

Can the Living Communicate With the Dead? (Part 2)

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(Editor's Note: This article is continued from last week. – Mike Gifford)

The Witch of Endor

The most notable case in the Old Testament is that of Saul's consultation of the so-called witch of Endor, whereby Samuel is said to have been summoned from the dead (1 Samuel 28:3-25). Again, however, scholars are disagreed as to the meaning of this incident. Some contend that this event was merely a hoax perpetrated by that evil woman. James Orr suggested:

The whole transaction was a piece of feigning on the part of the woman. . . . It was she who saw Samuel and reported his words; the king himself saw and heard nothing. It required no great skill in a practiced diviner to forecast the general issue of the battle about to take place, and the disaster that would overtake Saul and his sons. . . . Saul, in fact, was not slain, but killed himself. The incident, therefore, may best be ranked in the same category as the feats of modern mediumship (1939, 944).

The most common view, however, is that this incident did involve a real appearance of Samuel from the dead, effected not by the woman, but by Jehovah; hence, it was a unique event. This seems to be supported by the fact that the woman herself was terrified by the presence of Samuel. Davis and Whitcomb note: "This unusual act on the part of God was certainly designed to emphasize the doom of Saul and God's displeasure for his coming to a necromancer" (1970, 257). The biblical record certainly indicates that this circumstance in the life of Saul was the crowning act of his apostasy (cf. 1 Chronicles 10:13).

Spiritism Is Sinful

Attempts to contact the dead are both sinful and futile. Spiritism is wrong because: (a) It reflects a paganistic departure from God. Isaiah once asked: "And when they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isaiah 8:19 NASB). (b) Spiritism is a work of the flesh. One of the evils listed by Paul in Galatians 5:19ff is sorcery. The Greek term is *pharmakeia*, which originally had to do with the use of drugs (compare our word "pharmacy"), but it came to be used in a more general way. James MacKnight says that it is employed of "those arts of incantation and charming, and all the pretended communications with invisible malignant powers, whereby heathen priests promoted the reverence and worship of their idol gods, and enriched themselves" (1954, 301).

Furthermore, efforts to communicate with the dead are useless. The dead cannot inform the living concerning the events of this earth because "the dead know not anything . . . under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6)—that is, they are not aware of what transpires on this planet. Deane comments: "What passes upon the earth affects them [the dead] not; the knowledge of it reaches them no longer" (1962, 226).

A Hebrew prayer, emphasizing the need to trust solely in Jehovah, declares that "Abraham knows us not" (Isaiah 63:16), i.e., he is unaware of earthly activity, hence, is unable to assist the Israelite people. The dead cannot reveal the secret counsels of God, for Jehovah's righteous will is made known in his divine law (cf. Deuteronomy 29:29).

It is certain that the dead cannot bring spiritual admonitions from their abode as evidenced by the narrative concerning the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Here are the facts: The rich man had died and his spirit was in the hades (unseen) realm. He remembered that his brothers who survived him on earth were unprepared to meet God; hence, he wanted them warned. It is obvious that he could not get a message to them, otherwise he would not have requested that Lazarus be sent. It is likewise revealed that Lazarus was not permitted to make the journey back to earthly environs. The testimony of the Scriptures is sufficient to prepare men for death.

The Quackery of Spiritism

Even though there is absolutely no evidence, biblical or otherwise, that men can contact the dead, due to the nature of humanity, hope springs eternal in the bosoms of many. Hence, an environment which facilitates fakery thrives. Dr. Robert E. D. Clark tells of a spiritist medium, Mrs. Blance Cooper, who "communicated" with a gentleman named Gordon Davies, who supposedly had been killed in battle. Davies's voice was imitated, unusual features of the house were described, the future was predicted, etc. As it turned out, however, Davies was actually alive and had no interest in spiritism (1999, 501).

World famous magician Harry Houdini had a standing challenge to spirit-seekers. He claimed that there was no feat which a medium could perpetrate which he could not duplicate by innocent magic.

Let all of those who honor God shun the world of the occult, lest a “lying wonder” be believed resulting in damnation (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12). The Bible is plain: those who dabble in the mystic arts will not enter “into the gates of the city” above (Revelation 22:15). The words of Kipling are still appropriate:

Oh, the road to En-dor is the oldest road,
And the craziest road of all,
Straight it runs to the witch’s abode,
As it did in the days of Saul.
And nothing has changed of the sorrow in store,
For such as go down on the road to En-dor.

Sources/Footnotes

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