

## Selected Scriptures - A Theology of the Paranormal

Well, we are in a very interesting section of not only 1 Samuel, but also the entire Bible. This is one of the weirdest - if not the weirdest chapter - in all the Bible. Here we have king Saul in utter desperation to get some sort of help runs to a medium to contact Samuel who is dead to get some advice. There are no fewer than 7 explanations of what happened here. To be honest, I agree with several commentators that just a simple reading of the passage indicates that the medium really did communicate to Samuel. There's no suggestion in the text that this was contrived or an illusion. I think this was very likely Samuel summoned from the dead. And although the text does not say this, my best guess is that this is a special situation where God allowed this to happen.

All of this, by the way, brings up a massive amount of questions about what people often call paranormal activity. When I was a kid and even after I was saved I never really knew what to do with what seemed to be spiritually dark things. I remember coming home from school as a kid watch TV shows and there would always be commercials for the psychic hotline. You could call them and for \$1.99/minute they'd tell you who knows what. But there were other things as well that I didn't really know what to do with. If you go to the county fair you'll see palm readers, tarot card readers, tea leaf readers. I remember as a kid staying up late watching these scary documentaries about ghosts and people who had video evidence of haunted houses. The newspaper had the daily horoscope by Jeane Dixon. You go through the game aisle at the store and they have Ouija boards - which close family members had told me they had tried and actually received answers. And of course our culture now is obsessed with zombies and the undead.

So then the question becomes: as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, what do we say to this? How do we understand this? Does the gospel give us any kind of means to talk coherently and authoritatively about this or do we just not talk about these things because their weird? Well, I think the Word of God says plenty about these things and the gospel gives us assurance that our risen Lord has triumphed over all spiritual powers and authorities that might try to counterfeit or rise against him. So we don't need to fear, but we do need to be educated and reassured through Jesus our Lord.

So what I thought we would do is something of a theology of the paranormal this week that I think will serve to lay the groundwork for us to tackle this chapter next week. I use paranormal in the broadest sense possible to include all demonic or spiritual activity that is not sanctioned by the Bible or honoring to the Lord Jesus Christ. I think that will help us better understand other areas of the Bible, as well as how we understand some of the things in the world around us. We won't be able to answer every question, we can just lay some groundwork. If you have a specific question, maybe ask it for the Q and A sermon.

But I'll start off simple and build outward: my simple explanation is that the vast majority of all paranormal spiritual activity is either demonic or a hoax. It is demonic in the sense that it is either empowered by demons or Satan himself. Or it is simply made up. I say the vast majority of paranormal activity because there may be rare occasions where God himself intervenes in ways that seem unusual.

I believe that's what's going on here in **Chapter 28**. I think this medium was probably a fake because she seems genuinely surprised when she sees Samuel - almost as though she's never seen this before. I think it was really Samuel but I also think it was the judgment of God to allow her to summon Samuel.

This is not unprecedented, talking about the anti-Christ, the lawless one, Paul says in **2 Thes. 2:9-12**: "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Paul is making a list and it includes all power and wonders - genuine things - with deceptions which are fake. He expects there to be real satanic activity that Jesus will destroy at his coming. This is where Satan is powering the deception and signs, but God is deluding the people as an act of judgment because they rejected Jesus. I think this chapter is something of an example of that.

So let's talk about paranormal things.

## 1) Definitions

Medium (14 times) - Literally, the word medium means in between. Here Saul consults a medium. **Read 28:7**

Some of the older translations say witch. But she is a medium in the sense that Saul cannot talk to Samuel directly. So she communicates between them, almost like a translator. Or, theologically, like a priest for the dead. A priest communicates between God and people. A medium communicates between dead people and living people. In the Hebrew, literally the phrase is a woman of the underworld.

By the way, this makes it easy for mediums to deceive people: If you can't hear what the dead person is saying, how do you know it's true? Mediums and psychics are both trained at reading people and asking questions in such a way that their customers end up telling them way more information than they realize.

And sadly, they are capitalizing off desperate people who just want one more message from mom or dad or their deceased friend or child. Best case scenario is that it's a total scam. Worst case scenario it is demonic and satanic.

Necromancer (11 times) - When I was a kid I played video games that included necromancers. And at least according to Blizzard Entertainment they were guys who could raise the dead and use the dead to fight for them. Those are the things of fantasy video games.

True necromancers are those who attempt to talk directly with the dead or raise the dead for their own purposes. Biblically, they are very similar to mediums except that they are not interceding for anyone else. They are seeking to directly communicate with the dead and usually dead bodies are involved, not just spirits.

Ghosts (3 times) - The word ghost is only used three times in the Bible. It refers to essentially the same thing we know it as: the spirit or soul of a someone who was living but is now dead.

It's used once in **Isaiah 29:4** where God warns Israel that their loud boasting will be muted like the voice of a ghost. The idea is that God is going to stop the sinful mouth of Israel like the mouths of dead people have been stopped.

The other two times are in **Matt. 14:26** and again in **Mark 6:49**. Both record the same event where Jesus is walking on the water and the disciples think that it is a ghost. There is no more commentary on the situation other than Jesus affirms that it is really him walking on the water. This is not a trick or some kind of deception like liberal theologians suggest where Jesus is walking on a sand bar. The disciples are floored that a man is walking on the water in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and their only solution is that it is a ghost. The reality is that it is God.

Do ghosts exist? The short answer is no; not in the way they are portrayed in movies, or so-called documentaries. They do exist in the sense that "ghost" is just another word for a person's spirit after they are dead. But the moment someone dies they are either in hell in judgment or they are in glory with Jesus. Their spirit in no way hangs out to haunt people. So what do we do with all these hauntings we hear about.

I was looking through Facebook not long ago and there was this community thread about haunted houses and ghosts in Deer Park. And some of the people who used to live in my house commented that they were sure our house was haunted. Well, let me tell you, I've that house apart and the only paranormal phenomena I've seen is really bad electrical wiring. There are no departed human spirits just hanging out. Has there ever been demonic activity. Sure; demonic activity is all around us.

Exorcist (actual word: 1 time; "cast out" or "send away" used dozens of times) - An exorcist is someone who can cast out demons; send away demons You may have heard of the 1970s movie *The Exorcist* - I seem to remember seeing that but I've never seen a exorcism, where demons were cast out.

Exorcism is very biblical, in the sense that it is a good thing. The greatest exorcist that ever lived was the Lord Jesus Christ who cast out more demons than anyone we know. Demons would literally scream out by his mere

presence, he could cast out thousands at a time. He could cast out demons that his own disciples couldn't figure out how to cast out. The apostles were also exorcists. Actually, one of the tests of an apostles seems to be the ability to exorcise demons.

But there were also other exorcists. When Jesus is accused by the religious leaders of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he asks "If I'm casting them out by the prince of demons, who are your exorcists casting them out by" (**Matt 12:27**)? He doesn't deny them doing that, in fact his argument is that they actually are doing that. In the book of Acts we see exorcisms by the apostles as well as other exorcists. In **Mark 9:38-41** the disciples complain to Jesus that they saw other people they hadn't met casting out demons in Jesus's name - Jesus says don't stop them.

There are some rather unusual Christian books by people claiming a program for casting out demons. I've seen at least one person under the control of a demon - maybe you guys have too - I would encourage caution around those people and I would encourage you to simply preach the gospel to them.

Fortune tellers (10 times) - Fortune tellers are seen throughout the Bible. They are those who tell people the future. What makes a fortune teller different than a prophet is that a prophet tells the future under the sovereign guidance of God, a fortune teller is a pagan who is attempting to lead people away from God and tell the future for profit.

If you remember in **Acts 16:11-15** Paul and the missionary team is in Phillipi and they are preaching and there is a girl who is a fortune teller. Acts says she has a spirit of divination; literally a spirit of python - a snake spirit by which she gave fortunes. Did she really know the future? Probably not, but she was used by a demon to have enough information about people and things that would be considered impressive to her clients.

Magicians (19 times) - **Turn to Gen. 41:1-8**. We see sorcerers throughout the Bible. The first time they are mentioned is Genesis 41 during the Joseph story when Joseph is summoned from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream. **Read 1-8**

So here, magicians are used by leaders to interpret dreams for royalty. Royalty throughout history have used paranormal activities. Even the great Ronald Reagan used an astrologer named Joan Quigley - in fact, he had her on a \$35k retainer and he and Nancy would not leave the White House or even fly unless the astrologer gave him approval. The planets and moon had to be in certain alignment. He actually put out a statement later on in life that although they used an astrologer, she was never used for public policy or governmental direction.

We see that same idea all over the Bible. Most famously, they are present in Exodus when Moses is telling Pharaoh to let his people go. Pharaoh refuses and then Moses does a sign.

Magicians are seen all throughout the book of Daniel - used by the emperor as advisors. That's interesting. And what's more interesting is that there seem to be astrologers - magicians - at the birth of Jesus. Another word for wise men is what? Magi. Now, they don't appear to have had a pagan agenda. They bring gifts to Jesus and worship Jesus. But they are called magi, they are from the east (probably Babylon), they are likely involved in political operations. But they seem to have been influenced by Daniel and certainly they were given some sort of revelation that a star would precede the birth of Jesus.

There are at least 2 other magicians in the NT that we know of. Simon Magus - or Simon the magician - in Acts 8 who "practiced magic in the city saying he himself was somebody great" (**Acts 8:9-24**). He was likely a magician as we know them - an illusionist - who claimed true magic. Which is why he wanted to buy the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter.

There was also a magician on the first stop of Paul and Barnabus' missionary journey on the island of Cyprus named Elymas. If you remember he kept trying to turn the proconsul of the island - sort of like a senator - away from the faith. Paul got so irritated at him he proclaimed: "You son of the devil, full of deceit and villainy, will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord." And then Paul blinded him as an act of judgement (**Acts 13:4-12**). You know what happened after the magician was blinded? The proconsul believed!

By the way, what Paul says is helpful for us to remember: In the real world those who practice spiritual magic and dark arts and witchcraft are truly the enemies of God. They are like Satan their father who tries to deceive and murder and corrupt and they undermine righteousness. And although I love sleight of hand and a good card trick, if you ever go to a magic show - even the ones that say they are illusionists like David Blaine or David Copperfield - they seem to always include some sort of supernatural element. You can watch David Blaine and he's a creepy sort of guy who includes paranormal kind of feeling in his acts. And even with illusionists/magicians there is almost always some sort of sexual impropriety with scantily clad ladies. Why is that? It's just part and parcel of the show. They make crooked the straight paths of the Lord.

So those are some definitions - I know that's a lot. But what I want you to grab onto is that the Bible is not at all silent about these types of people or situations. God has a lot to say.

**Side:** Atheism cannot account for paranormal activity. And evolution cannot account for it either. If all we are is one giant chemical accident that occurred over millions of years, and if there is no God, and if there is nothing more than the physical world, then there is no explanation for spiritual or non-physical phenomena other than an utter deception.

## **2) How do we view those who are involved in paranormal activity?**

The simple answer is that anyone who willingly practices these things is an abomination to the Lord. Sometimes those who practice these things are lying or putting on a show. That seems to be the case with Simon Magus in Acts 8. But **turn to Exo. 7:11**. What I want to show you is that in the Exodus account, the assumption is that what they are doing is real. **Read 7:10-13, 7:20-22, 8:6-7, 8:17-19.**

So when the Bible talks about this stuff it assumes it is real. And so real that even those who practice such things know that what they are doing is not only trying to imitate God, they know God's work when they see it.

**Turn to Lev. 19:31, 20:1-7. Read**

Moloch was a false god who required child sacrifice. He was also a god that the Israelites came back to over and over again when things were bad. They wouldn't turn to the Lord, because that would mean giving up their sinful ways. But they'd turn to Moloch and pass their own children through the fire - burn them up - in order to try to make their situation better and keep their sin. What's also interesting here is that phrase in Vs. 7: "Be holy for I am holy" - at least here - revolves around not associating with mediums and necromancers.

**Turn to Deut. 18:9-14. Read**

Same thing. These things are an abomination and whoever takes part in them is an abomination as well. Part of the reason Israel was to destroy everyone who lived in their land was because these kinds of things are what they were doing.

And just in case we might think: "Well this is the OC, this doesn't apply anymore," **Rev. 21:8**: "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

**Rev. 22:15**: Outside [the New Jerusalem in the New Earth] are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Jl Packer talking about what he calls the "spiritist phenomena": "But three facts should be noted. First 'messages' from the departed are distressingly trivial and self-absorbed." That is, they are all about the person who is alive, not focused at all on the person who is dead. If you remember the rich man burning in hell in **Luke 16:28** wanted to tell his living brothers one thing: judgment is coming, repent and believe while you can. That's the message any dead person in hell would want their living loved ones to hear. Not some gibberish about grandma's diary.

Second, Packer says: “‘messages’ do not come from those who in this life walked close with God.” Isn’t it odd that those who completely reject Jesus in this life suddenly become bastions of spirituality in the next? That’s not consistent with what the Bible teaches us.

“Third, mediums and their ‘controls’ are embarrassed by the name of Jesus. These facts give warning that the spiritist phenomena whatever their true explanation, are a blind alley for investigating the “blessed hope of everlasting life” (Packer, J.I. *Affirming the Apostles’ Creed*; page 145-146).

Those who are involved in this stuff have no true love for Jesus. And really, there’s no such thing as a Christian psychic or Christian medium or Christian necromancer. There’s no such thing because they are completely contrary to God. It’s like saying a Christian idolator, or a Christian thief, or a Christian drunkard. It’s as ironic as Saul swearing by Yahweh that he won’t kill the medium for her sinful divination.

**Turn to Acts 19** for a couple of minutes. I want to camp there for a few minutes. So we know these things are often real - the Bible simply assumes that to be the case. And we know that they are demonic and anti-God. What does that have to do with us? I think Acts 19 tells us.

Acts 19 is an amazing account of how the city of Ephesus turned to faith in Jesus. **Read 19:8-10**

So this is the amazing setting of what’s going on in Ephesus. Now, check out what happens next. **Read 11-20**

So I just want to point out a few things. There were people in the town that were really filled with evil spirits. Some people think that it was only in Israel during Jesus’s ministry that there were people who were demon-possessed (not a term I like) or attacked by demons. But the reality is that this is everywhere and in every generation. I was talking to a guy just this last week who I think is trustworthy who was telling me some pretty remarkable stories.

But here, this spirit is attacking these false exorcists - the spirit gives the person so much power he takes out 7 men.

And here’s what I want to point spend a few minutes on: what do we who have the gospel do with this? When I was a young teenager I remember thinking, “Okay, I know Jesus is God, I know he died for my sins, I know God is powerful. How is that going to help me if I come across someone with a demon? Or what do I say to a medium?”

Let me point out a few things. First, what Paul and Apollos had been doing was preaching the gospel boldly. **Read 8**

That’s what they did for most of their time. Yes they healed people, yes it was amazing. But that doesn’t seem to convince people to follow Jesus in this situation. And it’s not Paul or Apollos casting out any demons that cause the people to believe.

You know what causes people to follow Jesus in this situation? It’s that the demon himself knows who Jesus is. The demon knows the power of the Lord Jesus whom Paul preaches. And it’s when the demon take out the 7 guys that the people believe in Jesus. **Read 15-17**

The gospel message had already been proclaimed. The groundwork had already been laid. It was actually when the demon testified to the power of Paul’s Jesus that people believed. Listen, all the supernatural paranormal phenomena out there are no match for the power of the gospel.

**Rom. 1:16:** I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the what? The power of God unto salvation. The simple, straightforward message of a crucified Jesus who has risen and reigns in glory who gives eternal life to all who repent from sin and trust in him is really all you need. That message is the power of God. That’s what they were preaching and that’s what people believed; even the demon knew it was true. You don’t need some sort of exorcist powers - you have the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That he is seated on the throne of heaven and

reigns supreme over all angels, and dominions, and spirits, and authorities, and principalities. There's no necromancer who causes Jesus to fear - they will all one day stand before him in judgement.

But here's the other thing that's important - and this connects back to Leviticus - when talking about God's people are to be holy: "Consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am the Lord your God." What do the people do when they see this. They don't just believe. **Read 18-20**

When someone comes to faith in Jesus there's no worship something else on the side; no side idolatry; no side magic that can be going on. True repentance includes putting away all of these practices. Jesus's lordship spreads to every area of our lives including our library. These guys didn't take their books down to Goodwill or put them up in a yard sale. These guys burned 50,000 shekels of silver because they knew how evil these books were and that the Lord Jesus is holy and demands that they be holy. He's cleansed them from sin, they need to cleanse themselves from idolatry. And look at the note at the end. **Read 20**

What is it that goes forth in the midst of all this spiritual warfare and idolatry? The Word of the Lord. That's what you have in your hand. You don't need to be afraid of mediums or fortune tellers. What you hold in your hand is all you will ever need. All you need to do is preach it faithfully and it will increase and prevail mightily to the glory of God.

**Pray**