

Did a witch raise Samuel from the dead?

Then Saul said to his servants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "In fact, there is a woman who is a medium at En Dor." So Saul disguised himself and put on other clothes, and he went, and two men with him; and they came to the woman by night. And he said, "Please conduct a seance for me, and bring up for me the one I shall name to you." Then the woman said to him, "Look, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land. Why then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" And Saul swore to her by the LORD, saying, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul!" And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." So he said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground and bowed down. Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do." Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy? And the LORD has done for Himself as He spoke by me. For the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbour, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." Then immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid because of the words of Samuel. And there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day or all night. 1 Sam 28:7-20

Introduction

The general consensus on this incident, from sound commentators, is that the witch (necromancer) conjured up a demon pretending to be Samuel. However, a few people

affirm that it must have been the real Samuel since Scripture mentions that ‘Samuel said’; that the conversation was with Samuel.

Now this cannot be true for serious doctrinal issues. It would create appalling contradictions of basic doctrine, especially the sovereignty of God. I explain here the reasons why this was a demon, not Samuel.

Background issues

Where was Samuel?

Samuel was not underground.

Because dead people were buried in the Earth, the place of departed spirits (Hebrew *sheol*; Greek *Hades*) was also known as ‘the grave’. This gave rise to the idea that the spirit/soul of dead people was also under the Earth; thence any resurrection of a person (as in necromancy) must be a ‘coming upwards’ from under the Earth.

This is not true. The place of departed spirits is a special dimension maintained by God where the spirits/souls of the dead await final judgment and punishment. They are not unconscious under the Earth; they are fully conscious and in torment. This is made clear by the teaching of Jesus in Luke 16.

However, those saints who died in faith before the cross of Christ were treated differently. Although in Hades, they were situated in a place of blessing called ‘Abraham’s bosom’. They were not in torment but in faithful hope waiting for redemption. They were translated out of Abraham’s Bosom after the cross when Jesus took them in paradise, to be at his side in heaven.

So Samuel was not underground.

Saul’s sins

Saul was not in a place of blessing under God but was under judgment due to his serious sins, made worse by consulting a witch against God’s law (Deut 18:10). He sought the blessing of seeking advice from Samuel but his previous rebellion made that impossible.

Saul’s sins had made him an enemy of God. He had refused to execute God’s judgment on Agag (Amalek)¹ and had disobeyed God multiple times. He had rejected God’s word and was rejected as king (1 Sam 15:23). He was unfaithful (1 Chron 10:13). He persecuted David.

He then, threatened with war, seeks help from a necromancer (‘*owb*, verse 7). This is despite the fact that Saul had previously banished witches, mediums and necromancers from the land (1 Sam 28:3). He was breaking his own laws in further disobedience to God. He turned to a witch because God was not speaking to him (1 Sam 28:6).

God was not going to bless a man, who was already under divine condemnation, with an unheard of miracle.

¹ ‘Agag’ was the title of Amalek kings.

Necromancers and mediums cannot contact the dead

This is standard Biblical doctrine. The dead cannot contact the living (Lk 16:27-31) and await judgment (Heb 9:27). Mediums who contact the dead are talking to demons masquerading as the dead in order to deceive.

The witch already lied

Verse 13 is 'I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth' in the NKJV; sadly this is a bad translation. The clause is literally, 'Gods [*elohim*] I have seen coming up out of the earth'. *Elohim* is plural. 'Saw' is also in the perfect tense. 'A spirit' would require the Hebrew word *ruwach* which is not present. Other translations include:

- I saw gods ascending out of the earth. KJV (1611).
- I saw gods ascending out of the earth. Revised Webster Update Bible (1995).
- I saw gods ascending out of the earth. WEB (the Webster Bible, 1833).

So the witch told Saul that she had seen gods arising from the Earth. This is a lie. There are no gods other than the Lord God. What she saw were demons, not gods; not God. They also did not arise from under the ground since they operate in the air (Eph 2:2); they just gave the illusion that they did so. In other words, the demons just deluded the woman to see what she wanted to see; this is what demons do to deceive.

The whole passage is about deception. Saul, under condemnation, was induced into further delusion as punishment from God. The witch was already fully deluded.

Reasons why it was not Samuel

A servant of Satan cannot overpower God

Samuel had died and his soul / spirit was placed in the protection of God, in Abraham's Bosom in Hades. Saints were constantly assured, even before the cross, that at death they would be preserved by God.

He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness. 1 Sam 2:9

For the LORD loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever, but the descendants of the wicked shall be cut off. Ps 37:28

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints. Ps 116:15

Those who trust in the LORD *are* like Mount Zion, *which* cannot be moved, *but* abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds His people from this time forth and forever. Ps 125:1-2

No weapon formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue *which* rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* from Me, says the LORD. Isa 54:17

In order for the real Samuel to be ripped out of this place of divine protection, it means that Satan must have more power than God. This is, of course, utter nonsense. There is no way that a servant of Satan could have sufficient power to snatch a saint out of God's hands.

Saints are preserved from Satan

Saints are delivered from the power of the enemy even while living, let alone after death. This was true of saints before the cross as well as those in the New Covenant. It is impossible that a servant of the Devil could overcome the power of God's preservation and command a dead saint. If God cannot protect the dead, he cannot protect anyone.

He delivered me from my strong enemy. Ps 18:17

The LORD preserves the faithful. Ps 31:23

For You have delivered my soul from death. Ps 56:13

You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol. Ps 86:13

You have delivered my soul from death. Ps 116:8

The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy. Ps 145:20

He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Prov 2:8

I will lift up my eyes to the hills -- From whence comes my help? My help *comes* from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD *is* your keeper; The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore. Ps 121:1-8

People in Hades have no communication with the living

I have already explained this.

Witches have no real power

Witches do not have real supernatural power. They are given delusions of power by their submission to demons and may have the appearance of power by using illusions or hypnotising people. They may even do some unusual things, as Pharaoh's magicians did (Exod 7:10-12); but they do not have authority over life and death. They cannot raise the dead. They cannot even communicate with the dead.

Technicalities for Samuel to be resurrected

For Samuel to appear before Saul and speak to him, there are only two options.

The first is that the appearance of Samuel's body was only ephemeral and not material. This would mean that Samuel's soul would have to be ripped away from God's protective custody in Abraham's Bosom, sent to Earth to speak to Saul in some supernatural way and then returned. This is simply preposterous. All souls are in the control of God who made them. When the soul is separated from the body at death, it is fully controlled by God and beyond any human power.

The second is that Samuel was actually resurrected and removed from Abraham's Bosom materially, communicated with Saul and then returned. This would mean that he would have to die a second time. This is also preposterous to imagine that a mere witch could have such phenomenal power.

It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment. Heb 9:27

Men only die once. After death they are beyond the scope of the living. Sinners are held in torment in Hades (Heb. *Sheol*) awaiting judgment. The faithful in the OT waited in Abraham's Bosom, a section of Hades, for release by Jesus at the ascension to be placed in heaven. Saints in the New Covenant do not go to Hades but go straight into the presence of God in heaven awaiting the judgment and restoration.

Resurrecting people from the dead, such as Lazarus, was part of the divine authentication of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah. These were acts of God used in testimony. This is also true of OT resurrections, such as to authenticate a prophet like Elisha. The idea that a mere human being could do such divine miracles is ridiculous.

What happened?

The necromancer summoned up an evil spirit who impersonated Samuel. The narrative, for sake of clarity, reports the incident as if it were Samuel because it was in the eyes of the witch and Saul.

Samuel would not have appeared in the clothing that he wore on Earth if he was in a state of blessedness. He would have shone with garments of glory and beauty, not earthly rags. [Compare the temporary resurrection of Moses and Elijah with Christ; Matt 17:2-3; Lk 9:30-31; NB. 'Who appeared in glory'.]² This demon appeared in the form that Samuel was buried in or that he appeared in life; what Saul expected to see.

The fruit of this conversation is not what would result from the real Samuel – who would have demanded Saul's repentance and following God, plus releasing David from banishment. In fact, like many other contacts with demonic forces, Saul immediately goes down the path of self-destruction.

Objections

The Bible says that it was Samuel

This is a case of over-literal interpretation.

Scripture says many things that cannot be taken literally. For example:

- Jesus is not a door. 'Then Jesus said to them again, "Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep"', (Jn 10:7). The Greek word *thura* is a root word meaning door or gate. Here it is used figuratively for a way in (to the kingdom).
- Jesus is not a vine. 'I am the vine, you are the branches', (Jn 15:5). Again this is figurative to emphasise the union of Christ with his disciples.
- God is not made of light waves. 'God is light and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 Jn 1:5). This is used figuratively to emphasise that God is true, pure, holy and righteous.

² This was a special miracle of God for two prophets who did not die in the normal manner Deut 34:5-6; 2 Kg 2:11.

The figure conjured up had the appearance of Samuel (an old man covered with a mantle³) in order to produce a strong delusion which God gives to the deceived (2 Thess 2:11).

The Bible reports accurately what people said even if they were demons, sinners and liars

But this does not mean that what was said is true. The Bible often reports what demons or sinners said even if the words were false.

Satan claimed to own all the kingdoms on Earth and offered them to Jesus.⁴ This was a lie. Satan has no authority over the kingdoms of this world – they belong to God.⁵ However, Satan rules over the kingdoms of men through temptation and sin;⁶ he controls nations through controlling sinful men; but he has no legal claim to those nations. The Gospels do not bother mentioning that Satan was lying; it merely concentrates on the victory of Jesus.

The spirit predicted Saul's death accurately

The demon set in motion the things that would precipitate such events and would also know of the various factors involved (strength of the Philistine army etc.). Defeat was entirely predictable since Saul had forsaken God. Sensing defeat did not require supernatural knowledge.

Further, evil spirits had done this at other times. An evil spirit foresaw Ahab's fall at Ramoth-Gilead and was instrumental in it (1Kg 22:20ff.).

Conclusion

It is impossible that the necromancer could raise up the real Samuel, who would not have come up from under the ground and would not have looked like that. It was a demon masquerading as Samuel in order to plunge Saul, already under condemnation, into further delusion.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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³ A large over-garment; a robe worn over a tunic.

⁴ Matt 4:8-9, 'Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."'

⁵ Ps 24:1, 'The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein'.

⁶ Eph 2:2, 'in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience'.