

Life of David, The Dark Side is Real, 1 Samuel 28, 3/30/25

What do these movies have in common: The Omen, The Devil's Advocate, The Conjuring, Paranormal Activity, The Exorcist. They are all Hollywood's depiction of the supernatural, of the dark side: the devil, demons, the occult. That wasn't a recommendation by the way. Is all of this just for scary movies? Well many people would say so. According to studies, 42% of Americans don't believe there is such a thing as the devil and demons.¹ Keyser Soze from the Usual Suspects- "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was to convince the world he doesn't exist." If he can get us to think the material world is all there is, there is no actual good and evil, afterlife, he doesn't need to work too hard to keep us from a saving relationship with God. While Hollywood might not have all the details right, make no mistake, the dark side is real. And if that's true, how can we as Christians make sure we are aware of these dark forces and be prepared spiritually? The reason this is a question is because 1 Samuel 28 reads like a script for one of these movies, and so we want to dig into this chilling story and then discover its surprising relevance in our lives.

Some context, King Saul has been chasing David to kill him since chapter 21. For us that's only 7 about 4 Sundays, in reality, it was nearly a decade of David's life. He was a teenager when he was first on the run, now he's in his late 20's. After sparing King Saul's life once more in chapter 26, in chapter 27 David says, "Enough of this, I'm going to make a treaty with Achish, ruler of the Philistines and live in his land...after all, the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Well it works. And just having David around bolsters the confidence of the Philistine army as we will see today. Well in chapter 28, we pause for a moment in the story of David, and we focus on Saul who is nearing a tragic end to his reign. **3b Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.** (That will become important context in a moment) **4 The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa.**

5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. The reason he's terrified is because the massive Philistine army has advanced from the southwest, modern day Gaza strip, all the way up in the northeast nearly to the Sea of Galilee. And what this tells us is this is a very serious threat to Saul and the kingdom of Israel. On the human level he is coming to the realization that there is no way he's going to survive. So, Saul gets desperate. **6 He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.**

7 Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." A medium was someone who claimed to be able to communicate with the dead, to conjure up a ghost, or able to speak on behalf of spirits...think Whoopi Goldberg in Ghost with Patrick Swayze. This dark practice still goes on today of course- from the jungles of the Amazon, to Haiti, the plains of Africa and right here in the US, people claim to be mediums, hold seances, and access the dead through a variety of methods. In no uncertain terms in the Bible, this practice for God's people was outlawed. **Leviticus 19:31 Do not turn to mediums or**

¹ https://baptistnews.com/article/gallup-finds-belief-in-five-spiritual-entities-on-the-decline/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God."

Deuteronomy 18:10-12 There shall not be found among you anyone...who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens,

or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead,

for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And yet this is precisely what we see King Saul doing. How far Saul had fallen, this same Saul who once rid the land of this practice, is now seeking it for himself. *V.7 "There is one in Endor," they said.* You say, "Isn't that where the Ewoks are from?" Yes, this is a different Endor, just a couple miles from Saul's camp. **8** *So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman.*

"Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name."

9 *But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul 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?"

10 *Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this."* How brazen for Saul to swear by God's name doing the very thing that is condemned by God.

11 *Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said.* Remember Samuel the great prophet who is now dead? The one who once anointed Saul, and was the one who removed his anointing for Saul's continued disobedience? The one who anointed David as the next king whom he is trying to kill! That Samuel. Talk about desperate!

12 *When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"*

13 *The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a ghostly figure coming up out of the earth."*

14 *"What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said.*

Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

15 *Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?"* You say, hold on, time out. Was this *really* Samuel? Sure seems like it. While many of these kinds of things seem to me to be scams, that's not what's happening here, this lady was scared so bad she shrieked at the top of her lungs. If you scare someone who is used to working with ghosts and demons, you

know this is serious. Then this raises a whole bunch of other questions, “But how? And where is Samuel this whole time? And why would God allow access to him through forbidden, occultic methods?” Those are great questions to speculate about over a cup of coffee or in your small group, but God apparently doesn’t think they are important enough to answer, so I’m going to avoid going down the rabbit hole on that one in a sermon. What is clear? 1- Saul is committing abominable sin here by doing this, and 2- God in his sovereignty, co-opts even this demonic practice to communicate through Samuel one last time, an ominous message to Saul. **v.15** “*I am in great distress,” Saul said. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me.*

He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”

16 *Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy?* He says, just what exactly are you expecting? You have abandoned God at every turn, disobeyed him, and did your own thing, practice the occult, and now you want to hear something good? Samuel knows that Saul wasn’t actually seeking God, if he was, he would have surrendered his life and obeyed him. No, what Saul is seeking is a sign to control his fate. Not the same thing. So Samuel continues **17** *The LORD has done what he predicted through me.*

The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David.

18 *Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today.*

19 *The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.*

The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.” Which is exactly what happens 24 hrs later... **20** *Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel’s words.* A foreshadowing of how he would die tomorrow, falling to the ground on his own sword.

Wow, what a haunting end to King Saul...pun intended, a life which began with such promise and is coming to a tragic end. That’s as far as we are going to go in the story. You say, “Nate this is a wild and frightening story, thanks, I’m probably going to have bad dreams now, it does seem like a script from one of those movies, and I’m really hoping that there is nothing relevant about this story in my life!” Well let’s talk about that.

Ironically, while belief in God and the devil, heaven and hell, demons and angels as described in the Bible is on the decline in America, more people than ever are seeking out spiritual practices to get in touch with the spiritual realm. Among U.S. adults aged 18-25, 51% reported engaging

in these practices in the last year.² But that makes perfect sense to me, we aren't just brains on sticks, we are spiritual beings made for a connection with the supernatural- and if we don't seek it in a relationship with God, we will look in alternative places. Seances, tarot cards, palm readings, mentalists, healing crystals, gurus, Wicca...In my research I came across a so-called expert who claims to have unlocked multi-dimensional communication through what she calls light language using vocal vibrations. The psychic industry continues to grow, last year it brought in an estimated \$2.3 billion³ In a quick google search I found about 10 psychics within a 10 mile radius. And so as your pastor, I want to take a few minutes to share **3 Warnings about the Dark Side** from Saul's encounter.

#1 Know your Real Enemy. Now, how did Saul get into this mess in the first place? How did these Philistines gain so much power when suddenly they are threatening to overtake his kingdom and his very life? Saul should have asked himself that question. The reason is because Saul was distracted with fighting and going after the wrong enemy, David. He was distracted with David chasing him across the country and wasting time, resources, and soldiers on him that the real enemy rises up to destroy him. Do you see the parallel? When you fight the wrong enemy, the real enemy will rise up to destroy you. **Ephesians 6:12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,*

against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Do you hear what Paul says? First, you are in a battle with a powerful enemy, whether you are aware of it or not. But the battle isn't being fought with guns and tanks, your real enemy is not other nations, republicans or democrats, it's not men and it's not women, it's not your neighbor whose dog does his business on your yard, it's not the girl who stole the boy you liked away from you...The real enemy is in the spiritual world. See, the devil loves to get us sidetracked into thinking all these other issues, all these people are your enemy when they are not. That person said something bad about me, and now I'm going to use up my energy, rent them space in my head, use up energy to figure out a way to take them down. While you are doing that, the real spiritual enemy studies you and rises up against you.⁴ Kids- your enemy is not your parents. For married couples- if you are finding yourself fighting all the time, angry at each other...this is exactly the real enemy's strategy to destroy your marriage. Look at your spouse and say "You are not my enemy." Kids look at your parents and say, "You are not my enemy." Do you know your real spiritual enemy?

#2 Don't Dabble in the Diabolical.

Many people say, what's the big deal- getting your palm read, reading horoscopes...aren't these things at best harmless and at worst just a scam? Many of them probably are scams...but don't underestimate these things. There is a reason they are strictly prohibited in the Bible like we read. Either these things that attempt to access the spiritual, supernatural realm are from God (which the Bible clearly says they are not), or used by the devil. **C.S. Lewis- "There is no neutral**

²https://religionnews.com/2021/08/11/study-gen-z-doubles-down-on-spirituality-combining-tarot-and-traditional-faith/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

³ https://www.ibisworld.com/united-states/industry/psychic-services/4413/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ Thanks to Skip Heitzig for the insight here. <https://calvarynm.church/teachings/#/series/314/sermon/4609>

ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” Ouiji Boards, crystals, horoscopes, new age meditation- these are not neutral, all these things are ancient occult practices of 1 Samuel 28 with a fresh coat of paint.

1 Peter 5:8 *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* You don’t play with a lion do you? Some of us are playing with the devil. His job description Jesus says, is to steal, kill, and destroy. Here is just a good principle- if you can’t find the spiritual practice encouraged in the Bible stay away from it, no matter how innocent it seems.

#3 Recognize the Devil’s Footholds.

Ephesians 4:27 *Don’t give the devil a foothold* in our lives. There are things we can dabble in that we might not think are overtly demonic...but we may unknowingly invite the devil to get a foothold in our lives and a foothold can create a stronghold. This isn’t a complete list but just some things to be discerning about:

Hallucinogens- Psychotropics that can even be prescribed, Opioids, psychedelic mushrooms, ayahuasca- a powerful plant used by Shamans in the Amazon that has gained popularity because of influencers like Joe Rogan and Aaron Rodgers. None of these things are new. These kinds of drugs were around in Bible days under the umbrella term- Sorcery- greek word *pharmakeia*. And not surprisingly they are always found in the same list as other occultic practices because they are footholds that the enemy can use. I’m not saying there are no medicinal benefits under the close watch of a trusted physician, but I am encouraging caution and accountability.

New Age Healing/Practices- Eastern Meditation- Emptying the mind of everything and repeating mantras- This is the opposite of Biblical meditation- filling our minds with the truth of God’s Word. Reiki- which even claims some ancient Christian origins, couldn’t be further from the truth. Reiki uses pantheistic and pagan rituals to contact the divine energy. Reiki masters give “complete control of healing sessions to their spirit guides.”⁵ Now some people say, but there have been people who have benefited from some of these things, they have worked! What if I said, I fixed my leaky toilet with duct tape? Well, it might be working for now- but it wasn’t the right way, and it’s going to create bigger problems later. Same with these practices. We don’t need to be experts on all these dangerous practices, we just need to be knowledgeable about the Bible so that we can exercise discernment.

Habitual Sin: The enemy can use any sin as a foothold, in the context of Ephesians 4- Anger. Same true about Pornography, lying, alcohol addiction, and a critical spirit. These sins open up a portal, making us susceptible to his influence in our lives.

3 Warnings about the Dark Side: #1 Know your Real Enemy #2 Don’t Dabble with the Diabolical. #3 Recognize the Devil’s Footholds.

⁵ <https://probe.org/what-is-a-christian-perspective-on-reiki/>

You may have friends, neighbors, co-workers who practice wicca, seances, new age... Our response should not be condemnation, "She's a witch, burn her!" Notice, this medium that Saul encounters, it's interesting how the narrator describes her, she's not painted as this an evil witch, but as a sympathetic character, far more than Saul. At the end of the story she's nursing Saul back to strength, even sacrificing a fattened calf to feed him, which would have been an incredibly generous act. Jesus showed the greatest mercy and compassion on those who were demonically harassed, on those who may have practiced the occult and he brings them to himself, he loves them, and heals them, he sets them free and offers them salvation in a relationship with himself. Over and over again. In Acts 19 it says that many people who practiced the occult came to faith when Paul shared the gospel with them and renounced their practices. These are often spiritually sensitive people who need Jesus just like we do. People to be loved. If you have people in your life trapped in this deception, pray for them, love them, share the gospel.

Some of you here may have come in totally unaware that there is a powerful spiritual realm around us, some of you might be dabbling in some of the dangerous practices I discussed today, and some of us have given the devil a foothold that has become a stronghold. If you find that there is a demonic stronghold, a besetting sin or addiction in your life, don't sit and be ashamed in silence, Jesus can set you free. For the Christian, the one who has by faith in Jesus, has become a child of God, listen to what the Bible says- **1 John 4:4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them,**

because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. In Christ, Satan does not have unrestricted access in our lives and the Holy Spirit lives within us. When Jesus encountered the demonic realm, the demons always had the same reaction, they knew exactly who he was, almighty God in the flesh, and they were terrified and pleaded for mercy. And Jesus set free those who were afflicted. Only in Jesus is there freedom from any oppression, from addiction, from gripping fear and anxiety. Have you invited him into your life? Come down front and pray with us, we want to help you. **TEXT: (302) 217-6594**

Well, you say, Nate- I'm a Christian, but what can I do to be better prepared for this spiritual battle you've described? Like is there a training manual I can read? Actually there is, Ephesians 6. I'm pulling an audible, and instead of continuing in our 1 Samuel series, I think it's important to be equipped for this spiritual battle together. That's what next week is going to be about.