



## The Day Samuel Came Up from the Grave

By Jim Myers

Ancient Israelites believed in an afterlife, but in a different way that most people believe today. For the Israelites, the dead still exist in a place called **Sheol** (*the underworld*). And, in some cases, the dead are able to communicate with the living. One of the best known stories in the Jewish Scriptures is that of Samuel who was called back to the world of the living to meet with King Saul by a woman with "a familiar spirit" -- *the Medium of Endor.*"

The story is found 1 Samuel 28, but in order to understand the dynamics of the relationships between characters in this story, you need to know more about King Saul, David, and Samuel. Saul is the first king of Israel. Do you know how he became king? The elders of Israel went to Samuel, a priest and prophet, and said, "*Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.*"

That displeased Samuel, but he prayed to Yahweh before he responded to them. This is Yahweh's answer:

*"Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."*<sup>1</sup>

Yahweh gave Samuel a message for the people about what life under a king will be like.

*"He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots and to be his horsemen, and some will run before his chariots. He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, will set some to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give them to his servants. He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give*

*it to his officers and servants. And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and Yahweh will not hear you in that day.”<sup>2</sup>*

Samuel delivered Yahweh’s message, and this is the response of the people:

*“No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”<sup>3</sup>*

Samuel delivered their response back to Yahweh and He said, “*Make them a king.*” So, Samuel began searching for a king and found **Saul**.

*There was not a more handsome person than Saul among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.<sup>4</sup>*

Saul was a young man when the great prophet Samuel anointed him “*King of Israel.*” But since then his rule had been filled with terrible problems, many of them due to his own fickle character and inconstant behavior. Now, the Philistine kings were bringing their armies together and preparing for war with Israel. In the past, **Samuel** and a young upstart named “**David**” had been at his side, but now things had changed dramatically (1 Samuel 28:3):

*Samuel died and all Israel had lamented for him and buried him in Ramah . . . Saul had put those having familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land.*

David was with the Philistines, because of a conflict with Saul (1 Samuel 27:1).

*And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul: there is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines; Saul will not try to seek me any more in all the borders of Israel: so shall I escape out of his hand.*

Chapter 28 opens with a conversation between Achish, Philistine King of Gath, and David.

King Achish: “I am sure you will go out with me to battle, you and your men.”

David: “Surely you know what your servant can do.”

King Achish: “Therefore I will make you the guardian of my head.”

The military situation looked hopeless and the people expected their king “*to go out before them and fight their battles.*” Saul needs divine guidance to see him through the crisis.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Philistines gathered together and came and encamped at Shunem. Saul gathered all Israel together, and they encamped at Gilboa. Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he feared and trembled in his heart very much. Saul asked of Yahweh. Yahweh did not answer, either by dreams or by the Urim or by the prophets.*

His trustworthy advisor Samuel is dead. Yahweh would not answer him – *even when he used the mysterious Urim*. In desperation, Saul decided he needs to use illicit means for guidance and he will ask the deceased Samuel for help. But there are two very big problems. First, necromancy is forbidden in the laws of Moses. Second, King Saul himself had explicitly banned everyone with “a familiar spirit” and wizards from Israel.

<sup>7</sup> Saul: “Find me a woman who possesses a familiar spirit, so that I may go to her and inquire of her.”

Servants: “Behold, a woman who is in En Dor.”

Endor, just happened to be near the front lines of the approaching battle. Saul goes to her and does so in disguise, for rather obvious reasons: *it would not help matters if she realized the illicit request for contact with the dead was coming from the king who made it illegal in the first place.*

<sup>8</sup> Saul and two men with him went to the woman by night.

Saul: “Please divine for me, and bring up for me him whom I shall say to you.”

Woman: “Behold, you know what Saul has done, that he has cut off the those having familiar spirits and the wizards out of the land. Why are you laying a snare for my life, to kill me?”

She is understandably reluctant because she knew the Law of Moses orders sorceresses to be put to death. She required him to swear an oath that no harm will come to her.

<sup>10</sup> Saul: “As Yahweh lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.”

Did you notice “the name” Saul used to swear the oath? What do you think Yahweh thought about that?

<sup>11</sup> Woman: “Whom shall I bring up for you?”

Saul: “Bring up Samuel to me.”

She obeyed his request and held a kind of séance, and “*asked for Samuel to come up out of the ground.*” But when the woman saw what was coming out of the ground -- *she cried out with a loud voice!*

<sup>12</sup>Woman: “Why have you deceived me? For you *are* Saul!”

<sup>13</sup> King: “Do not be afraid. What did you see?”

Woman: “I saw a **god** ascending out of the earth.”

The Hebrew translated “**god**” is **elohiym**, the same word that is used in Genesis 1:1 – “*In the beginning elohiym created the Heavens and the Earth.*” Why is **elohiym** used in this text? Either this text imagines that as God’s prophet, Samuel, is semi-divine, or it wants us to think that the dead, or just dead prophets, have somehow become divinized. The text is clear that a divine being of some kind has appeared.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>14</sup> King: “What *is* his appearance?”

Now we know that Saul could not see the elohiym.

Woman: “An old man is coming up, and he *is* wrapped with a robe.”

It is worth noting that this divine being can readily be recognized for who he is. Since he comes up as an old man wearing a robe, Saul realizes it is in fact Samuel. For this story, as for the Greek and Roman texts we have examined, the dead retain the appearance they had while living; in this case, Samuel looks just as he did at the end of his life.

*Saul knew it was Samuel.  
He bowed his face to the ground.  
He prostrated himself.*

<sup>15</sup> Samuel: “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

What do you think about Samuel's reaction to the situation? He is extremely upset that Saul has interrupted his rest. It is hard to interpret this reproach, but it appears that Samuel had been enjoying being dead. That does not necessarily mean that Samuel had a conscious existence in his dead state. It could equally suggest he was in a deep, even a dreamless sleep and was upset about being woken up. But either way, his death was not awful, terrible, and something to escape. It was pleasant. What was awful for Samuel was being brought back to life!<sup>7</sup>

Saul: "I am greatly distressed. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned from me and does not answer me anymore, either by hand of the prophets, or by dreams. I have called for you to make known to me what I should do."

<sup>16</sup> Samuel: "Why do you ask me, since Yahweh has turned from you and is your adversary? Yahweh has done for Himself as He spoke by my hand. Yahweh has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David! Because you did not obey the voice of Yahweh nor execute His burning anger on Amalek. Therefore Yahweh has done this to you this day. Moreover Yahweh also gave Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons *will be* with me. Yahweh will also give the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines."

This is one of the great lines of the Hebrew Bible, foretelling death without mentioning the word — the deceased Samuel tells Saul -- "*and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me!*"

Again, this does not necessarily mean that the dead all live together and Saul will soon join them in that large assembly hall beneath the earth. It could simply mean that the dead have in common the same fate: they are all dead, and Saul will soon join their ranks.

It is striking, however, that the divine spirit of Samuel knows what will happen the next day. Apparently the dead — at least dead prophets — know the future.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

When Samuel came up from the ground, the woman was terrified. Now, the woman came to Saul and sees that he is terrified.

Woman: “Look, your maidservant has obeyed your voice, and I have put my life in my hands, and I heard the words which you spoke to me. Now, listen, I beg you, also listen to the voice of your maidservant, and let me set a piece of bread before you; and eat. You will have strength when you go on *your way*.”

<sup>23</sup> Saul: “I will not eat.”

His servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he heeded their voice. Then he arose from the ground and sat on the bed. <sup>24</sup> And the woman had a fatted calf in the house, and she hastened to kill it. She took flour and kneaded *it*, and baked unleavened bread from it. <sup>25</sup> She brought *it* before Saul and his servants, and they ate. Then they rose and went away that night. **END OF THE STORY**

### ***Saul & David***

Saul didn't seek the kingship of Israel. He was a tall good-looking guy. Samuel went to him and anointed him “King of Israel.” He was the first King of Israel and had no model of kingship to follow. He was also aware of Yahweh's words that “*he became king because the people rejected Yahweh as their king.*” From the beginning of his kingship, Saul had Samuel standing by his side as his link to Yahweh. And then, there was the Goliath situation (1 Samuel 17).

*The Philistines stood on a mountain on one side, and Israel stood on a mountain on the other side, with a valley between them.*

The people expected the king to fight for them. Goliath challenged Saul to send a man to fight him and neither Saul nor any of his soldiers stepped up and took the challenge – *but a young shepherd named David did.*

*The Philistine cursed David by his gods and said to him, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!”*

*David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. I come to you in the name of Yahweh of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. Today Yahweh will deliver you into my hand!”*

Understanding relationships of key characters allows us to put ourselves in their shoes and *that helps us learn more about life and the circumstances that brought them together.* **BHC**

# The Calendar Reflects the Seasons of Our Lives

(In memory of Rabbi Leynor. This article was originally published July 31, 2014.)

I was teaching someone who is in the process of conversion about the Jewish calendar and I mentioned that the number of ways the calendar reflects the seasons of our lives. *It is an all-encompassing journey which includes birth, life, death and rebirth.*

- We are required to "**remember**" those things we have forgotten, those who are no longer by our side and incidents we'd like to forget.
- We **celebrate victories** and dance with the Torah, we sit on the floor and by candlelight we read Lamentations and recognize and **accept our losses**.
- We are required to address the "**victims**", those we have wronged and be open to others asking for forgiveness for the pain they have caused us.
- We are obligated to **reconcile relationships**, that's not YAH's problem! We are supposed to recognize injustice and establish *Tzedek*, righteousness, and bring light and warmth to the cold darkness of winter.
- We **celebrate the spring** and the life-giving rains. We cope with the expulsion from what is familiar to the wilderness.
- We **stand before the Creator** at the mountain and **accept responsibility** for ourselves and the rest of creation.
- We recognize that we must **recharge our souls every week** to maintain our humanity and learn to be grateful, thankful and appreciative for all our blessings and gifts every day.

*Choose Life By Doing TOV!*

Rabbi Leynor

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 8:6-7

<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 8:8-18

<sup>3</sup> 1 Samuel 8:19-21

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 9:2

<sup>5</sup> *Heaven and Hell: A History of the Afterlife* by Bart D. Ehrman © 2020; Simon & Schuster, New York, NY; p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> *Heaven and Hell*: p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Heaven and Hell*: p. 91.

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## November Memorials

*In Loving Memory*

**PAMELA  
STRYKER**

December 11, 1941  
November 21, 2000

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**LARRY V.  
HARRISON**

October 19, 1944  
November 2, 2016

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

*In Loving Memory*

**JOHNNIE  
VERA BOND**

February 21, 1893  
November 30, 1985

*May you dwell under His  
wings in complete  
SHALOM forever!*

### When We Remember Them

*May their memories inspire us to seek in our lives  
those qualities of mind and heart  
which we recall with special gratitude.*

*May their memories help us bring closer to fulfillment  
their highest ideals and noblest strivings.*

*May their memories deepen our loyalty to each other  
and to those things which cannot die –  
faithfulness, love, and life giving values.*

*We are blessed by our memories of them!\**

\* Inspired from prayers found in **Yitzhor Reflections** - *The New Mahzor* - The Prayer Book Press

***Caring About & Caring For Each Other.  
Creating the Memories Others Will Remember Us.  
Choosing Life & Doing TOV!***