

You Decide: Was It Samuel, or an Evil Spirit?

In Samuel 28, King Saul inquired of God for advice, but God did not answer him because of his disobedience. King Saul then went to the witch of Endor to bring back the prophet Samuel from the dead even though this was forbidden by God. Was it Samuel who appeared to him—or was it an evil spirit?

I believe Scripture is clear that it was Samuel who ascended out of the earth to talk with King Saul. There are multiple reasons that make this clear.

First, the witch was surprised and startled to the point of fear. Scripture says, “When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice” (v. 12a, MEV). This verse says she saw Samuel, not an evil spirit. She would not have been shocked and scared if were an evil spirit. She had seen evil spirits before, since this was her practice. She knew she could not have brought up the real Samuel, but only an impersonating demon (familiar spirit).

In addition, seeing the real Samuel caused her to know that it was Saul asking. She said, “Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul” (v. 12b). She would have known that Samuel was frequently with Saul, as the prophets had audience with the king. She immediately associated the two identities.

The second reason is that Samuel’s appearance came before the witch had started her ritual or incantations. God interrupted it immediately. Bringing up Samuel was allowed and caused by God, as several commentaries point out, since this was the king, and it involved the nation of Israel, God made this exception. God made exceptions elsewhere in the Bible. One example is He allowed Samson to marry a Philistine in Judges 14:4, which was not permitted for an Israelite.

The third reason is the witch described Samuel's appearance as, "an old man ... coming up; and covered with a mantle" (v. 27, NKJV). Samuel would have in fact been old, and Samuel wore a mantle as a prophet would (1 Sam. 15:27).

The fourth reason is found in 1 Samuel 28:14, which states that "Saul perceived it was Samuel." I'm sure Saul knew, since he was an eyewitness. He perceived it to be Samuel. In addition, verse 14 says that Saul, "stooped with his face towards the ground and bowed down." He must have been strongly convinced it was Samuel for the king to bow down.

The fifth reason is the most important point. The passage states twice that Samuel spoke: "and Samuel said" (v. 15a) and "Then said Samuel" (v. 16a). If it were an evil spirit, the Scripture would not have said it was Samuel. The Bible answers this question for us. God's Word says what it means.

The next reason is that Samuel prophesied the future in detail, which the evil spirit could not do. The devil does not know the future. "Then Samuel said, 'So why 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 neighbor, 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'" (1 Sam. 28:16-19).

If it were an evil spirit, the spirit would not have chastised Saul's disobedience to God, and more importantly, could not have predicted the future so accurately and with so much detail.

The last reason, found in verse 20b (KJV), says, "Saul was

sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel.” Again, it says these were “the words of Samuel.” The Bible would not record a lie, which would have produced confusion. Four times, the Scripture specifically says it was indeed Samuel. That sums it up clearly and leaves no doubt.

Bill Wiese is the author of the New York Times bestselling book *23 Minutes In Hell*, the story of his life-changing visit to hell in 1998. Bill has since authored six additional book titles and continues to share his experience around the world. He and his wife, Annette, founded Soul Choice Ministries in late 2006 and have dedicated their lives to reaching the unsaved.

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