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12, KJV), breaking their hold over the Israelites. The occult held fear, but God provided a way of salvation through the blood of a lamb.

We see it again in Europe through the Apostle Paul. In Ephesus, a major center for occult arts and the worship of Artemis, the gospel's power was displayed spectacularly. "Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:19-20, KJV). These were not skeptics; these were practitioners who saw the superior authority in the name of Jesus Christ. The demonic realm was so overpowered that even Jewish exorcists trying to misuse Jesus' name were routed by a demonized man (Acts 19:13-16). The result was that "fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17, KJV).

This is our position. We have nothing to fear from the occult because we serve the Christ who has "spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:15, KJV). When we are in Christ, we are seated "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion" (Ephesians 1:21, KJV). The enemy is a defeated foe. Our weapon is not incantations or rituals, but the full armor of God, the blood of the Lamb, the word of our testimony, and the all-powerful name of Jesus (Revelation 12:11).

Conclusion: Seeking the True and Living Way

Saul's journey to Endor is the ultimate dead end. He received the truth, but it was a truth of condemnation, not salvation. He sought a word, but it was a word of death. He is a warning to all who, in fear or curiosity, would seek guidance from any spirit other than the Holy Spirit, from any source other than God's Word. Our world offers countless Endors—digital, storefront, televised—promising guidance, comfort, and control. But we must remember: All supernatural power is not from God. The test is not whether it "works," but whether it aligns with the holy, revealed character of God in Scripture and leads us to worship Jesus Christ alone.

Let us, therefore, flee the seduction of the forbidden. Let us cleanse our lives of any vestige of horoscopes, fortune-telling, spiritism, or any practice that seeks to manipulate or uncover the spiritual realm outside of Christ. Instead, let us be a people who, in times of confusion or fear, do what Saul refused to do until it was too late: we must fall in repentant faith before the Lord. We must seek Him in His Word, in prayer, and in the counsel of the godly. We must wait on Him, even in the silence, trusting that He is good.

For we are not like Saul, forsaken and desperate. We are like David, who, though he sinned greatly, could pray with confidence: “Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psalm 32:7-8, KJV). Our God promises guidance to the humble, the repentant, and the trusting. We need not go to Endor. We need only go to the foot of the cross and the empty tomb, where all the power of hell was broken, and where the true and living Way stands open forever.