

Introduction: Kerri and I first moved here and were looking for homes. We were kind of shocked that most of the houses we looked at had these cold basement storage shelters—our first rental had this eerie-looking concrete room that was like a bomb shelter. We were informed that the predominate LDS population here, because of their peculiar end-times teaching, are instructed to keep a supply for the end times. Kerri and I were amused. Truthfully, we kind of laughed about it.

Until Covid hit.

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread fear and uncertainty gripped communities around the world. Empty shelves across the country told the story of a nation in sheer panic. As news of lockdowns, quarantine measures, and reports of shortages spread, many people reacted by **panic-buying** essential supplies, most notably **toilet paper**.

We could feel our LDS neighbors smiling from their homes as if to say, "Look who's laughing now." And now we all have cold storage supplies as we prepare for a dystopian future (should keep us alive for exactly three weeks).

Fear and desperation can be powerful motivators.

Transition: Such is our story today. Saul is going to descend to a new low, motivated by his desperation and fear of losing it all.

Recap: In 1 Samuel 25, Abigail stops David from seeking revenge on Nabal, showing wisdom and restraining grace. In Chapter 26, David refrains from killing Saul once more, upholding his honor and mercy. Moving to Philistia in Chapter 27, David earns King Achish's trust and becomes his bodyguard. Achish lives by the dictum, "Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

The Philistine hoards are at the gate—ready, once and for all, to smash Saul and his forces and take the land of Judah forever, enslaving Israel. Achish has a trophy, the mighty and feared David as his personal and permanent bodyguard.

There's a biting irony in the story: the one who defeated Israel's challenger, the Philistine Giant from Gath, is now guarding the king of Gath.

We'll see this story unfold over three scenes today:

Scene 1: Saul's desperation leads to a final (and catastrophic) act of disobedience (1 Sam 28:3–7). Driven by desperate fear, Saul seeks an answer for his tormented mind, a solution to his dilemma. By this time **Samuel had died**, all Israel had mourned for him and **buried** him in Ramah, his city, and Saul had removed the mediums and spiritists from the land. ⁴The Philistines gathered and camped at Shunem. So Saul gathered all Israel, and they camped at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the Philistine camp, he was afraid and his heart pounded. ⁶**He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer** him in dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets. ⁷Saul then said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I can go and consult her."

His servants replied, "There is a woman at En-dor who is a medium."

Talk about hitting rock bottom. Ever since Saul so publicly disobeyed the LORD's command to wipe out the Amalekites, he has not sought the LORD since. **Instead, he's been dallying with idolatry** on the high places under the tamarisk tree, he has become *a mass murderer of priests at Nob, unjustly pursuing the guiltless*—on two occasions, he's been confronted by David and forced to admit David's innocence and acknowledge his calling to be King. A pointless quest all railing against the God Most High.

Unlike David, who has frequently inquired of the LORD and heard directly from God, giving him direction and guidance, Saul doesn't seek God. He seeks God's functionaries, the intermediaries—reducing Jewish religion to empty soothsaying and paganism.

Having rid the land of all soothsayers, mediums, and spiritualists earlier, he now seeks one. And is told there is one left at Endor.

Hear me well: Saul didn't fall from the heights of his royal calling overnight. Saul didn't wake up one morning and say, "I think it would be a good idea to practice the occult today." No, my friends. This is the inevitable end of a life that has been out of control for a very long time.

Principle: Satan rarely ever starts with an invitation to become a devil worshiper. He starts with one little compromise after another after another until, in the end, he has a worshiper and a slave to sin on his hands.

Notice Jesus' temptation in the wilderness:

- (1) **First temptation:** Prove you're the Son of God—do something spectacular like turning these rocks into bread. It was a temptation to disobey God—who had led him there to fast. Jesus chose obedience.
- (2) **Second temptation:** Prove to me that you're God's Son by launching yourself off the pinnacle of this high corner on the temple—doesn't the Bible say that God will send his angels to catch you? Jesus said, "The Word says you shall not put the LORD your God to the test."
- (3) **Third Temptation:** If you will but bow down and worship me I will give you all the inheritance that you deserve. Jesus said, "It is written, Worship the LORD your God and serve him only."

Similarly, we are almost never tempted to have an affair, or to become a raging prescription pill addict. Or to descend into the abyss and the darkness of self-pity and self-wallowing. He never shows us that constant anger and refusal to reconcile leads to divorce and shattering our families.

Satan never showed Saul the end of his life and his sinful pointless pursuits. And he never shows us that either. He hides the consequences all the while lying to us, ***telling us “keep at it—some day this will pay off” and instead of paying off we tragically have to pay up.*** Where the debt of sin comes due.

Scene 2: The Encounter at Endor (28:8–14). There’s a hint of shame in this act. Notice what Saul has to do in order to seek this woman out—shrouded in a cloak and common clothing, the once royal regal Vizier, King of God’s country stoops to an unimaginable solution. ⁸ Saul disguised himself by putting on different clothes and set out with two of his men. They came to the woman at night, and Saul said, “Consult a *spirit* for me. Bring up for me the one I tell you.” ⁹ But the woman said to him, “You surely know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you setting a trap for me to get me killed?” ¹⁰ Then Saul swore to her by the Lord: “As surely as the Lord lives, no punishment will come to you from this.” ¹¹ “**Who is it** that you want me to bring up for you?” the woman asked. “Bring up **Samuel** for me,” he answered. ¹² When the woman **saw Samuel**, she screamed, and then she asked Saul, “Why did you deceive me? You are Saul!” ¹³ But the king said to her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?” “I see a *spirit* form coming up **out of the earth** (*ha’ eretz*; from the netherworld),” the woman answered. ¹⁴ Then Saul asked her, “What does he look like?” “An old man is coming up,” she replied. “He’s wearing a robe.” Then Saul knew that **it was Samuel**, and he knelt low with his face to the ground and paid homage.

The word used here for “spirit” (*ā’ob* רִּיחַ) means “spirit of the departed dead.” This word is used throughout the OT to refer to someone’s spirit that has left their body at death to join the netherworld, sheol, or a place of rest with ancestors.

Just a couple of examples in the prophet Isaiah:

- Isaiah 8:19 “When they say to you, ‘Inquire of the mediums and the spiritists who chirp and mutter,’ shouldn’t a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?” The context here is God telling the nation through the prophet Isaiah they are not to fear their enemies but fear the LORD; they are not to trust in themselves, but trust and seek the LORD. Now notice, Isaiah doesn’t question whether seeking out this darkness is a possible alternative.
- Isaiah 19:3 (my translation) “Egypt’s spirit will be disturbed within it, and I will frustrate its plans. Then they will inquire of worthless idols, ghosts of the dead (**Heb. *ittîm***), departed spirits (***ā’bōt***) and spiritists (***jidde ‘onim***).”

In an eerie and unnerving moment, the woman shrieks in horror as she sees Samuel’s ghostly visage rise from the netherworld. Notice Saul’s response: don’t miss it—Saul is a man who is afraid of all the wrong things. **He fears the Philistines**, whom he should not fear if God is with him. And **Saul fears Samuel**, bowing prostrate to pay him homage. But Saul **doesn’t fear the LORD**, who has forbidden this practice.

The law: Deuteronomy 18:10–11 (see 2 Kings 17:17) “No one among you is to sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire, practice divination, tell fortunes, interpret omens, practice sorcery, ¹¹ cast spells, consult a medium or a spiritist, or inquire of the dead.” Then he warns them that if they turn to divination and the occult they will be driven out of the land.

Question: Why would Moses command them not to practice necromancy (inquiring of the departed dead) if that were not possible? They are not to access the spiritual realm through unauthorized means.

Scene 3: Divine Judgment and Spiritual Warfare (28:15–19). To our shock, Samuel’s spirit responds...“Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Samuel asked Saul. “I’m in serious trouble,” replied Saul. “The Philistines are fighting against me and God has turned away from me. He doesn’t answer me anymore, either through the prophets or in dreams. So I’ve called on you to tell me what I should do.”¹⁶ Samuel answered, “Since the **Lord** has turned away from you and has become your enemy, why are you *asking* me?”¹⁷ The **Lord** has done exactly what he said through me: The **Lord** has ***torn the kingship out of your hand and given it to your neighbor*** David.¹⁸ You did not obey the **Lord** and did not carry out his burning anger against Amalek; therefore the **Lord** has done this to you today.¹⁹ The **Lord** will also hand Israel over to the Philistines along with you. Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me, and the **Lord** will hand Israel’s army over to the Philistines.”

Is this not the news he expected? Did he think there would be any good news here? Honestly, this guy is dumber than box of hair.

Scholars have debated the issue as to whether Samuel was truly summoned by a spirit medium. Some propose that this was a demon masquerading as Samuel. Regardless, the text invites the reader to reflect on the supernaturalism inherent to the story.

I, for one, think we are dealing here with divine intervention; God allows this woman to conjure Samuel’s actual spirit from the realm of the dead. While Samuel’s body clearly lies in a grave, his spirit has passed on to “rest” with his fathers and ancestors. *Notice her shock when she sees him.* This suggests that this encounter is out of the ordinary—Saul is given a special dispensation, God has allowed Samuel to be summoned, but as always the lesson is *be careful what you wish for.*

Why would we suspect this is Samuel not an imposter?

- **Samuel used a very specific pun** on Saul’s name in Chapter 12:17 (28:16) “asking” (Saul’s name means “the one who asks”) and that same pun is here to chide him.
- **Samuel usually referred to the LORD by his formal name, “Yahweh,” and less often as “God,”** and that name appears prominently here in the speech (5 times).
- **The spirit repeats verbatim the words of Samuel’s rebuke** “torn the kingship out of your hand and given it to your neighbor.”
- **Lastly, the spirit tells him the truth and knows specific details about his future.** If you recall, God’s challenge in Isaiah for any being masquerading as God must be able to tell the future. And God says, that telling the future is a litmus test for the claim of deity.
- **Notice in the NT that Satan does not know the future**—he doesn’t know in Matt 4 what Jesus’ destiny is. Paul stated in 1 Cor 2:8 that if the rulers, powers, and spiritual forces in heavenly realms had *known the future*, they would never have crucified the LORD of glory.

Samuel tells him, by this time tomorrow, you and your sons will be joining me “here”—he doesn’t specify where “here” is. His spirit is obviously in a state of rest from the struggles and hardships of life in a fallen corrupted body.

This is likely a reference to Sheol. Isaiah 14:9, for example, portrays Sheol as eager to receive the dead, and stirs up the spirits who have previously departed to receive the dead.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 “And the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Why is all this important to know: Because folks, we have to understand that we have inherited from the Jews a supernatural worldview. This stuff seems weird to us, but it wasn’t so weird to them. We live in a world where dead people depart, leave their bodies and their spirits go to hell or depart and go to be with the LORD.

Paul tells us that we wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, power, authorities—the spiritual forces in heavenly realms that are bent on opposing the gospel and stopping our rescue mission.

We pray, have faith, stand firm, and root ourselves in the truth of God’s Word so that we may take our stand against the enemy.

The forces that you see in opposition to the gospel, have unseen forces behind them.

The Principle: Spiritual hunger can only be satisfied in the LORD, in the God who made us for himself.

Question: What are those who are engaging in spirituality or spiritism or the occult looking for? The so-called “New Athiesm” came and went—attempting to vanquish all spirituality, transcendent meaning or experience from human life (If you want a fascinating book on this subject, pick up Justin Brierley’s *The Surprising Rebirth of Belief in God: Why New Atheism Grew Old and Secular Thinkers Are Considering Christianity*. So after the demise of the New Atheism, what followed?

The New Paganism. Practice of the occult (the attempt to fulfill a spiritual longing, find spiritual experience in an unauthorized way) is on the rise. They’re looking for a path to spiritual fulfillment. And spiritism or the occult offers a path into spirituality. But that spiritual life leads to ruin because it doesn’t lead to Jesus.

Illustration: I’m thinking here of Yeonmi Park—a best-selling author who tells her story about escaping oppression and starvation in a prison state in North Korea. There's a point in the story where she talks about longing for freedom even though she didn’t have the language for it. Though they are brought up in a prison-state where they have no freedoms, no powers of self-determination, no governmental structure to ensure their liberties. **So how did Yeonmi Park know to seek it?** How did she know to desire freedom. Yeonmi and others yearn for it naturally. God has hard-wired into the human being.

Well, the same is true for a religious and spiritual experience—a spiritual hunger for meaning, purpose, and spiritual reality.

C.S. Lewis made the argument that before a baby knows (cognitively) what food is, they know what hunger is. Because the human being is the kind of thing that was made for food. How have we come to develop a spiritual hunger, a religious sensibility? How is it that we are the kind of beings that have been produced to seek more than that which aids in our survival, but to engage in extravagant pursuits like spirituality?

The spiritualist is seeking a path, a way to spiritual reality that is true, in the hopes that it will offer them a vibrant, transcendent experience beyond the mundane realities of life, beyond the routines of dead lifeless religion.

So, if God made us for it, where can we find it?

Jesus had this conversation with his disciples and told Thomas, “I’m going to prepare a place for you and you know the way.”

Thomas responds, “What do you mean we know the way?” John 14:6 Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

We were made to live *with the Father*, the God of the universe. And we were made such that we only find spiritual life and fulfillment in Him. And the only way to Him is through HIM. Through the one who died on that tree for you, to give you access to the God who loves you, while you were a sinner and enemy of the cross.

Listen, the spiritual hunger that you've suppressed by simply following the herd, living in the mundane, pursuing the material and the natural world as if it were all there is, or pursuing dead, lifeless, false religion—and suddenly awakening to a new spiritual reality—there's something in you that you can't shut off and suppress.

The spiritual life you seek is in Jesus alone. There is no life outside of the gospel of Jesus: which is the royal announcement that God's rightful King has arrived—to live a sinless life, to die a substitutionary death, and to raise again bodily from the dead that all who believe on him would not perish in hell, but have eternal life.

King Saul had rejected God, rejected Moses' law and his prescribed way of approaching God. And at the end of that pursuit was nothing but death for him. Judgment.

And it's the same for anyone who seeks spirituality apart from the life-giving God of the universe, through his Son, empower by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 15:45 "So it is written, The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

Because we were all born into Adam we inherited his death sentence. All were born into Adam, all sinned, and all died (Rom 5:12).

But if you have placed your trust in Jesus as Savior and LORD—then you have inherited his death to sin, and his life forevermore—Resurrection glory is what is in store for you.

And when the faithful come together and we gather in this place we are not just going through the routines of religion. A lifeless liturgy that makes us feel a little better. We are spiritually communing with God the Father, through Christ the Son and the Life-giving Spirit, and we are changed.

We are engaging with our spiritual gifts to serve the family, the body of Christ.

We are walking with God by singing, praying, and meditating on his Word, the Bible.

Through this spiritual activity we are filled with the Spirit in Spirit-filled community.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, we acknowledge today that life is found only in you—the author of creation, the giver of life.

And we can only access that spiritual life we crave through Jesus your one and only Son.

And he has authorized us to become disciples, to shake off the Satanic bonds of this world, and to encounter new life in the Son.
We confess our belief in Jesus, we trust him for salvation and satisfaction. We trust in Jesus today.
We commit ourselves to a life of praying, singing, and meditating on your Word. Amen.