


THE INFAMOUS WITCH OF ENDOR

by **David Lee Burris**



A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent blue shapes that form a horizontal bar with a wavy, layered appearance, tapering off to the right.

In Rome's Pauli Sententiae, (Legem Corneliam De Sicariis et Veneficis), compiled in the late third century A.D. Julius Paulus writes: "Persons who celebrate, or otherwise cause to be celebrated - impious or nocturnal rites - to enchant, bewitch, or to bind anyone, shall be crucified, or thrown to the wild beasts."

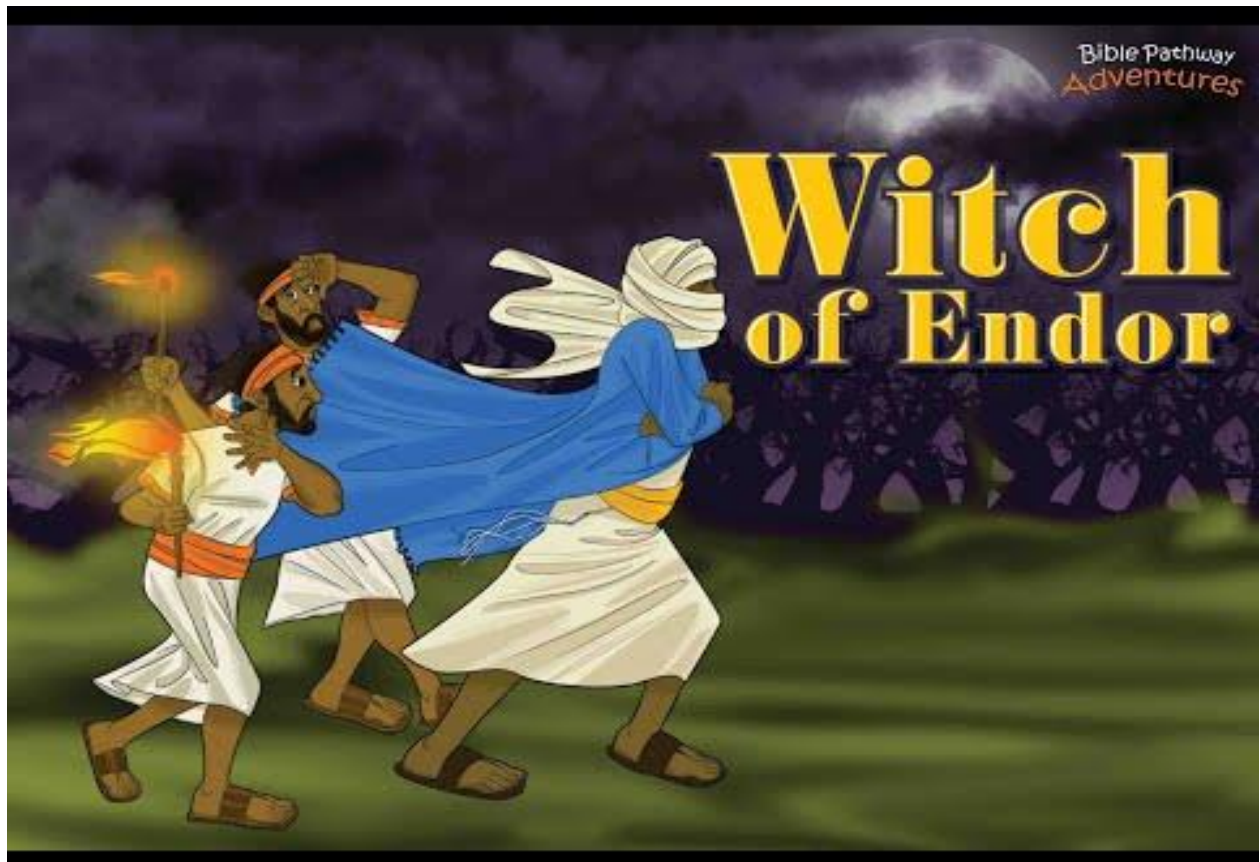


Thou shalt not suffer
a witch to live.

— Exodus 22:18

Exodus 22:18

- **American Standard Version** "Thou shalt not suffer a **sorceress** to live."
 - **The Answer:** Put to death any woman who does **evil magic**.
 - **Amplified Bible:** You shall not allow a woman to live who practices **sorcery**.
 - **King James Version:** Thou shalt not suffer a **witch** to live.
 - **Living Bible:** A **sorceress** shall be put to death.
 - **New American Standard Bible:** You shall not let a **sorceress** live
 - **Exo 22:18** En trollkvinna skall du icke låta leva.
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- Sorcery, Magic: The art or science of putting into action the power of spirits; or the science of producing wonderful effects by the aid of superhuman beings, or of departed spirits; sorcery; enchantment



New King James: First Samuel Chapter 28 @Saul Consults a Medium

28 Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, “You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men.”

2 So David said to Achish, “Surely you know what your servant can do.”

And Achish said to David, “Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever.”

3 Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah, in his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the spiritists out of the land.

4 Then the Philistines gathered together, and came and encamped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. **5** When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. **6** And when Saul inquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.

7 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.”

8 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.”

9 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?”

10 And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, “*As* the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.”

11 Then the woman said, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” And he said, “Bring up Samuel for me.”

12 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!”

13 And the king said to her, “Do not be afraid. What did you see?” And the woman said to Saul, “I saw a^{al} spirit ascending out of the earth.”

14 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.

15 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.”

16 Then Samuel said: “So why do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? ¹⁷ And the LORD has done for ^{luj}Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. ¹⁸ 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.

19 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.”

20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night.

21 And the woman came to Saul and saw that he was severely troubled, and said to him, “Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands and heeded the words which you spoke to me. ²² Now therefore, please, heed also the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength when you go on *your* way.”

23 But he refused and said, “I will not eat.” So, his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. ²⁴ Now the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. And she took flour and kneaded *it*, and baked unleavened bread from it. ²⁵ So she brought *it* before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

1st Samuel 28 (11) **Bring me up Samuel** — A remarkable passage in the Babylonian Talmud evidently shows that, at all events in the Rabbinical Schools of an early date, the bringing up of Samuel was looked upon as owing to the witch's power.

“A Sadducee once said to Rabbi Abhu, ‘Ye say that the souls of the righteous are treasured up under the throne of glory; how then had the witch of Endor power to bring up the prophet Samuel by necromancy?’ The Rabbi replied, ‘Because that occurred within twelve months after his death; for we are taught that during twelve months after death the body is preserved, and the soul soars up and down, but that after twelve months the body is destroyed, and the soul goes up, never to return.’” — Treatise *Shabbath*, fol. 88, Colossians 2.

Saul's state of mind on this, almost the eve of his last fatal fight at Gilboa, affords a curious study. He felt himself forsaken of God, and yet, in his deep despair, his mind turns to the friend and guide of his youth, from whom—long before that friend's death—he had been so hopelessly estranged. There must have been a terrible struggle in the proud king's heart before he could have brought himself to stoop to ask for assistance from one of that loathed and proscribed class of women who professed to have dealings with familiar spirits and demons. “There is,” once wrote Archbishop Trench, “something unutterably pathetic in the yearning of the dis-anointed king, now in his utter desolation, to exchange words once more with the friend and counsellor of his youth; and if he must hear his doom, to hear it from no other lips but his.”

Benson Commentary

1 Samuel 28:12. *And when the woman saw Samuel* — *when*, which our translators have inserted here, and which is not in the original text, embarrasses the sense, and is calculated to give the reader a wrong idea of this transaction, leading him to think that some space of time intervened between Saul's request and Samuel's appearance, during which the woman was employed practising her art. Whereas, the Hebrew implies no such thing. It is literally, *And he (Saul) said, Bring me up Samuel*; and *the woman saw Samuel, and cried with a loud voice*, &c. — The true state of this affair seems to have been, that as soon as Saul had signified whom he wished to have brought up, the woman was about to proceed to her charms and incantations, “designing,” says Dr. Dodd, “to put some trick upon Saul, by producing an accomplice to represent Samuel.”

Be this, however, as it may, contrary to all her expectation, the moment Saul had mentioned the name of Samuel, the woman saw a venerable figure before her, which made her shriek out with astonishment, *Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul* — She knew this appearance was not owing to any contrivance of her own, or her associates. It was what she in no wise expected and immediately concluded, that it could be no less a person than the king of Israel that this venerable person was really sent to. From all the circumstances of the relation, it appears that the woman herself was convinced, as the Egyptian magicians were upon another occasion, that *this was the finger of God*.

To suppose that the woman herself, by her familiar spirit or spells, raised Samuel, or any evil spirit that personated him; or that she put a trick upon Saul, by causing one of her associates to appear as Samuel, is so contrary to reason, and the circumstances of the story. The historian expressly says *the woman saw Samuel*, and if we believe that she didn't see Samuel, but only an evil spirit personating him, we must call in question either the ability or integrity of the sacred writer: we must conceive that he did not know what he wrote about.

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(13) *I saw gods ascending out of the earth.* — *The king at once calms the witch's fears for her life, and impatiently, asks what she saw which called forth the cry of fear and terror. "Gods" — this is the rendering of the Hebrew word Elohim. The English Version, however, follows the majority of the Versions here. The Chaldee translates the word by "angels." Corn, à Lapide and the best modern scholars, however, reasoning from Saul's words which immediately follow — "What is his form?" — suppose the Elohim to signify, not a plurality, but one God-like form: something majestic and august. The feeling of antiquity seems to have been in favor of more than one supernatural form entering into the Endor dwelling on that awful night. Besides the testimony referred to, the passage in the Babylonian Talmud treatise Chaggrigah, quoted below, speaks of two positively spirit forms - Samuel and another.*

Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(14) **An old man Cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle.** — The "mantle;" Hebrew, *m'il*. The garment so named was not a peculiar one, and bore no official signification; still, its mention in this place would seem as though the woman recognised the well-known *m'il* which the prophet used to wear in life.

But it has been asked, How could a spirit bear the semblance of an old man? and further, How could such a being be clothed? Rabbi Moses Maimonides of Cordova (twelfth century), surnamed the “Eagle of the Doctors,” in his *Yad Hachazakah*, admirably replies to these queries when discussing certain similar expressions used with regard to the Holy One, who is a Spirit without a body or a frame. “We find,” says Maimonides, “such expressions as ‘under His feet,’ written with the finger of God,’ ‘the eye of the Lord,’ &c. Of Him one prophet says, ‘That he saw the Holy One—blessed be He!—whose garment was white as snow’ ([Daniel 7:9](#)); whilst another saw Him ‘like a warrior engaged in battle.’ Compare the saying of the sages in the *Yad Joseph* on [Exodus 15:3](#) :—‘On the sea He was seen like a man-of-war, and upon Sinai like a reader of prayers, wrapped (in a surplice); and all this though he had neither similitude or form, but that these things were in an apparition of prophecy, and in a vision.’”—*Yad Hachazakah*, bk. I., ch. 1 “God designed,” says Bishop Wordsworth, “that the spirit of Samuel should be recognised by human eyes; and how could this have been done but by means of such objects as are visible to human sense? Our Lord speaks of the *tongue* of the disembodied spirit of Dives in order to give us an idea of his sufferings; and at the Transfiguration He presented the form of Moses in such a garb to the three disciples as might enable them to recognise him as Moses.”

And he stooped . . . and bowed himself.—It Seems probable that at this juncture the king *saw* the form before him when he did obeisance. It is, however, not clear, from the language here used, whether this strange act of reverent homage did not at once follow the description of the woman.

[Keil/Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament](#)

(15) Then Samuel said, **"Why hast thou disturbed me** (sc., from my rest in Hades; cf. [Isaiah 14:9](#)), **to bring me up?"** It follows, no doubt, from this that Samuel had been disturbed from his rest by Saul; but whether this had been effected by the conjuring arts of the witch, or by a miracle of God himself, is left undecided. Saul replied, "I am sore oppressed, for the Philistines fight against me, and God has departed from me, and answers me no more, either by prophets or dreams; then I had thee called (on the intensified form וַאֲקַרְאֵהָ, vid., Ewald, 228, c.), to make known to me what I am to do." **The omission of any reference to the Urim is probably to be interpreted very simply from the brevity of the account, and not from the fact that Saul shrank from speaking about the oracle of the high priest, on account of the massacre of the priests which had taken place by his command. There is a contradiction, however, in Saul's reply: for if God had forsaken him, he could not expect any answer from Him; and if God did not reply to his inquiry through the regularly appointed media of His revelation, how could he hope to obtain any divine revelation through the help of a witch?**

"When living prophets gave no answer, he thought that a dead one might be called up, as if a dead one were less dependent upon God than the living, or that, even in opposition to the will of God, he might then reply through the arts of a conjuring woman. Truly, if he perceived that God was hostile to him, he ought to have been all the more afraid, lest His enmity should be increased by his breach of His laws. But fear and superstition never reason" (Clericus). Samuel points out this contradiction ([28:16](#)): "Why dost thou ask me, since Jehovah hath departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?" The meaning is: How canst thou expect an answer under these circumstances from me, the prophet of Jehovah? עֵרֵךְ, from עָרָה, signifies an enemy here (from עֵרָה, fervour).

There is all the less ground for any critical objection to the reading, as the Chaldee and Vulgate give a periphrastic rendering of "enemy," whilst the lxx, Syr., have merely paraphrased according to conjectures. Samuel then announced his fate ([1 Samuel 28:17-19](#)): "Jehovah hath performed for himself, as He spake by me (לִּי, for himself, which the lxx and Vulg. have arbitrarily altered into לְךָ, σοί, tibi (to thee), is correctly explained by Seb. Schmidt, 'according to His grace, or to fulfil and prove His truth'); and Jehovah hath rent the kingdom out of thy hand, and given it to thy neighbor David." The perfects express the purpose of God, which had already been formed, and was now about to be fulfilled.

Pulpit Commentary

Verses 17-19. - **Jehovah hath done to him.** Rather, "hath wrought for himself;" but the LXX., Vulgate, and some MSS. read "hath done **to thee,**" as in ver. 18. **As he spake by me.** See [1 Samuel 15:28](#). Saul's rebellion is there said, in ver. 23, to be a crime as great as the witchcraft which he was at that time zealously punishing; here, where the sentence is being carried into execution, **King Saul has himself become guilty of what in his better hours he so abominated. Jehovah will also deliver Israel with thee.** Rather, "deliver Israel also with thee," i.e. the nation is to share thy punishment. **Tomorrow shalt thou & thy sons be with me.** I.e. shall be dead. Whence this voice came it is difficult to say.

The object of the narrative is plainly to set before us the completeness of Saul's moral downfall and debasement. Here is the man endowed with so many and so great gifts of genius, and who in so many things started so well and behaved so nobly, the victim of a despairing melancholy; his conscience is blackened with the wholesale massacre of the priesthood, his imagination is ever brooding over the sick fancy of treason plotted by his son-in-law, whom now he supposes to be in the Philistine camp.

In this dire extremity his one wish is to pry into futurity and learn his fate. There is no submission to God, no sorrow for disobedience, no sign of even a wish for amendment; it is to unholy arts that he looks, simply that he may know what a few more hours will make known to all.

Neglecting his duties as a general and king, instead of making wise preparation for the coming fight, he disguises himself, takes a dangerous and wearisome journey round the enemies' camp, arrives at his destination by night, and, exhausted with hunger and mental agitation, seeks there for the knowledge unattainable in any upright manner from a reputed witch. He has rejected God, lost all the strength and comfort of true religion, and is become the victim of abject superstition.

Whether he were the victim also of the woman's arts, or of his own sick fantasy, is not a matter of much consequence; the interest of the narrative lies in the revelation it makes to us of Saul's mental and moral state; and scarcely is there in the whole of Scripture anything more tragic than this narrative, or any more intense picture of the depth of degradation to which a noble but perverse intellect is capable of falling. 1 Samuel 28:17

Keil/Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament

(18) The reason for Saul's rejection is then given, as in [1 Samuel 15:23](#) : "**Because (כִּאֲשֶׁר, according as) thou ... hast not executed the fierceness of His anger upon Amalek, therefore hath Jehovah done this thing to thee this day.**" "This thing" is the distress of which Saul had complained, with its consequences. יִתֵּן, that Jehovah may give (equals for He will give) Israel also with thee into the hand of the Philistines. "Tomorrow wilt thou and thy sons be with me (i.e. in Sheol, with the dead); also the camp of Israel will Jehovah give into the hand of the Philistines," i.e., give up to them to plunder. The overthrow of the people was to heighten Saul's misery, when he saw the people plunged with him into ruin through his sin (O. v. Gerlach). Thus was the last hope taken from Saul. His day of grace was gone, and judgment was now to burst upon him without delay.

Benson Commentary

1 Samuel 28:19. *Moreover, the Lord will also deliver,* &c. — Samuel here predicts three things: **1st**, That the Lord would deliver Israel, with Saul, into the hand of the Philistines. **2nd**, That Saul and his sons (namely, the three that were with him in camp) should be *with him*, that is, should, like him, be in the state of the dead, or another world. **3rd**, That this should take place on *the morrow*. Now as no evil spirit or impostor of any kind could possibly know these particulars, which were all exactly accomplished next day, nor even Samuel himself, unless he had been divinely inspired with the knowledge of them, it is surprising that any person should imagine that this appearance of Samuel was either a human or diabolical imposture; for it is evident it could only proceed from omniscient God. And if we consider the whole attentively, we may see a peculiar propriety. **When Samuel denounced God's judgments upon Saul he was clad in a mantle, which Saul tore on that occasion. He now came to repeat and to ratify the sentence then denounced; and, to strike him with fuller conviction, he appears in the same dress, the same mantle, in which he denounced that sentence.** And since he now again denounced a **rending of the kingdom** from Saul's posterity, why may we not presume that the mantle showed now the same rent which was the emblem of that rending? Is it irrational to suppose that when he spoke of this he held up the mantle and pointed to the rent? It is well known that the prophets were men of much action in their speaking, and often illustrated their predictions by emblems. It may be observed further, that although Samuel in his lifetime often reprov'd Saul for his guilt, and told him that God had given away his kingdom from him for that guilt; yet he never told him to whom, nor when the sentence should be executed upon him. How proper, then, to raise from the dead the same prophet who predicted that sentence, to confirm it; **to tell him that the kingdom should be taken from him that day; and to name the very person to whom it should be given; to show by whom, and where, and how the sentence should be executed;** and the execution of it should be deferred no longer. Was not this an occasion worthy of the divine interposition? The son of Sirach, who probably had as much wisdom, penetration, and piety, as any critic that came after him, is clearly of opinion with the sacred historian, that it was Samuel himself who foretold the fate of Saul and his house in this interview.

It has been a question with some, whether the Jews had any belief in the immortality of the soul? This history is a full decision upon that point, and perhaps the establishment of that truth upon the foot of sensible evidence, was not the lowest end of Samuel's appearance upon this occasion.

Pulpit Commentary

Verses 20-25. - **Saul fell straightway all along, i.e.** at full length, **on the earth.** He fainted, partly from mental distress, partly from bodily exhaustion, as he had gone **all the day** and **all the night** without food. It was this long continued violent emotion of feeling which had driven Saul to this rash enterprise; but fasting and agony of mind were the worst possible preparation for a visit to one used to cajole her victims by pretended magical arts, and gifted, as people of her class usually are, with great shrewdness. Practised as she was in deceit, yet even in her triumph over her enemy she felt, when she saw him swoon away, a natural sympathy for his misery and weakness, and urged him to take food. Perhaps she saw that without it he could never have gotten back to the Israelite camp. At first, he refused, but the necessity of it was so plain, that when the two men with him also urged it, he at last consented. **So, he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed.** During this colloquy he had remained prostrate upon the ground, but now he seated himself, not on a bed, but upon the **raised bank, or divan, which runs along the wall of an Oriental house**, and is furnished with carpets and cushions for men to sit or lie upon. There he rested, a prey, we may well believe, to bitter thoughts, while the woman prepared a meal, killing a calf and baking unleavened cakes, as there was no time to leaven the dough. And so "they ate, and rose up, and departed that night."

MacLaren's Expositions

Among all the persons of Scripture who are represented as having fallen away from God and wrecked their lives, perhaps there is none so impressive as the giant form of the first king of Israel. Seamed and scarred with marks of passions, moody and suspicious, devil-ridden and lonely, doubting his truest friends, and even his son, striking blindly in his fury at the gracious, sunny poet-warrior who shows so bright, so full of resource, so nimble, so generous, by contrast with the heavy strength of the moody giant, and ever escapes the javelin that quivers harmlessly in the wall, with an inevitable destiny hanging over his head, and at last creeping to 'wizards that peep and mutter,' and dying a suicide, with his army in full flight and his son dead at his feet-what a course and what an end for the chosen of the Lord, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came with the anointing oil, and gave him a new heart for his kingly office.

I know not anywhere a sadder story: and I know not where human lips ever poured out a more awful wail-like a Titan in his rage of pain - than these words of our text. Bright hopes and fair promise, and much that was good and true in performance - all came to this. A few hours more and the 'battle went against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.' Madness, despair, defeat, death, all were the sequel of, 'Because thou hast rejected the commandment of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king.' A true soul's tragedy!

I. At the bright dawn.

The early story gives us many traits of beauty in Saul's character. Not only physical strength but a winning personality are apparent. His modesty and humility when Samuel salutes him are made plain.

How many a man finds that sudden elevation ruins him! But often it evokes what is good and brings an entire change of disposition.

The story of the beginning of his reign reveals a very noble and lovable character. So, for the first year of his reign all went well.

How much of divine influence a man may have and yet fling it all away! How unreliable a thing mere natural goodness is! How bright a beginning may darken into a tempestuous day! How seeds of evil may lurk in the fairest character! How little one can be judged by part of his life! How it is not the possession, but the retention, of goodness that makes a man good.

II. The gathering clouds.

The acts recorded as darkening the fair dawn of Saul's reign may seem too trivial to deserve the stern retribution that followed them, but small acts may be great sins. The first of them was his offering sacrifices without authority, an act which Samuel stigmatised as wanton, deliberate disobedience to 'the commandment of the Lord thy God.' Next came his rash and absurd laying of a curse on any soldier who should eat food before evening, and his consequent mad determination to kill Jonathan, for 'taking a little honey' on the end of his rod. Next came his flagrant disobedience to the divine command transmitted to him through Samuel, to 'smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all they have, and spare them not,' We shudder at such ferocious extermination, but we are to remember that Saul was moved by no pity, but by mere lust for loot, and tried to deceive God, in the person of His representative Samuel, by the lie that the people had coerced him, and that the motive for preserving the best of the cattle was to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel's blaze of indignation gave the world the great word: **'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.'**

Putting all these acts together, we have the sad picture of a character steadily deteriorating. He is growing daily more self-willed and impatient of restraint. He is chafing at his position as a viceroy, not an absolute sovereign. He is becoming tyrannical, careless of his subjects' lives, intolerant of opposition, remonstrance, or even advice. The tragedy of his decadence is summed up in Samuel's stern word: 'Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'

Trivial acts may show deep-seated evil. The master-sin is disobedience, self-willed departure from God. That disobedience may be as virulently active in a trifle as in a deed that men call great. **Self-will is the tap root of all sin, however labyrinthine the outgrowth from it.**

III. The long eclipse.

'An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and the Spirit of God departed from him.'

Modern psychologists would call Saul's case an instance of insanity brought about by indulgence and self-will. Is there any reason why the more religious explanation should not be united with the scientific one? Does not God work in the working of 'natural' phenomena?

What we nowadays call insanity is not very far off from a man who habitually indulges in passionate self-will, and spurns God from any authority over his life. What were Saul's characteristics now? The story tells of bursts of ungovernable fury, of universal suspicions, of utter misery, seeing enemies everywhere and complaining, 'None of you hath pity upon me,' of ferocious cruelty and gloomy despair, of paroxysms of agonising but transient remorse.

IV. The stormy sunset.

The scene at Endor makes one's flesh creep. No more tragic picture of failure and despair was ever painted. The greatest dramatists, whose creations move the terror and pity of the world, have imagined no more heart-touching figure.

The boding prophecy of to-morrow's defeat and death filled yet fuller the cup that had seemed to be already full of all misery. And that collapse of strength in the huddled figure, prostrate in the witch's den, may well stand for a prophecy of what will be the upshot at the last of a self-will that boasts of its own power, and tries to shake off dependence on God.

DIGGING DEEPER @THE END GAME:

Israelite Divination - Prophets, *Urim*, and *Thummim*

Although the focus of 1 Samuel 28 lies in the summoning of Samuel's soul by the witch of Endor, the biblical texts also provide us with various details which serve to locate, functionally and legally, the particular skills of the witch. The purpose of Saul's visit to the witch is to provide him with knowledge which has been denied to him by the normal prophetic channels.

1 Samuel 28:6 informs us that God did not respond to Saul's plea for help through either dreams, the *Urim*, or by the actions of a prophet (Hebrew: *navi*, Greek: *prophetes*). These three agencies are intended to designate the sanctioned forms of divination which an Israelite monarch could rely upon. Again, we are reminded in 28:15 that Saul is spiritually adrift, as he acknowledges again God has not addressed him through either the prophets or through dreams.

The purpose of these references is to draw contrast with the efforts of the witch; Saul is forced to turn to her illegal divinatory skills because God has left him. In no sense then is the *ba'alat ob/engastrimuthos* to be considered in the same category as the *navi/prophetes*. Indeed, the injunctions of Deuteronomy 18:10-14 clearly reference the former as practitioners of magic who have no place in Israel.

We might remember, too, that the laws against magicians in 18:10-14 are followed immediately by a lengthy description of the office of the prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-23. The implication in both Deut and 1 Samuel is one of contrast; in no way can a prophet of God be compared to a magician.

The *Urim* and *Thummim* appear together in Exodus 28:30, Leviticus 8:8, Numbers 27:21, Deuteronomy 33:8, 1 Samuel 14:41, 28:6, Ezra 2:63, and Nehemiah 7:65. Perhaps having little idea of its true nature, versions provide us with the nebulous translation of 'manifestations' (Greek: *delois*).

In rendering 1 Samuel 28:6 LXX, clearly at a loss as to how to translate the term *Urim*, imagines that Saul could not receive divine guidance from the 'manifestations' (*delois*).

Whilst various theories have been advanced to explain the nature of the *Urim*, often in concert with an analysis of the equally mysterious *Thummim*, our only secure conclusion is that both dealt with some form of prophetic or divinatory activity. This is certainly the sense in which they appear in 1 Samuel 28. This conclusion is supported by 1 Samuel 14, which not only provides further support for the theory of 1 Samuel 28:3-25 as an integral part of 1 Samuel, but also suggests that the *Urim* and *Thummim* are **two types of oracular response**.

Saul has already made use of the *Urim* and *Thummim*, as a valid form of divination, prior to the events of 1 Samuel 28; indeed, not only does he receive an answer to his questions, but he makes it clear that in his consultation he is appealing to God for judgement. By including the *Urim* and *Thummim* in its list of acceptable forms of divination then, 1 Samuel 28:6 makes a clear statement concerning Saul's rejection by God. Indeed, **not only are the active forms of divination unavailable to Saul, the prophets and the *Urim* and *Thummim*, but so too is the passive form of dream revelation. These various forms are mentioned not only to illustrate Saul's fall from divine grace, but also to provide a contrast with magic and the illegal events of 1 Samuel 28:3-25.**

Jewell, Phil. *The Rehabilitation of The Witch of Endor: Flavius Josephus and Roman Necromancy*. Kindle Edition.

Early Christian Commentary & Interpretations of 1st Samuel 28

Early commentators were guided in their interpretations of 1 Samuel 28 by several passages of the New Testament which address the notion of demonic inspiration and deception.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15 speaks of those who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ, stating; “Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So, it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness.” In Acts 8:9-24 we see the quintessential battle of miracle and magic between the apostles as representatives of God and the forces of daemonic magic in the form of Simon Magus.

Justin, (Dialogue with Trypho, 105), Origen, (Commentary on John, 20.42) Augustine, (De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum, 2.3), all believed that the prophet was truly raised by the witch, whilst John Chrysotom, (Commentary on Matthew) felt that that either a demon in Samuel’s likeness or Samuel himself appeared not by the magic of the witch but by God’s command. Finally, Tertullian, (De Anima, 57), Gregory of Nyssa, (De Pythonissa), Jerome, (the Matthew and Ezekiel Commentary) saw that a demon was summoned by the witch in order to give Saul a false prophecy.

The exegesis on this issue by such influential figures as Origen, Jerome and Tertullian, demonstrate the extent to which magic was a very real, and dangerous, factor in nascent Christianity. Moreover, their multiple explanations reveal the extent which biblical exegetes, of a slightly later period than Josephus, were troubled by the nature of 1 Samuel’s bold narrative and sought to explain events according to their own magic understanding. The magical episode contained in 1 Samuel 28 is replete with distinct forms of magical terminology, and constitutes one of the few direct references to the practice of necromancy in the Hebrew Bible.

As we have seen, there is some confusion in modern appraisals of these magic terms as to their exact meanings; this sense of mystery about the events of Endor extends to ancient sources too. However, the magic terminology is principally of negative aspect & association; certainly this is how some translators would like the witch and her art to be seen, linking her description and undertakings to the outlawed magicians of Deuteronomy 18:10-14.

In this manner, the witch appears as a negatively-defined magician. Thus, Philo finds little worthy of comment in the story of the witch, and his image of necromancy is wholly negative. Likewise, we have the negative appraisal of Pseudo-Philo, who not only cites the witch as an example of the *malefici* who Saul expelled, but also imagines that she is the daughter of Aod, the arch-magician and paragon of evil intent against the Israelites in the Biblical Antiquities. In post-Josephan literature we find a similar sense of negativity in viewing the witch. In considering the account given by Josephus, then, we will be aware that ancient literature had very little positive to say on the matter of the witch, her art, or the character of Saul.

Jewell, Phil. *The Rehabilitation of The Witch of Endor: Flavius Josephus and Roman Necromancy*. Kindle Edition.

Commentary Of Josephus Specific To The Raising of Samuel

Having secured her services and trust through the swearing of oaths, Josephus reports that Saul asks the witch to raise the soul (Greek: *psyche*) of Samuel (Ant., 6.332; in 1 Samuel 28:11b Saul simply requests for Samuel to be brought up). **Here, Josephus expands on the biblical texts for he presumes that Samuel's soul is to be raised, rather than simply 'Samuel', and he adds, by way of explanation, that this soul is brought up from Hades.** These details are intended for a Graeco-Roman audience, for whom the natural abode for souls after death is Hades. Indeed, for a culture heavily indebted to the Homeric epics we may see the *nekoumanteion* of Odyssey Book 11 as a common form of Graeco-Roman necromancy. Josephus' account of the Endor witch mirrors this classical case.

Unlike the later rabbis and church fathers, Josephus was in no doubt that Samuel's soul has been raised by the necromantic art of the witch.

The very fact that Josephus uses the term *psyche* here suggests that for him the events of the biblical narrative can be read in a literal manner. Such an approach does not conflict with either his Graeco-Roman or Jewish understandings of life after death, nor with his approach to magic. Josephus has no doubts concerning the efficacy of the witch's magical skills; indeed, he praises them and suggests that they are responsible for her livelihood. Nor do we see his usual refrain on the supernatural and appeal to rational sensibilities here, no warning to the reader to believe as they will on this matter. This suggests that there is no need of such a warning; **the events are as narrated, with no need for Josephus to explain them.**

Through his use of Greek terminology, he has established the location of the witch in the landscape of Graeco-Roman magic. These terms, as we have seen, suggest Josephus understood the nature of necromancy in the Graeco-Roman world and his nuanced usage demonstrates his understanding of the elastic nature of the magic category; the witch, as a necromancer, is open to both negative and positive responses.

For Josephus this portrayal is overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, Josephus repeats the biblical details which see Saul make the request for divination and the witch hesitate due to the king's ban on such practices (Ant., 6.331, 1 Samuel 28:10a). The oath sworn by Saul not to punish the witch, repeated by Josephus, represents a sanctioning of her activities. For a Graeco-Roman audience who saw magic as a form of unsanctioned religious/ritual activity, this oath from a king, who has tried other avenues of divination without success, dissolves many of the negative aspects which surround a necromancer. Indeed, this oath is coupled with the excision of the detail that the events took place at night, something which would have screamed 'unsanctioned' to the Graeco-Roman audience. Josephus could therefore be said to be providing the witch with as much sanction as he can muster.

Graeco-Roman sensibilities are observed in Josephus' description of the spirit of Samuel, details which are added by Josephus in order to explain several troubling sections of the biblical accounts. Thus, Samuel is portrayed as a venerable and distinguished man.

Unlike the Targum, which introduces the angel of the Lord in place of 'gods' of 1 Samuel 28:13b, Josephus removes mention of the divine by merely reporting that it was Samuel's ghost appearing. Pseudo-Philo, likewise troubled by this passage which points to polytheism, suggests that Samuel's appearance is not that of a normal man and that he was accompanied by two angels (Bib. Ant., 64:5). MT 1 Samuel 28:13 describes the apparitions of the witch's vision as *elohim*, the plural form for the divine. LXX follows this lead by using the plural *theous*. This description was troubling for a wide variety of biblical commentators, not least of whom was Josephus.

In Josephus' eyes, not even an illustrious prophet such as Samuel is deserving of this divine description. Josephus neatly sidesteps the issue by his use of the term *morphe*, suggesting the witch's surprise is due to her seeing "someone arise in form like God." Josephus elaborates on the biblical idea by expanding the description of this vision with the witch describing not only the priestly mantle as in 1 Samuel 28:14, but also a figure of 'advanced age' and 'distinguished aspect' (Ant., 6.333). By these extra distinctions, Josephus states that Saul is able to recognize the prophet Samuel.

Evidently, Josephus did not share the view of later commentators who viewed the actions of the witch as those of sophistry, deception and what we might term 'stage magic'. For Josephus, necromancy is a possibility; it is a skill and an art which he is keen to demonstrate as one possessed by the Israelites. Indeed, it is only in Ant. that we have a description of her art as a technique (*techne*), one which leads undeniably to the raising of the soul of Samuel.

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What Is Up with the Witch of Endor?

Perplexing Passages by **STEPHEN DEMPSTER**

Saul's nighttime séance with the witch of Endor in [1 Samuel 28](#) is regarded as the *coup de grâce* on his tragic kingship of Israel. In this text, the Israelite king has reached the bottom of the moral and theological abyss in resorting to occult practices in Israel he himself has forbidden with the death penalty, in a desperate bid to find out what will happen in an imminent battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa.

This text narrates a critical turning point in the history of Israel. The end of the first dynasty is at hand, and the tall ruler will fall as Saul, whose name means “the asked for one” asks about the future from the place of the dead — Sheol. This word means “the asking place,” perhaps because death is always asking for more. The irony is that the asking place will soon have its name request (“the asked for one”) fulfilled. **Saul and Sheol are inseparably linked!**

This text raises all kinds of theological questions. Did the witch have the ability to bring the departed spirits of the dead back to predict the future for the living, or was this simply a demonic delusion? Does not only God have power to predict the future? Or do departed spirits or evil spirits? What about other sources of revelation besides the Word of God? Does this text not prove that such exist?

In dealing with this text, let's briefly summarize it and then try to come to an overall understanding of what is being said before drawing theological conclusions.

Summarizing the Story

1. As already mentioned, the text is pivotal in the book of Samuel as it **narrates the events the day before Saul and his sons meet a tragic fate** on Mount Gilboa in a battle with the Philistines. As has been the case ever since the Spirit of Yahweh departed from Saul when he disobeyed the Lord, he has tried to find supernatural insight and guidance for his kingship, but to no avail. Before an extremely important battle, Saul as a military leader is desperate for supernatural guidance, as was the case generally before a battle in the ancient world. But his desperation finds no solution as God is silent through the media of prophets, *Urim* and *Thummim*, and dreams.

Not content to take divine silence for an answer, Saul crosses forbidden theological boundaries in virtual sacrilege & seeks guidance from a medium, a woman that's called a "mistress of necromancy." This person is traditionally called "the witch of Endor," presumably because she was well known in that area. The name Endor may suggest a place that had a reputation for necromancy. That Saul has clearly crossed a theological Rubicon is crystal clear because he had earlier been seeking to eliminate diviners from Israel with the death penalty. **He is openly defying the word of the Lord, and by consulting the medium pronounces his own death sentence.**

2. Saul takes two servants, disguises himself, and deceives the medium about his identity and asks her to bring up the spirit of Samuel the prophet back from the world of the dead to tell him about the outcome of the impending battle. The woman hesitates by reminding him of his own prohibition before she engages in her occult practice.

When Samuel's spirit shows up, the medium shrieks in shock but immediately recognizes Saul, presumably because his spirit has enlightened her. At the same time she has to wait for Saul to identify Samuel through her description. What kind of diviner is this? She alone is able to see the spirit, but Saul must tell her who it is. When Samuel finally speaks, he tells the king what he already knows, that God has judged him for his disobedience and given the kingdom to another.

The dead Samuel is the same as the live Samuel! Finally, Samuel adds that Saul and his sons —the dynasty—will be joining Samuel in Sheol the next day when Israel will lose the battle against the Philistines. At this news, the tall Saul then collapses. After being revived, he and his men leave the scene. The next day Israel is defeated at Gilboa, and Saul and his sons are slain.

3. It is clear that the spirit of Samuel appears to the witch and speaks. There is no other way to understand the text in verses 15 and 16, which states that Samuel speaks. But there are other questions to ask. **Why was the medium shocked when she saw the spirit of Samuel? Why did she not recognize him but have to wait for Saul's confirmation of his identity? It seems this experience was different from her usual practice of divining departed spirits. Why?** Perhaps the writer is mocking her. In my judgment the reason has to do with the wider context of Samuel. This particular story is an example of God bringing up the dead from Sheol (Samuel) and bringing down the living to Sheol (Saul), exalting the humble and abasing the proud. The second book of Samuel essentially begins with David's lament for the fallen dynasty of Saul, and its refrain reminds everyone of **Hannah's song: "How are the mighty fallen!"**

Assessing the Meaning

There is a dark supernatural power to which mediums and diviners sought access in the ancient world. For the Israelites, however, this power was off limits. Yahweh was the ultimate power, and his transcendence meant that Israel must trust in him alone. This dark power was no match for Yahweh and in the end would be terribly harmful. For example, the demonic powers behind the Canaanite Baal cult were no match for the prophet of God on Mount Carmel during the time of Elijah.

In this example in [1 Samuel 28](#), it is only fitting that because Saul continued to defy God to the end, his end was brought about through his own rebellion, which was the result of disobedience. The depths to which Saul had sunk in seeking counsel from a witch prove Samuel's prophetic words when alive and he first condemned Saul because of disobedience:

“Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.”

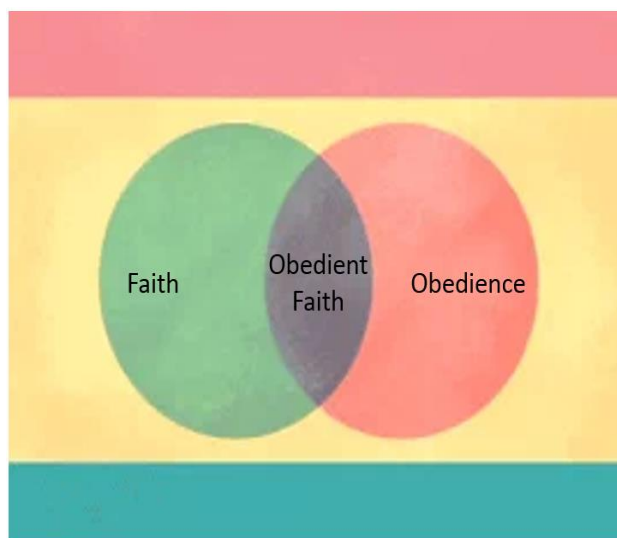
At the time Saul probably thought this was an “over the top” prophetic exaggeration. How wrong he was! God brought the prophet back from dead to remind him of this truth. **The fact that Saul went out to battle the next day proves the truth of father Abraham who speaks to all of us from the afterlife: “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, then they will not be convinced even if someone rises up from the dead.”**

The story of Endor reminds us all of the importance and clarity of the divine word. He who speaks to the dead soon joins them.

AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- HEARING:
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- BELIEVING:
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- REPENTING:
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- CONFESSING:
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- BAPTISM:
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Wh* O that will be glory for me, e grace,

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

