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Sha’ul and the Medium at Endor
First Samuel 28: 3-25

Sha’ul and the medium at Endor DIG: How did YHVH communicate His will at this time in Isra’el’s history? But how did Sha’ul do it? Why did Sha’ul expel spiritists and mediums from Isra’el (see **Leviticus 19:31, 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10-13)? Why then did he consult one anyway? And why in secret? Why did the woman fear she might die? Considering Sha’ul’s assurance in verse 10, who fears the living God more – the Israelite king or the pagan witch? Why is she terrified when she saw Samuel? Why had YHVH stopped responding to Sha’ul when he called? How had Sha’ul responded to ADONAI’s calls in the past? How is Sha’ul like and unlike Yeshua? Explain. How do you think Sha’ul enjoyed his last meal? Was Sha’ul numbered with the righteous of the TaNaKh? Why? Why not?**

REFLECT: Sha’ul was prone to say one thing (expel the spiritists and mediums) and do quite another (consult them). What area(s) of your life are like that? Where do your actions speak louder than your words? What “great distress” in your life has you seeking God’s will in earnest? Where are you looking for answers? Whom are you consulting? Do you temporarily “repent” during hard times, only to “harden your heart” when things get better? In light of your present relationship with God, what are your feelings about death and dying? Are you a “Sha’ul” or a “David?” Do you know with certainty where you are going to spend eternity? What is the basis for your certainly?

The witch asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” And Sha’ul answered, “Bring up Samuel!”

When this episode begins, the battle lines are already drawn, but **Sha’ul** had no **heart** for battle. **He** urgently needed someone to talk to for advice and encouragement, but found **himself** totally isolated, desperate, and in need of counsel. Of all the “night scenes” in the Bible – and there are many of them – this one is perhaps the strangest and most dramatic. A dead man returned to announce

the doom of a despairing king who couldn’t find any way to escape. **Samuel** and **Sha’ul** would meet for the last time, and it wasn’t a happy meeting.[433]

The Silence of God: In **28:3-6** we learn that **Samuel had died, and all Isra’el had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah.** This is a summary of **25:1**. But the point the author makes in this context is that **Sha’ul** could not go to **Samuel** for advice as **he** was able to do in the past. Although **Sha’ul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land (Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14)**, **he** had sunk down to that which **he** had banned**.** The fact that he regretted his decision indicates how far **he** had departed from **his** earlier commitment. At this time, **he** had the worst of both worlds.

The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem a few miles north of the valley of Jezreel at the mountain of **Gilboa** and had penetrated into the largest valley in northern **Isra’el, while Sha’ul gathered all Isra’el and set up camp at Gilboa (28:4). Sha’ul** had moved **his** army from the plane of Jezreel, where **he** would have been at a disadvantage because of the superiority of the Philistine chariots, to the mountain of Gilboa. **When Sha’ul saw** how much larger **the Philistine army** was than **he** thought it would be**, he was afraid and terror filled his heart. He inquired of ADONAI, but YHVH did not answer him by:** the usual method of **dreams** (see **Genesis Hd – Jacob Saw a Stairway with the Angels of God Ascending and Descending**)**,** or **by the Urim and Thummim** (Abiathar had taken **the Ephod** with him and was with **David), or prophets** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Eo – The Days are Coming, declares the LORD, When I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Yisra’el**)**.** No matter what **Sha’ul** tried, **he** received no answer from **God**.



The Medium of Endor: Therefore, **Sha'ul said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium** who consults the dead to determine the future**," so I may go and inquire of her."** These mediums were possessed by demons, which impersonated the dead. So **Sha'ul** was in a very desperate condition. This was a direct violation of the Torah spelled out in **(Leviticus 19:31** and **20:6)**. **"There is one at Endor," they said.** It is very interesting that **Sha'ul's servants** knew about **her** despite of its unlawfulness **(28:7)**. Fearful of **Philistine** strength, **Sha'ul** wanted to know how to proceed, and thus was willing to go to any lengths to find out what to do.

So Sha'ul disguised himself putting on common **clothing** instead of royal **clothing, and at night he and two men** traveled about ten miles and **went to the witch.** This was a very dangerous journey for **the king** because to get to **Endor** from Gibeah **he** would have to pass over the shoulder of a hill on which **the Philistines** were encamped. The darkness of **the night** matched the darkness of **Sha'ul's** soul. **"Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring me up** from Sh'ol **the one I name" (28:8).** Like a noose around **his** neck, this was a desperate attempt to escape the fate that was closing in all around **him**.

But the woman said, her words dripping with irony: **Surely you know what Sha'ul 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** neither admitted nor denied what **she** was. **She** wanted to make sure that this wasn't a trap. **But Sha'ul swore to her by ADONAI, "As ADONAI lives, you will not be punished for doing this" (28:9-10 CJB). The rabbis teach that Sha'ul was**

like a woman who swears by her husband’s life when in bed with her lover. In a practice forbidden by **ADONAI**, **he** swears by **ADONAI’s** name.

Then the woman asked: **Whom shall I bring up for you?** And **Sha’ul** answered: **Bring up Samuel.** Despite the finality of **Sha’ul’s** last confrontation with **Samuel (15:10-35), Sha’ul** still longed for the word of **ADONAI** that **he** had received through **the prophet** who first anointed **him** and proclaimed **him king**. **He** must have hoped that **Samuel** would somehow reverse the judgment that **he** had pronounced, much in the same way that some people today refuse to take seriously the consequences of **sin** in their lives.[434]

She left the room and drawing on the demonic powers of necromancy **(Deuteronomy 18:10-11), she** called up the apparition of **Samuel**. **Even the rabbis do not speculate as to her technique in conjuring up Samuel, but simply say, “She did what she did, and she said what she said, and raised him. When the woman saw Samuel, she** recognized something was different. Normally, **she** would bring up a demon that would impersonate the dead. But in this case, **it seems to follow the view held by the rabbis that the text records a genuine appearance of Samuel that YHVH Himself brought about.** When **the real Samuel came up** and **she cried out at the top of her voice.** It was cry of shock and a cry of fear because this didn’t normally happen. It shows that **she herself** had nothing to do with **Samuel coming up**. **YHVH took over and allowed Samuel to come up from Sh’ol. She said to Sha’ul, “Why have you deceived me? She** immediately realized that it was the work of **God** and not **herself** and that **her** disguised night visitor was none other than **King Sha’ul**. **She** declared indignantly: **You yourself are Sha’ul” (28:11-12)!**



When **the king** heard **her cry out**, **he** called to **her**, saying: **Don’t be afraid** – **you** will not be executed**. What do you see?”** What this tells us is that **Sha’ul** was in another room. **The woman** had the capacity to see the unseen world. **Hers** was a demonic power, but a power nonetheless. **She** said: **I see a god-like being coming up out of the earth. He asked her, “What does he look like?” She** said: **An old man wearing a robe is coming up.** Before glorification, **Samuel** appeared the age in which **he** died. **He** was in death exactly as **Sha’ul** knew **him** in life: unaccommodating and unwilling to cosign **Sha’ul’s sin**. **Then Sha’ul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground** as if before **the LORD (28:13-14 CJB).**

The Message of Samuel: Samuel’s shalom in **sh’ol** was **disturbed**, and **he** didn’t like it at all. **He said to Sha’ul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” Sha’ul** laid the full weight of **his** abandonment and despair before **Samuel**, **“I am in great distress. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams.” Sha’ul** justifies **his** action by saying **he** needed **God** and had no alternatives. **“So I have called on you to tell me what to do” (28:15).**

Samuel said: **Why do you ask me** this**, you** have answered **your** own question. **Now that the LORD has departed from you, He** has **become your enemy! Samuel** explained, in an impatient, serious tone, that **ADONAI** and **he** are allied

and nothing can come between **them**; if **God** had **departed**, **Sha’ul** may be sure that **Samuel** had also **departed**. If **the LORD** had no answer, there was no reason to believe that **Samuel** had any answer. No wedge could be driven between them. Then **Samuel** painstakingly reviewed the record: **YHVH has done what He predicted through me (15:28).** The record had not changed, and the verdict had not softened. **ADONAI has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors . . . to David (28:16-17).** This is no surprise to us, and it surely is no surprise to **Sha’ul**. The entire story has been building the case for the utterance of **his name**.

28:18-19 is structured like a lawsuit that asserts the verdict and sentence against **Sha’ul**. The cause is **Sha’ul’s** disobedience. **Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out His demand** to utterly destroy **the Amalekites** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ag – The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh**), **ADONAI has done this to you today. He** had no one to blame but **himself**. The verdict was that because **he** did not utterly destroy **the Amalekites**, **God** would utterly destroy **him (15:18-19)**. Then the sentence against **Sha’ul** is pronounced: **YHVH will deliver both Isra’el and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your** three **sons will** die (see **Dk – Sha’ul Takes His Own Life**). **Samuel’s** speech is final and absolute. There will be no appeal, no protest, no argument, and no alternative. The narrator does not mention **Samuel’s** departure. It doesn’t matter. It is **the Voice** that counts, and that **Voice** only speaks of death and doom for **Sha’ul**. Since **Chapter 15**, **Sha’ul’s** career has been carried out under the omen of this irrevocable decision.[435]

But the question remains, was **Sha’ul** saved? Which side of sh’ol did **he** end up in for eternity (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Hx – The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**)? When Jewish believers talk about **the righteous of the TaNaKh**, the emphasis is on **the righteous**. Not perfect, but having a loving, obedient **heart** that desires to please **the LORD**. But **Sha’ul,** possessed by an **evil spirit** and having a murderous **heart**, selfishly worked against the known purposes of **God**. We see no repentance from **Sha’ul** after this encounter with **Samuel**. **He** only felt sorry for **himself**. Like **the rich man** in the parable above, **he** was spiritually dead. Though **Sha’ul’s** selfishness was awful, **God** would have forgiven **him** if there had been a softening of **the heart** that led to repentance. **Peter** denied **Messiah** three times, yet **he** was forgiven due to a repentant **heart**. **David** also **sinned**; but **David’s heart** was so grieved by **his sin** and totally repentant before **God** that **he** also was forgiven. When there is true repentance, **God** always

forgives. There is no **sin** too big that **God** can't forgive. All **sins** are forgivable – when **the heart** is truly grieved over the **sin** and turns away from **sin** to lovingly follow **God**.

When people abandon **YHVH**, their only desire is that **ADONAI** leave them alone to their own devices. But when **the LORD** abandons people, **He** assigns to them the judgment of **death**, **"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Sinful** mankind has violated the law of **YHVH** and rebelled against **His** sovereign rule, the only possible result is that foretold by **Yeshua** in the parable of the Ten Minas: **The king said, "But those enemies of mine who** rebelled and **did not want me to be king over them – bring them here and kill them in front of me" (Luke 19:27).**

If we think this is a dreadful picture of **God's** justice and wrath, let us not forget **His** spurned offer of grace and the sacrificial blood of **His** own **Son**. If you have heard but refused the Gospel offer of forgiveness through the blood of **Messiah**, your judgment will be not only for rebellion against **His** divine authority, but also for contempt of **His** saving grace. The application from **Sha'ul's** plight is both urgent and unwavering: **Seek the LORD while He may be found and call on Him while He is near. Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts, let them turn to the LORD, and He will have mercy on them, and to our God, for He will freely pardon (Isaiah 55:6-7; Second Corinthians 6:2b).**[436]

Do you have **peace** with **God**? If so, that's great. If not, would you like to accept **Messiah** right now? If so, there is a prayer I would like you to repeat. But before you do I want you to remember that saying a prayer does not save you, trusting in **Messiah** does. Say these words: **God, I admit that I have sinned. I believe Yeshua Messiah died for my sins, and I want to trust Him to save me right now.** If you were to die right now, where would you go? That's right, heaven. Why should **God** let you into **His** heaven? That's right, because **Yeshua** died to pay for your **sins** (see **The Life of Christ Fr – Jesus the Bread of Life:** see **imputation**).

Yeshua's last words from the cross were: **It is finished (John 19:30).** That is the translation in Aramaic because that was the common language of His day. But the original Greek text in the B'rit Chadashah reads, *tetelestai*, which means ***paid in full***. This word is actually an accounting term. After the destruction of Herod's Temple in AD 70, many Jews found their way to Alexandria, Egypt. There they had

one of the greatest libraries of the ancient world by the second century. But by then, the international language was Greek. And while the Jews spoke Aramaic, they wrote in Greek, not Hebrew. Archaeologists have discovered an underground storage area there with thousands of clay accounting tablets. Across each one was written *tetelestai.* It is important for you to understand that your **sins** have been ***paid in full*** by the blood of **the Messiah** on the cross. *All* of your **sin**, past, present, and future. And as a result, you now possess **living water (John 4:4-14, 7:37-39; Revelation 7:17)**, or eternal life **(John 6:37-40; 10:27-30)**.

Sha'ul's Last Supper: Samuel ended **his** message by saying that **the LORD would also give the army of Isra'el into the hands of the Philistines.** Thus, **Sha'ul,** who had not seen the divine vision, but had heard only to plainly **the prophet's** words, was as good as dead already. The fatal truth overwhelmed **him** and **he immediately fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and all that night (28:20).** Most people in fear for their lives lose their appetite rather quickly.

When the woman came to Sha'ul from another room (it seems likely that **she** had an inner sanctum where **she** practiced **her** secret rites) **and saw that he was greatly shaken. She** said: **Look, your servant 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. She** was thinking in human terms of some way to boost the morale of **the king**. Though **she** couldn't save **him** from **his** fate, **she** could give **him** temporary help and comfort to strengthen **his** fainting spirits. But **she** was astute enough to realize that **Sha'ul** was in no mood to eat. So **she** reasoned that since **she** had risked **her** life for **him**, **he** should be willing to do something for **her**.[437]

Initially, **he refused and** said: **I will not eat.** Without a doubt, **he** was not hungry. **But his men joined the woman in urging him, and** finally **he listened to them. He got up from the ground and sat on the couch. The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast. Then she set it before Sha'ul and his men, and they ate. That same night Sha'ul** arose and dejectedly walked off into **the darkness (28:21-25)**.

As Richard Phillips comments on his commentary on **1 Samuel**, reflecting on

Sha'ul, we should remember another Last Supper (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Kd – The Last Passover in the Upper Room**) when **Yeshua Messiah** gathered with **His** apostles on the night **He** was betrayed. **Sha'ul** brings to mind one of the apostles, who for all **his** privileges as one close to **the Savior** had nonetheless rejected **Yeshua** in **his heart**. **John** says of **Judas Iscariot** that **after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night (John 13:30). John** was not merely noting the time, but also the state of **Judas'** soul and the destiny to which **he** was turning to unbelief. Like **Sha'ul**, **Judas** had **a heart** of darkness. **Messiah's** words about **Judas** are true of all those who turn from **His** light to the darkness of **sin** and self-rule: **It would have been better for that man if he had not been born (Matthew 26:24).**

After the Last Supper, our **Savior Himself** would head into darkness. Like **Sha'ul**, **Yeshua** bore the curse of a prophesied death upon **His** head. The only completely righteous **man**, **the One** who had perfectly obeyed the will of **YHVH** every moment of **His** life, **the Son of David** who was far more unlike **Sha'ul** than even **David**, would be nailed to the cross to die for **sin**. As **Mark** records: **When the sixth hour came, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Yeshua cried with a loud voice . . . My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Lv – Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God**)**?** As **God's Son** prepared to die in **the sin**-cursed **darkness**, the words spoken by **Sha'ul** to **Samuel** could equally be said of **Yeshua, "God has turned away from me and answers no more" (First Samuel 28:15).**

Yet how great, how infinitely great, was the difference between **Sha'ul** in **the darkness** of **his** own **sin** and **Messiah** in **the darkness** of the **sins He** did not commit. **Sha'ul** with **his** hardened heart and in **his** rebellion against **YHVH** had entered a **darkness** that would last forever in sh'ol. But **the Savior**, **Yeshua Messiah**, in obedience to the saving will of **the Father**, **became sin on our behalf (Second Corinthians 5:21)** so that **He** might take its curse away forever from the people who belong to **Him** by faith. **Yeshua** entered **the darkness** of the cross that we might enter life and light of **His** resurrection glory. On the third day **He** rose in the light of the open tomb, and all those who place their **sins** on **His** cross may know the joy of eternal life in **His** grace. The Bible teaches that **neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in**

Messiah Yeshua our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).[438]

*Dear heavenly **Father**, praise **You** for **Your** gracious offer of the gift of salvation. **For if by the one man's transgression, death reigned through the one, how much more shall those who receive the overflow of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the One, Messiah Yeshua (Romans 5:17). Your gift** cost **You** a huge amount of pain and shame **(Hebrews 12:2)**, yet some people think they can live for themselves and still have **the gift**; but **a gift** must be received in order for **the gift** to belong to someone. **The gift** is received when someone receives you as their **Lord** and **Savior (Romans 10:9-11)** which makes them **Your** child. **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12).***

*How gracious **You** are to not only offer salvationbut to also promise those who hear the **Gospel** message and then trust in **Messiah Yeshua**, to receive an inheritance, the promised **Ruach Ha'Kodesh**. **After you heard the message of truth – the Good News of your salvation – and when you put your trust in Him, you were sealed with the promised Ruach Ha'Kodesh. He is the guarantee of our inheritance, until the redemption of His possession – to His glorious praise!** As **David** delighted in praising **You**, even in the midst of **his** hard trials, so I also love to **praise** and to worship **You**! **I will praise You, my Lord, among the peoples. I will sing praises to You among the nations. For Your lovingkindness is great up to the heavens, and Your truth to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens. Let Your glory be over all the earth (Psalms 57:9-10)!** In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*