

# The Woman of Endor

**HER CHARACTER:** Compassionate to Saul on the eve of his death, she exercised power by acting as a medium.

**HER SORROW:** To have delivered a hopeless message to Israel's king.

**KEY SCRIPTURE:** 1 Samuel 28:3–25

## *Monday*

HER STORY

*I*t was a night for frightening apparitions. Squinting through the open doorway, the woman stiffened, retreating a step. A face loomed before her, floating on its own like a full white moon in the outer darkness. Before she could close the door, she felt fingers gripping her wrist.

“Please,” the voice insisted, “consult a spirit for me, and bring up for me the one I name.”

The large man pushed through the door, followed by two more men. She could smell his fear as he swept past her and sat down on the couch.

“Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?” she replied.

“As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this,” he swore.

“Whom shall I bring up for you?”

“Bring up Samuel,” he said.

So the woman sat down and yielded herself, making her soul a bridge for the dead to walk across.

Suddenly she screamed, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!”

The king calmed her, saying, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?”

“An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said.

Saul bowed down and prostrated himself, his face in the dirt.

Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

“I am in great distress,” Saul replied. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”

Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy? The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.”

The woman shuddered, the message delivered. Little wonder the king had seemed so desolate. Fear had crushed the life out of his once-strong face, hollowing the eyes, etching deep lines across cheeks and forehead.

Taking pity, she spoke to him: “Look, your maidservant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do. Now please listen to your servant and let me give you some food so you may eat and have the strength to go on your way.”

Kindly, she served what may have been Saul’s last meal. The next day he was dead. Wounded in battle, he fell on his own sword, determined to finish the job before his enemies could reach him. True to form, Saul, who had always tried to control his destiny, controlled even the manner of his death. But he could not control what happened next. Discovering his body, the Philistines celebrated by severing his head and hanging it in the temple of their god. Then they tacked his naked corpse to the walls of a nearby town as a trophy. Israel’s first king had become a gruesome spectacle.

The woman of Endor is a strange character, steeped in the occult yet kind and motherly in her attitude toward the tormented king. For some reason, God allowed her to call up the prophet Samuel even though necromancy (conjuring spirits for the purpose of knowing or influencing future events) was strictly forbidden in Israel.

Perhaps she had become a medium because women in those days had so little power. Or perhaps it seemed an outlet for her helpful nature. But by yielding her soul to spirits, she was abusing herself in the deepest possible way, distorting her dignity as a person for the sake of obtaining power. How fitting that Saul, who had always tried to control the future, spent his last moments consulting her, breaking his own law in the process. Step-by-step, his insecurities had taken control of him, reducing his soul and disabling his ability to depend on God rather than on himself.

That night the woman of Endor had looked into the eyes of the most powerful man in Israel and had seen the terror there. Did the vision shake her? Did she recognize herself in him? Did her encounter with a true prophet cause her to forsake her trade as a medium? We have no idea what became of her. Sadly, her meeting with Saul marks one of the lowest moments in the life of Israel's first king, revealing his disintegration as a man whose future was destroyed by disobedience.

Saul's tragic ending reminds us that the antidote to fear is always trust. Only faith can cure our worst nightmares, and faith is a gift that is either fed by obedience or starved by disobedience. Forsaking our own desire to manipulate and control people and circumstances, we must trust God to use his power on our behalf.

## WITCHCRAFT

*I*ronic, isn't it, that the same Saul who refused to heed Samuel's prophetic words when he was alive now disobeyed the very laws he had put into effect in order to hear from Samuel one last time. Saul's desperation must have been very great for him to consult with a medium, to dabble in the occult.

Ancient peoples felt as though they were living in close contact with the spirit world around them. They depended on divination—foretelling the future—to help them avoid possible troubles ahead, and used occult rituals to attempt to gain control over people, objects, and even nature.

Magicians studied the entrails of animals and the flights of birds to discover information about the future. They examined the stars and interpreted dreams. They called on the dead to make use of their wisdom. At times, they even gathered information from such common occurrences as a sneeze.

Right from the start, God commanded his people not to have anything to do with witchcraft in any form. His words are clear and firm—we might even think harsh: “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads” (Leviticus 20:27).

Today, when the interest in spiritism and mediums is once again strong, it is good to consider what may be fueling the fascination. Words like *waiting*, *depending*, *surrendering*, and *obeying* rankle. We would much rather find ways to control the course of events. Yet the spiritual life is often counterintuitive. When we embrace the way of faith and trust in God, following him even when the path is unfamiliar or unknown, what seems like it should diminish us actually enlarges us. The story of Saul and the woman of Endor reminds us that there's really nothing new about human behavior. Under the skin we all experience the same desires, temptations, and needs. Then, as now, our happiness lies in faith and trust.

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HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

**Read 1 Samuel 28:3–25.**

1. The woman of Endor enters this story fearfully. Why was she afraid?
2. Who do you think appears in 1 Samuel 28:13? Is it really Samuel or a spirit impersonating Samuel? Explain why you think so.
3. What do you learn about occult practices from this story?
4. How, if ever, have you consulted spirits (horoscopes, cards, books, fortune-tellers, Ouija boards) to plan your future or just for “fun”? Why do you think the Bible says that nothing like this should ever be done, even for fun?
5. Consider how kind the woman is to Saul in 1 Samuel 28:21–25. If someone who practices the occult can also be such a kind person, how do you think that should affect your views on occult practice and practitioners? Why?

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HER PROMISE

*I*n a backhanded sort of way, the woman of Endor reveals for us our need to trust God. As human beings, many of us are like Saul, afraid of the future, estranged from our loved ones and God, willing to go anywhere for help. But God is our only true source of help and comfort. He has promised to guide and direct us and plan our steps. He doesn't promise to reveal the future to us, but he does promise to go with us as we step into it.

**Promises in Scripture**

*O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the LORD gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."*

—ISAIAH 30:19–21

*Strengthen the feeble hands,  
steady the knees that give way;  
say to those with fearful hearts,  
"Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come ...  
he will come to save you." ...  
And a highway will be there;  
it will be called the Way of Holiness....  
Only the redeemed will walk there.*

—ISAIAH 35:3–4, 8–9

*This is what the LORD says:*

*"Stand at the crossroads and look;  
ask for the ancient paths,  
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,  
and you will find rest for your souls."*

—JEREMIAH 6:16

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## HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*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

- REFLECT ON: 1 Samuel 28:3–25.
- PRAISE GOD: That he protects us against evil.
- OFFER THANKS: That God doesn't hide himself from those who love and follow him.
- CONFESS: Any dealings you may have had with the occult: using tarot cards, consulting horoscopes, visiting fortune-tellers, reading occult books.
- ASK GOD: To cleanse and free you from any ill effect of your contact with the occult.

### Lift Your Heart

*S*ometimes we expose ourselves to the occult naively—reading horoscopes in the daily paper, consulting a medium on a whim, or thinking tarot cards simply an innocent game. At other times our interest is more serious, based on a desire for knowledge, healing, or power over others and ourselves. If you have ever dabbled in the occult, now is the time to come clean before God. Express your sorrow and your resolve to follow God by removing from your home anything remotely related to the occult. Confide in your pastor or a mature Christian friend about your involvement, asking them to pray with you as you seek God's protection and forgiveness.

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*Father, forgive me for my involvement in the occult. I want nothing whatever to do with the realm of evil. Draw me out of the darkness and into the light of your presence. Free me from any lingering effects of my involvement and help me to trust you completely for my future.*