

# Biblical Use of the Word Sheol

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"This magnificent Conditionalist Faith volume is characterized by your customary careful scholarship"— Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Two other vital Hebrew terms must be considered ere we turn to certain favorite Old Testament problem texts constantly invoked by Immortal-Soulists in seeking to sustain their view of the persisting consciousness of disembodied spirits, or souls, after death and of the Eternal Torment of the incorrigibly wicked. We will then bring this survey of the Old Testament on the nature and destiny of man to a close. So we now turn, first to she'ol and then to Ge Hinnom.

## A. She'ol's Most Suitable Rendering Is "Gravedom"

In seeking to grasp the meaning and to understand the usage of the basic Hebrew terms that concern the destiny of man, we come to the familiar word she'ol, which we should remember is always connected with death. Now, there are two principal reasons for the prevalent difficulty in grasping the true intent of she'ol—(1) conflicting translations, and (2) popular misconceptions prevalent concerning Hell. These must be clarified and the true intent ascertained.

### 1. DIFFICULTY CREATED BY VARIANT TRANSLATIONS

First of all, variant translations of the Hebrew word she'ol have made it difficult for the English reader to grasp the basic meaning of the word. For example, in its sixty-five occurrences in the Old Testament she'ol has been given three different and actually contradictory renderings. In the Authorized Version, she'ol is twenty-seven times rendered as "hell," thirty-five times as "the grave," and three times as "the pit." (It should be noted at the outset that "grave," as here used, means "the grave" in contrast to "a grave" [qeber] or mere burial place.) Added to this primary difficulty is the fact that nine other words besides she'ol are also translated "pit." Furthermore, six other words, in addition to she'ol, are translated "grave."

This obviously complicates the situation. In the Revised Version she'ol is translated as "hell" fourteen times, as "grave" fifteen times, and as "pit" six times. In thirty instances she'ol is left untranslated—just the plain transliteration "sheol." In the Revised Standard Version she'ol is transliterated in all but two occurrences—[1 Kings 2:9](#) and [Song of Solomon 8:6](#), in both cases being rendered "grave." The Jewish Publication Society Torah transliterates she'ol in all cases. As a convenience for those who wish to check the various translations, the sixty-five instances are listed in the note below. See Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance*, art., "Hell." p. 368.

The sixty-five instances in which she'ol occurs are: [Gen. 37:35](#), [42:38](#), [44:29](#), [31](#); [Num. 16:30](#), [33](#); [Deut. 32:22](#); [1 Sam. 2:6](#); [2 Sam. 22:6](#); [1 Kings 2:6](#), [9](#); [Job 7:9](#), [11:8](#), [14:13](#), [17:13](#), [16](#); [21:13](#), [24:19](#), [26:6](#), [Ps. 6:5](#), [9:17](#), [16:10](#), [18:5](#), [30:3](#), [31:17](#), [49:14](#), [15](#), [55:15](#), [86:13](#), [88:3](#), [89:48](#), [116:3](#), [139:8](#), [141:7](#), [Prov. 1:12](#), [5:5](#), [7:27](#), [9:18](#), [15:11](#), [24](#), [23:14](#), [27:20](#), [30:16](#); [Eccl. 9:10](#); [Song of](#)

[Solomon 8:6](#); [Isa. 5:14](#), [14:9](#), [11](#), [15](#), [28:15](#), [18](#), [38:10](#), [14](#); [57:9](#); [Eze. 31:15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [32:21](#), [27](#); [Hosea 13:14](#); [Amos 9:2](#); [Jonah 2:2](#); [Hab. 2:5](#).

## **2. "HELL" A WHOLLY UNSUITABLE TRANSLATION**

The second major handicap to correct understanding is the popular misconception that Hell (one of the principal words by which she'ol is translated in the English versions) is commonly considered to be a place or state of fiery, endless, present torments for the wicked.

As mentioned, in a total of thirty-eight instances out of the sixty-five, in the Authorized Version she'ol is rendered either "the grave" or "the pit." Now, if she'ol were to signify the lake burning with fire and brimstone in which the wicked are generally believed writhing in endless conscious misery, then why should she'ol ever be rendered "grave," or "pit," which it is in more than half the passages? The question is pertinent, and the answer is simple and basic: In Old Testament times she'ol meant the unseen secret resting place of all the dead—not the place of torment for the wicked.

In the first occurrence of: she'ol (in [Gen. 37:35](#), "For I will go down into the grave [she'ol] unto my son mourning"), the revisers in the Revised Version added a marginal note, "Heb. she'ol, the name of the abode of the dead, answering to the Greek hades, [Acts 2:27](#)." Certain texts seem to suggest this definition ("If I wait, the grave is mine house," [Job 17:13](#)), and it presents no difficulties if we do not take it to imply that the dead are living in she'ol, which is contrary to other plain texts describing the state of man in death.

## **3. "GRAVEDOM"—MOST SUITABLE RENDERING FOR "SHE'OL."**

A careful examination of the sixty-five she'ol passages will show that the word "gravedom"\*—not primarily the place of interment or the locality of departed spirits, but the condition of death or the death-state—offers the nearest suitable preponderant rendering. The insertion of "gravedom" for she'ol into the sixty-five texts where she'ol appears, would clarify the whole problem, and afford the nearest possible uniform meaning.

Thus harmony and consistency would result, and a semblance of order come out of much confusion. Added to this is the fact that the New Testament Greek hades, equivalent of the Hebrew she'ol, may likewise be consistently translated gravedom. This is further reason for approving this, term.

## **4. SUSPENSION OF LIFE IN "SHE'OL" AWAITING RESURRECTION**

In the Pentateuch and throughout the subsequent books of the Old Testament, she'ol is set forth as the place or state of death, or the dead, where deepest darkness and silence obtains, and in which there is total absence of life in any form. In she'ol all human activities cease. It is the awesome terminus toward which all human life moves. The dead who are therein give no sign of life. In she'ol nothing is seen or heard. There is no thought or perception, no activity of any kind. Good and bad alike are there—confined in darkness, with suspension of all life.

\* Employed by such eminent scholars as Canon Henry Constable, Prof. E. W. Bullinger, Congregationalist Chaplain J. H. Pettingell, and many others, as will be seen in volume 2.

See Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon*, art., "Hell," p. 368; also *The Companion Bible*, Appendix 35, p. 33.

In she'ol "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom" ([Eccl. 9:10](#)). Each is wrapped in heavy, unconscious sleep, there to await the call of the Life-giver on the resurrection morn. Beyond any question she'ol is the place of death, darkness, and silence—gravedom. [[Gen. 37:35](#); [Job 14:12, 13](#); [Ps. 6:5, 49:19](#); [Eccl. 9:5-10](#); [Isa. 38:18](#).] The fact is particularly impressive that she'ol, or gravedom, stands in complete contrast with the state of the living ([Deut. 30:15, 19](#); [1 Sam. 2:6-9](#)), and is never connected with the living except by contrast. As to its duration, the dominion of she'ol, or the grave, lasts until, and will end only with, the resurrection which is its only exit. "I will ransom them from the power of the grave [she'ol]; I will redeem them from death . . . ; O grave [she'ol], I will be thy destruction" ([Hosea 13:14](#). Cf. [Ps. 16:10](#) with [Acts 2:27](#)).

Man himself, as a person or individual, goes down into she'ol, the state of death, and remains in she'ol during the entire period of death. Here are confirmatory texts:

"As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave [she'ol] shall come up no more" ([Job 7:9](#))—that is, not until the resurrection.

"They [the wicked] spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave [she'ol]" ([Job 21:13](#)).

"Like sheep they [the foolish] are laid in the grave [she'ol]; death shall feed on them" ([Ps. 49:14](#)).

## **5. DARKNESS OF "SHE'OL" DISSIPATED BY LIGHT OF RESURRECTION**

The concept of death and she'ol as equivalents runs all through the Old Testament ([Prov. 5:5](#); [7:27](#); [Song of Solomon 8:6](#); [Isa. 28:15](#); [Hab. 2:5](#)). Resurrection was understood and anticipated. But the sadness of the Old Testament Hebrew contemplation of entrance into the dark, silent, lifeless state of she'ol, gives way to the New Testament Christian emphasis on the exit from the grave under the gospel, where she'ol's dominion is broken and its rule abrogated by the triumphant resurrection of Christ from its power and domain. Job's words thus somberly tie she'ol, darkness, corruption, and the dust, together in "gravedom." "If I wait, the grave [she'ol] is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? . . . They shall go down to the bars of the pit [she'ol], when our rest together is in the dust" ([Job 17:13-16](#)).

However, under the gospel, the exit from gravedom through the assurance of resurrection, becomes luminous and central. Thus sadness gives way to gladness.

## **6. "SHE'OL": PLACE OF DEATH, NOT LIFE**

She'ol is therefore the place or state of death. Not once does the Old Testament speak of she'ol in connection with life. Only in the poetical imagery of Isaiah 14 are those in she'ol said to perform the acts of living beings, as will be noted in Part IV. She'ol is therefore invariably connected with death. Hannah the prophetess speaks of God as the One who "bringeth down to the grave [she'ol], and bringeth up" ([1 Sam. 2:6](#)). In other words, she'ol is clearly, and always, the place of death.

"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave [she'ol]" ([Ps. 89:48](#)). "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell [she'ol] gat hold upon me" ([Ps. 116:3](#)).

## **7. "SHE'OL" AND "DEATH" ARE FREQUENTLY SYNONYMOUS**

She'ol and "death" are often equivalents. Proverbs speaks of the strange woman whose "feet go down to death [maweth]; her steps take hold on hell [she'ol]" ([Prov. 5:5](#)). "Her house is the way to hell [she'ol], going down to the chambers of death" (chap. 7:27). So, we repeat, she'ol and "death" are used in Holy Writ as synonyms. Thus: "We have made a covenant with death, and with hell [she'ol] are we at agreement" ([Isa. 28:15](#)). And Habakkuk describes the proud as one who "enlarges his desire as hell [she'ol], and is as death" ([Hab. 2:5](#)). This is invariable from the earliest book of the Old Testament through to its close.

We therefore rightly conclude that she'ol is the grave, or gravedom—the silent, invisible place to which God told sinful Adam he must go—"dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return" ([Gen. 3:19](#))—not to a land of living ghosts. That was the understanding that Job had of she'ol, or the grave, as noted:

"If I wait, the grave [she'ol] is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. . . . They shall go down to the bars of the pit [she'ol], when our rest together is in the dust" ([Job 17:13-16](#)).

[This article deals only with the term Sheol and therefore extracted from the original text is section "B. Origin of 'Gehenna' (Ge Hinnom) Symbol of Final Destruction" where Fromm deals with that subject]

## **C. Three Supporting Citations Break Down Under Scrutiny**

### **1. RECOURSE TO WEAK ARGUMENTS AN UNWORTHY PROCEDURE**

It is regrettable to see how, when bereft of strong, clear, positive statements from the Word declaring Innate Immortality for all men—and deprived of clear-cut assurances of persisting, conscious existence of the soul (or spirit) following the crisis called "death"—how many Immortal-Soulists grasp at certain hazy, disputed passages, parables, and figurative statements to sustain their views.

Such a procedure would almost appear to be an act of desperation that would be disdained as unworthy under virtually all other circumstances. Recourse to such doubtful evidence would

seem to indicate an inherent weakness of their case. A dubious assortment of such props does not provide a trustworthy platform for a fundamental belief. It will not bear much weight or strain, and cannot endure close scrutiny. Nevertheless, draft upon such is frequently made.

We must not close this Old Testament survey without examining, briefly, a few such citations and contentions that are commonly invoked. Then we will look into the inevitable Saul and the witch of Endor episode—always brought forward from Old Testament annals as primary testimony.

Without direct proof of Innate Immortality, recourse is often had to indirect supports—some of them of rather strange character. Curious Old Testament citations are claimed by certain believers in the immortality of the soul to support the postulate of disembodied life after death. First, there is the case of the prophet Jonah in she'ol, in the belly of the great fish (Jonah 2). Second, there is Isaiah's parabolic taunting ode on the king of Babylon in she'ol ([Isa. 14:4-11](#)). And third, there are the parabolic dirges by Ezekiel on the fate of Pharaoh and other monarchs, likewise in she'ol ([Eze. 31](#); [32](#)). These will suffice.

## **2. JONAH NOT DEAD: SO CASE IS DISMISSED**

As to the first episode, it can be dismissed with a couple of paragraphs—for the simple reason that Jonah was not dead, but living and conscious while in the "she'ol," or grave as it were, of the fish's belly. Consequently this dramatic episode can have no bearing on the question of consciousness in death. Jonah's recorded prayer, offered while in the belly of the fish, was this: "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell [she'ol; or margin, "the grave"] cried I, and thou heard my voice" ([Jonah 2:2](#)). Jonah went down into "she'ol" he said, when he descended into the waters in this living "submarine," where none but dead men had ever been before. It seemed to him that he was practically dead. The darkness and horror of his extremity made it a veritable grave. So Jonah cried out as if he were already dead—and he surely would have been dead in that living tomb had not God heard and speedily delivered him. But to draw from this graphic narrative of life in extremity any valid conclusion as to man's continuing consciousness in death is reasoning from a totally false premise. The recital is not dealing with death. The case must consequently be dismissed forthwith, as the contention breaks down before it starts.

### **D. Isaiah's Parabolic Taunting Ode on King of Babylon**

The taunting ode, or parable, of [Isaiah 14:4-11](#), is like wise presumed by various Immortal-Soulists to teach that she'ol is a land of active ghost life, with ghostly memories and thoughts of life on earth. But in the narrative itself Isaiah twice plainly identifies she'ol with "the grave" (vs. 9, margin, and 11), while personifying for the moment the eerie shades of the dead as infused with life, in order to utter God's doom upon the tyrannical king of Babylon.

In the story conquered kings are parabolically represented as having thrones in she'ol, and sitting upon them as they had sat in the royal palaces from which they had been rudely ejected by the conquering arms of Nebuchadnezzar. And now, when the haughty king of Babylon, himself defeated and dead and descending to the grave, joins them in their dark domain, these departed

monarchs are portrayed as rising up from their shadowy thrones to mock the fallen tyrant with feigned obeisance—but actually with insult and derision—just as in life they rendered him feigned homage.

## **1. PERSONIFIED TREES REJOICE OVER FALLEN MONARCH.**

The whole earth rejoiced in Nebuchadnezzar's overthrow, and here the "she'ol-eans" rejoice over the downfall of this tyrannical king of Babylon, as the scene shifts from earth to she'ol, region of the dead. Even the fir trees and the cedars (v. 8) are introduced as uttering a derisive taunt over the fallen tyrant, and voicing their new security now that he is no more.

But this impressive parable was all in imagery—the inspired poet creating one of the classic odes of the Old Testament, to cast contempt upon the pride of Babylon, while its broad walls and mighty gates still stood imperiously on the plains of Chaldea. It was all in the striking figure of prosopopoeia, or personification, by which the dead are represented as speaking.

In the same passage the prophet makes the fir trees and cedars of Lebanon to speak (vs. 8-10)—thus to portray, through this literary device, how death will reduce the king of Babylon to the same level as his subjects, and become fellow prisoners in the realm of death.

Students of literature and language are well aware of the figure of prosopopoeia, or personification, wherein things are frequently represented as persons. In the Sacred Writings these include the members of the human body ([Gen. 48:14](#); [Ps. 35:10](#)); animals ([Gen. 9:5](#); [Job 12:7](#)); products of the earth ([Nahum 1:4](#)); inanimate things ([Gen. 4:10](#)); kingdoms, states, and countries ([Ps. 45:12](#))—with human actions attributed to things ([Gen. 18:20](#); [Ps. 85:10](#)).

## **2. PATHS OF GLORY LEAD BUT TO GRAVE**

So this she'ol, to which these royal inhabitants were made to descend, was actually the silent grave (v. 11; v. 9, margin), or gravedom. And these kings are so represented under this figure of personification, thus to describe their real condition, and to say to the king of Babylon:

"Art thou also become weak as we? Art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave [she'ol], and the noise of thy viols: the worm [rimmah, "maggot"] is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee" ([Isa. 14:10, 11](#)).

Thus in the mind and teaching of Isaiah she'ol was none other than the grave, the place where worms revel in their feast on the dead—worms being grossly material, not spiritual. No one was to assume that the characters portrayed actually acted or spoke as pictured. The term "proverb," as here used, simply means a parabolic taunt (v. 4, "taunting speech," margin).

It was never Isaiah's purpose, in this impressive ode, to reveal the conditions of the death state. Rather, it was to fore cast in graphic pictorial language God's coming judgment upon Israel's great oppressor, and to show that the paths of cruel glory "lead but to the grave." Thus the second argument in behalf of conscious persistence of the soul after death like wise collapses.

## E. Ezekiel's Parabolic Dirge Over Pharaoh of Egypt

The third plank in this wobbly platform of indirect evidence in behalf of Immortal-Soulism is this: In Ezekiel 31 and 32 a parabolic dirge of similar strain over Egypt proclaims the doom pronounced on Israel's foes—Egypt, Babylon, Assur, Elam, and Edom. The same figure of personification is employed in describing the overthrow of Pharaoh the oppressor. Here Pharaoh and his hosts, slain in battle against the king of Babylon, are portrayed in similar fashion. The "strong among the mighty" are represented as speaking from their graves in the midst of "hell" (she'ol), or gravedom, as he enters that dark domain to await his fate.

The Heb. *mashal* is rendered "proverb" nineteen times, and "parable" eighteen times in the Old Testament, "parable" being preferable here.

### 1. "SHE'OL" CONTRASTED WITH STATE OF LIVING

Thus she'ol—"the nether parts of the earth" ([Eze. 32:18, 24](#)), full of graves, and so the land and state of the dead—is contrasted with the land and state of the living. The victims of slaughter had "gone down" to she'ol with their "weapons of war," and with their swords laid "under their heads" (v. 27). And when Pharaoh, figuratively portrayed as lying among them, saw the "multitude" of his enemies that also were slain, he was "comforted" by the sight (vs. 31, 32). It is all highly figurative and impressive, and not at all literal. But prediction of bitter overthrow is spoken of the conqueror of Israel. Here is the dirge:

"Thus saith the Lord God; In the day when he went down to the grave [she'ol] I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed: and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him. I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell [she'ol] with them that descend into the pit [she'ol]: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth. They also went down into hell [she'ol] with him unto them that be slain with the sword; and they that were his arm, that dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen" ([Eze. 31:15-17](#)).

### 2. PARABOLIC SCOURGE NOT CONSTRUED LITERALLY

The portrayal was wholly parabolic, like Jotham's famous parable to Abimelech, making the trees elect a king over them, choosing a bramble, et cetera, in [Judges 9:8-15](#). Then the imagery of the parable is openly applied: "This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, saith the Lord God" ([Eze. 31:18](#)). Then there follows, in chapter 32, an enumeration of the various forces of the slain that in life had caused such terror, but are now in she'ol (gravedom), "whose graves are set in the sides of the pit [she'ol]" (chap. 32:23)—their "princes" and mighty warriors "slain by the sword" (v. 29), which have "gone down to hell [she'ol, the grave] with their weapons of war" (v. 27).

It is to be noted that the three terms "grave," "hell," and "pit" in these verses are variant translations of the selfsame Hebrew word she'ol.

They are there simply personified as speaking "out of the midst of hell [she'ol]" (v. 21). But the parabolic dirge is not to be construed literally. She'ol is the place of the silence of death. But the parable had nothing to do with the intermediate state. The lesson was that, having raised up a heathen nation to chasten His own people because of their moral departures, when that instrument has executed His will, God will not allow it to go beyond His purpose, but will send retribution upon it for its own sins and cruelties.

Such literary devices are samples of testimony sometimes unworthily brought forward to bolster the theory of consciousness in death, and of the persistence of disembodied souls or spirits in the nether world. But these have no actual bearing on the question.

## **F. Saul Deceived by Necromancy of Medium of Endor**

Turning from the figurative side, let us now examine a problem passage, constantly cited in support of Immortal-Soulism. Modern Spiritualism, or spiritism, is not new in its operations. Its ancient counterpart and forerunner had already made its tragic appearance back in ancient Israel's day, and before. But so grave was this corrupting and forbidden practice considered by God, and so sinister were its involvements, that under the theocracy those who sought out the practitioners of this evil art were to be "cut off," or excommunicated, from the commonwealth of Israel. So heinous was the fraudulency of this pretended communication with the dead regarded that the mediums, when apprehended, were to be summarily put to death by stoning. The solemn warning against necromancy or consulting with "familiar spirits," was written thus into law by Israel: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God" ([Lev. 19:31](#)).

### **1. EVIL SPIRITS PERSONATING THE DEAD**

"Familiar spirits" were none other than "evil spirits," or demons—fallen angels personating the dead—appearing at the beck and call of a medium who had entered into sinister league with them. And here was the dread penalty then provided for such transgression, first for the seeker and then the medium:

"The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, ... I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people" ([Lev. 20:6](#)).

"A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones" (v. 27).<sup>13</sup> That was the gravity of the evil traffic. Later, this further admonition was given by the prophet Isaiah:

"And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? For the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" ([Isa. 8:19, 20](#)). This peeping and muttering refers to the incoherent incantations of the pagan mysteries, which they simulated. Such an inspired admonition surely constitutes a most solemn warning against all ancient or modern spiritism, and is an appeal to heed the declarations of the Word regarding the true nature and condition of man in death. And it should

be added that the traditional belief that death is but life continuing on in spirit form, is the foundational basis of Spiritualism in its various forms, which has blighted the centuries, climaxing in these latter times.

## **2. SAUL'S RECOURSE TO FORBIDDEN CRAFT OF NECROMANCY**

Nevertheless, the case of Saul and the witch of Endor is constantly and fervently invoked by those maintaining the continued consciousness of the dead. Let us therefore examine the circumstances of that dramatic episode. Israel's apostate King Saul, when the Lord refused to answer him, sought out "a woman [or medium] that hath a familiar spirit" ([1 Sam. 28:7](#)), to inquire of her. Here is the story:

Disguising himself to avoid recognition, Saul came to the woman, significantly under the suggestive shelter of "night," and asked her to bring up the prophet Samuel, who had been dead for some time, to elicit information from him (v. 8). After being assured by an oath that she would not be betrayed or harmed for cooperation (vs. 9, 10), she then brought up 13 Compare [Deuteronomy 18:10-12](#) where witches and wizards, consultants with familiar spirits, or necromancers (i.e., seekers unto the dead) are declared to be an abomination unto the Lord. The modern counterpart is dealt with fully in the closing chapters of volume 2. (not down, or forth) "out of the earth" (v. 13)—allegedly some subterranean region—one of the "gods" in characteristic spirit manifestation, whom she described as an "old man," and "covered with a mantle" (v. 14).

This materialization took place in the questionable abode of a forbidden, outlawed sorceress, invoking the alleged "shade" of the old prophet said to be wearing a "mantle." (It might be asked, If it was Samuel's "spirit," supposed to be with God, why the mantle? If it was Samuel's body, up from the grave, would it not rather be with "graveclothes," as with Lazarus [[John 11:44](#)]?)

## **3. SAUL DECEIVED; SLAIN FOR HIS TRANSGRESSIONS**

The record then states that Saul "perceived"—that is, understood indirectly, for he himself saw nothing—that it was "Samuel."

But this evil "spirit," impersonating Samuel, first chided Saul for disquieting him when the Lord had departed from the king. This alleged "spirit" then proceeded to predict Saul's defeat and death. Perhaps this "lying spirit" here gave a true message, as in the case of Ahab of old ([2 Chron. 18:19-22](#)). But the sad sequel was simply this: "So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord, even against the word of the Lord, which he kept not, and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the Lord: therefore he [the Lord] slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse" ([1 Chron. 10:13, 14](#)).

So back through the centuries this question of the nature and destiny of man, and purported communication with the "dead," has been a vital issue, constantly fraught with disaster for those disobeying the Word of God. Saul's act was a transgression, punishable with death. Why, then, is such testimony valid? But let us probe into this unsavoury episode a little deeper.

#### **4. CRUX OF THE WHOLE PORTRAYAL**

The crux of this whole occurrence hinges on whether this appearance, or materialization, was wrought by the power of God or was manoeuvred by Satan. If by Satan, we may well look for deception, for he began his duplicity back in Eden by asserting the Innate Immortality of man, and has ever since persisted in his trickery by tenaciously perpetuating his original contention wherever and whenever he can gain a foothold. Note the facts closely: Saul was violating God's express command by communicating with such a character and by engaging in a sinister practice sternly forbidden by God. He was deceived by this "familiar spirit" simulating Samuel, who first of all significantly put the medium on her guard as to the identity of Saul. And the appearance in the night, under the incantations of an abandoned woman, was that of "an old man" "with a mantle." It is to be particularly noted that Saul had to ask the medium, "What saw thou?" "What form is he of?" ([1 Sam. 28:13, 14](#)). Saul himself never saw the simulating spirit that was brought "up" through the agency of Satan. And while the appearance was actual, it was simply a manifestation of ancient necromancy, sorcery, witchcraft, spiritism. It was a gross deception, a simulation of Samuel by a depraved "spirit," palmed off on the desperate apostate king, and with fatal results.

#### **5. CRUEL HOAX AND ITS MODERN COUNTERPART**

One major difference between ancient and modern spiritism is that the medium of Endor then pretended to bring the spirits "up" from the lower regions. Now their present counterparts claim to bring them "down" from the upper spheres. How dare any firm believer in the Word of God presume to appeal to this episode of Saul and the witch of Endor to prove the continuing living existence, or immortality, of the soul—unless he is prepared to deny the express declarations of the Inspired Word, and to maintain that ancient necromancy and modern spiritism are a divine gift, and that the blasphemous pretensions and contradictions of such lying spirits are to be accepted instead of the verities of the Scriptures of truth?

The Word of God expressly declares that when a man dies "in that very day his thoughts perish" ([Ps. 146:4](#)). But fallen angels do have supernatural knowledge and mystifying malign powers. And they have uncanny powers of deception. Of these we are to beware. We trespass at our peril. Incidentally, the invoked "spirit" told Saul (through the medium), "Tomorrow shall thou and thy sons be with me" ([1 Sam. 28:19](#)). Might it not be pertinent to ask, Where was this rendezvous to be?—in the grave? or in Heaven, where the Immortal-Soulist would expect the Lord's prophet to be? or per chance in some kind of Purgatory or intermediate place? Where, we ask, and in what state? Further question: Do God's prophets and apostate kings go to the same place—if conscious?

#### **6. GRANDEUR OF GOD'S WONDROUS PROVISION**

In the face of such artificial negativisms, how comforting it is to have not only the clear, positive, consistent testimony of the Old Testament concerning the actual mortality of man, but the glorious assurance of immortality for the righteous as a gift from God through Christ, bestowed at His second advent and its attendant resurrection.

How good to know that in the interim of death man quietly sleeps until the great awakening. And finally, that the incorrigibly wicked will, after due and just punishment for their sins—and their rejection of the overtures and saving provisions of God—be ultimately and utterly destroyed, passing out of existence. The infinite love, righteousness, justice, grace, and mercy of God, as the wondrous hope of man, stand out in impressive grandeur all the way from Genesis to Malachi. The inspired testimony of the Word is consistent and satisfying—and, above all, authoritative and final. Happy the lot of all who put their trust in the revealed provisions of God. And all this is amplified and intensified in the New Testament portrayal...