

PROJECT TITLE: HOPE AFTER DEATH
PROGRAM TITLE: THE WITCH
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Reach out and touch something. Feel that? My friends in the physics department would say you're touching molecules of this and that and the other thing. My simple take on it? It's solid matter. It belongs to the visible, material world we interact with every day. In a word, it's REAL.

Hold those questions. I want to tell you a war story.

Let's go back to the Middle East more than three thousand years ago. The army of Israel is on Mount Gilboa, looking north across the Valley of Jezreel to the enemy lines. King Saul is in command, but he's terrified. He doesn't stand a chance against his enemy.

It would take a miracle to save him, but a miracle is out of the question. He's already been to his priests and to his prophets, hoping for supernatural intervention. But they have nothing for him. Nothing!

For many years his most trusted counselor and advisor was an old prophet named Samuel. He could always count on Samuel to steer him right – even though he didn't always take his advice. Now he wished the old man were by his side – but Samuel is gone. Dead.

The king has one faint glimmer of hope: Maybe he can still reach Samuel. Maybe Samuel isn't really gone.

Dead, yes. But not gone.

In Israel, communication with the dead is forbidden. Saul himself has given orders to expel anyone who dealt in the occult. But he's enough of a realist to know that a king's orders are not always carried out to the letter. He asks his aides to find him a spirit medium – a witch. "Sure," they tell him. "There are rumors about a witch up at Endor."

So that night he disguises himself, takes a couple of his men with him, and sneaks off to the witch's hut.

She asks him, "Whom shall I bring up for you?"

"Samuel," he says. "Bring up Samuel for me" (1 Samuel 28:11).

She recites some incantations in the secret language of the spirits and exclaims, "I see a god coming up out of the earth."

"What's he look like?" the king asks.

“He’s an old man, wrapped in a robe.”

Saul sees nothing, but he recognizes the description. “That’s him. That’s Samuel,” he says.

So, here is the king of Israel, who has turned his back on God - looking for help from a dead prophet of God – who has been summoned up by a pagan witch – who’s not supposed to be there.

And to top it off, he ends up talking to an apparition he never even sees. “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” It’s an agitated, impatient voice. Saul assumes it’s Samuel.

There’s a red flag. Why would the godly prophet be coming UP? Would the man of God come from below, from the realm of the evil spirits? Most people would expect a righteous man like Samuel to come down from above. Right? No way this could really be Samuel!

But, based on the witch’s “old-man-wrapped-in-a-robe” description, Saul speaks to the apparition. “I’m in great distress; for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I should do” (1 Samuel 28:15).

The apparition has no advice for Saul. No words of comfort or encouragement. Only the echo of the ominous predictions the king has already heard while Samuel was still alive.

Then the apparition delivers a new blow to crush the courage of the king. “Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me” (1 Samuel 28:19 ESV).

Saul falls prostrate on the floor of the witch’s hut, overwhelmed by fear and foreboding. His companions take him back to Mount Gilboa.

A few hours later, wounded during the battle, he takes his own life by falling on his sword.

But contrary to the spirit’s dark prophecy, one of his sons survives to claim his father’s throne.

This story has puzzled Bible scholars for nearly 2000 years. That apparition the witch saw: was it Samuel? King Saul was convinced; what do you think?

If you take this story at face value, you have to ignore what the Bible teaches about death.

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing... Never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 NIV).

If “the dead know nothing,” that witch didn’t see the dead prophet. What she saw – the apparition – was something else, or somebody else, altogether.

She was well aware of the dark side. Her practice put her in frequent contact with the evil spirits who exist there. They are shapeshifters and imposters. They assume false identities and masquerade as dead men coming back to visit the living. They are demons the same as the demons Jesus confronted when He walked the earth.

So what happened in the witch’s hut that fateful night was a fraud – a sham. But King Saul fell for it.

That unseen spirit world is dangerous. That’s why God warned the Israelites against fooling around with it. He said, “Let no one be found among you . . . who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead” (Deuteronomy 18:10, 11 NIV).

He gave them this command: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:31 NIV).

The warning is just as real today. People who believe that the dead are alive in spirit form are in particular danger, but anyone could be susceptible.

The bottom line for all of us is this: Don’t dabble in the occult. Don’t try to communicate with dead loved ones or friends, because you’re opening yourself to satanic tricks and deceptions.

The Bible is your best guide and protector. It may not tell you where your dead father hid the map to his buried treasure – or where your late husband’s online passwords are. But it does hold answers to life’s biggest questions. And it offers the hope of ultimate victory over death for all who accept the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.