

The Witch at Endor

It is very easy to read a passage and impose our own interpretation on it without bothering to see what the passage itself actually says. A great example of this can be found in the curious case of King Saul and the witch at Endor.

There came a time when Saul faced an upcoming battle with the Philistines. The battle frightened him and he wanted some counsel from God – but God refused to respond:

I Samuel 28:5: “And when Saul saw the host of the Philistines, **he was afraid**, and his heart greatly trembled.

6 And when Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.”

Since God wasn’t responding to Saul, the king did what he normally did in that situation – he solved the problem by disobeying God. He decided the best thing to do was to seek out a witch so he could talk to the dead prophet Samuel. (Why he thought a *dead* prophet would talk to him when the living ones would not (I Sam. 28:6b) is a great question. Saul was not known for thinking clearly.)

Now, the Mosaic Law strictly prohibited witchcraft (on pain of death), and everyone who had a familiar spirit had supposedly been removed from the land. Despite this, Saul had no trouble finding someone to help him:

I Samuel 28:7: “Then said Saul 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.”

Saul was hoping that the witch would be able to use her relationship with a “familiar spirit” (demon) in order to communicate with the dead Samuel. He therefore disguised himself and went to talk to her:

I Samuel 28:8: “And **Saul disguised himself**, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and **they came to the woman** by night: and he said, I pray thee, **divine unto me by the familiar spirit**, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee.

9 And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?

10 And Saul sware to her by the Lord, saying, As the Lord liveth, there shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.”

The reason Saul had to disguise himself is because even the witch knew that necromancy was illegal. If he had come as King Saul then the witch would never have agreed to his request. He had to trick her into doing it – and that’s exactly what he did.

After assuring the witch that everything would be fine he made his request:

I Samuel 28:11: “Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, **Bring me up Samuel**.

12 And when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? **for thou art Saul.**”

This is where our assumptions start to lead us astray. Virtually every commentary I have ever read on this passage claims that the witch was startled because she wasn't expecting to see Samuel. They claim that the witch was going to trick Saul and became incredibly surprised when Samuel himself showed up. That is a great theory but it is *not* what the passage says. Look at what the witch *actually said*. She did not say "Oh my goodness – it's Samuel!". No, what she said was something completely unexpected: "Oh my goodness – you're Saul!" What surprised her – *according to the witch herself* – was not the presence of Samuel *but the presence of Saul*. King Saul was the one who unnerved the witch and caused her to panic. Despite what the commentaries claim, nowhere in the passage does the witch ever express surprise at seeing Samuel.

Some people claim that Samuel didn't actually appear; they say it was just a demon who was pretending to be Samuel. That is a great theory but it's not what the passage says. This chapter does not say that the witch saw a demon who was pretending to be Samuel; it says that *she saw Samuel*. It does not say that a demon answered her; it says that Samuel answered her. These verses simply do not allow us any alternative: the person Saul was talking to really was Samuel. It was not an imposter.

But let's keep going. Look at what happens next:

I Samuel 28:13: "And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending out of the earth.

14 And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh 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 himself.

15 And Samuel said to Saul, **Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?** And Saul

answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and **God is departed from me, and answereth me no more**, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.”

Notice what Samuel asks Saul in verse 15: “Why have you disturbed me?” The very first thing that Samuel does is tell the king that *he is bothering him*. Samuel does not want to be there and he is not happy about it. His peace has been disturbed.

Notice, also, that Samuel never says “God sent me to tell you that you will die in battle tomorrow.” Commentators far and wide claim that the witch had nothing to do with this and that God’s power arranged this meeting, but the passage doesn’t support that claim at all. Samuel never says that God sent him to talk to Saul. Stop and think for a moment: God had refused to communicate with Saul by *every single method that God had sanctioned for communicating with Him*. Saul had tried them all and God refused to talk to him. Why on earth would God cast aside all of the acceptable ways to talk to the king and instead choose to talk to him through a method that was not only a sin but *was a crime punishable by death*? Does that really seem reasonable? Another thing to think about: if God had sent Samuel to talk to the king then do you really think Samuel would have been complaining about the situation or would have needed to ask Saul what was going on?

I think it is far more likely that the truth is exactly what it appears to be: the witch used her demonic powers of necromancy to bring Samuel back from the dead so that his departed spirit could talk to King Saul. The witch was not a phony and her powers were not phony either. She had genuine power and she used it.

One thing we need to keep in mind is that there was a time when people (like this woman) entered into relationships with demons and used them to gain tremendous power. A great ex-

ample of this can be found in the New Testament:

Acts 16:16: “And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel **possessed with a spirit of divination** met us, which brought her masters much gain **by soothsaying**:

17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

18 And this did she many days. But 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.”

This woman had a demonic spirit of divination that she used to foretell the future. Some people might scoff at this and say that she was just fooling people, but think about it: if you are going to perpetrate a hoax then *you don't need to be demon possessed!* She had a demon that had powers of divination, and that demon had some ability to foretell the future.

I have no idea what powers the average demon possesses; the Bible does not give us a complete list. What we do know is that demons have genuine powers. We also know that forming a relationship with a demon in order to harness their powers is an *extremely bad thing*.

Do you remember what Christ said when He described the time just before His Second Coming?

Matthew 24:24: “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and **shall shew great signs and wonders**; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

Jesus didn't say that they would show *phony* signs and wonders; no, He said that they would show *great* wonders. The

reason these wonders would nearly deceive the elect is because *they will be real*. This isn't the first time that we've seen this; Pharaoh's magicians in Egypt were able to duplicate some (but not all) of Moses' miracles.

Somehow over the years we've lost sight of the fact that demons exist and have genuine power. We've forgotten that there were once real witches who were not frauds. King Saul went to the witch at Endor to have Samuel's spirit brought up from the dead, *and that is exactly what the witch did*.

As we saw in Matthew 24:24, Jesus warned us that a day is coming when false Christs will arise and do mighty wonders. These men will do great miracles, but they will do them with demonic power. Jesus warned us of this in advance so that when it happens we will not be deceived. Not all miracles are of God – and that is something we desperately need to keep in mind.