The Central Question

In Luke 16:27–31, Jesus tells a parable about a Rich Man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. After their deaths, the Rich Man begs Father Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth to warn his five brothers about the place of torment he is experiencing.

Abraham replies:

> *“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.” (Luke 16:29, NKJV)*

The Rich Man insists that if someone comes back from the dead, they will repent. But Abraham responds:

> *“If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.” (Luke 16:31, NKJV)*

From this, we understand that God does not permit the dead to return to communicate with the living in order to preach, warn, or influence them. God has already given humanity the sufficient witness of Scripture and prophetic revelation.

The Apparent Contradiction: Samuel and Saul

Yet in 1 Samuel 28:3–25, we find King Saul seeking out a medium at Endor, commonly known as “the witch of Endor,” to summon the deceased Prophet Samuel.

Here’s what the passage says:

> *“Now 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!’”*
> *(1 Samuel 28:12, NKJV)*

> *“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.'”*
> *(v. 13)*

> *“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…”*
> *(v. 14)*

This raises a challenging question:

> *How could Samuel “come back” and speak with Saul, if the parable in Luke makes it clear that the dead cannot return?*

Is This a Contradiction in the Bible?

No, the Bible does not contradict itself. The two passages

describe entirely different spiritual situations.

To understand this, we must explore biblical theology on the dead, the afterlife, and spiritual communication.

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1. The Parable in Luke: A Clear Doctrinal Teaching

Luke 16:19–31 is a teaching parable of Jesus, not a historical event—but it illustrates real spiritual principles about life after death. It confirms:

- There is a fixed separation between the righteous and the unrighteous after death (v. 26).
- The dead cannot return to warn the living (v. 31).
- Revelation through Scripture is the ordained means by which God communicates truth to the world (v. 29).

Therefore, Jesus is emphasizing the sufficiency of Scripture and the finality of death.

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2. The Witch of Endor: A Case of Occultism, Not Resurrection

The event in 1 Samuel 28 is not an example of a God-ordained

resurrection or spiritual appearance. Rather, it is a record of Saul's rebellion, as he directly violates God's command:

> *"There shall not be found among you... a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead."*
> *(Deuteronomy 18:10–11, NKJV)*

Saul himself had previously expelled all mediums and spiritists from the land (1 Samuel 28:3), but now, in desperation, he seeks one out. This was an act of direct disobedience.

When the medium claims to see "Samuel," several details cast doubt:

- Saul does not see Samuel himself; he relies on the woman's description (v. 13–14).
- The text says "Saul perceived" it was Samuel—it does not say God raised Samuel (v. 14).
- The voice speaking condemns Saul and foretells his death, which aligns with God's judgment—but this does not prove it was truly Samuel.

Theological Interpretations of 1 Samuel 28

There are three main theological views:

View 1: It Was a Demonic Deception (Most Common View)

Many theologians believe that the “Samuel” who appeared was actually a familiar spirit—a demon impersonating the prophet to deceive Saul.

- This aligns with 2 Corinthians 11:14:

> *“Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”*

- Familiar spirits are known to mimic the dead and deceive people seeking forbidden knowledge.
- The woman was a medium, and God forbids all such practices because they open the door to demonic deception.

View 2: God Permitted Samuel to Appear in Judgment

Some scholars argue that God allowed the real Samuel to appear and pronounce judgment on Saul as a one-time exception.

- The content of Samuel’s message was consistent with earlier prophetic warnings.

- However, this view is controversial because it suggests God responded to a séance, which contradicts His nature and commands.

View 3: It Was a Psychological/Emotional Experience

A minority believe Saul's perception was clouded by fear, stress, and guilt, and the woman manipulated him with a vague description, leading him to believe it was Samuel.

Why Lazarus Could Not Return — But "Samuel" Could?

The Rich Man's request in Luke 16 was for Lazarus to return bodily from the dead and testify to the living—something only God could allow, and which God explicitly refused.

By contrast, the event in 1 Samuel 28:

- Was not a resurrection.
- Did not involve a bodily appearance.
- Was done through an occult medium, not by God's Spirit.
- Was most likely demonic deception or, at best, a permitted act of judgment.

What About Today—Can People Still Contact the Dead?

No. Absolutely not.

After the resurrection of Christ, He declared:

> *“I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”*
> *(Revelation 1:18, NKJV)*

Only Jesus Christ now has authority over the dead. Neither humans, demons, nor Satan can access or speak with souls who have passed on. Any supposed communication with the dead today is either:

- Fraud, or
- Demonic deception through familiar spirits.

Paul warns:

> *“The things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have*

> *fellowship with demons."*
> *(1 Corinthians 10:20, NKJV)*

Conclusion: What Really Happened?

- In Luke 16, Jesus teaches that the dead cannot return, and that Scripture is enough for salvation.
- In 1 Samuel 28, Saul disobeys God by consulting a medium. The appearance of "Samuel" was not a resurrection, but likely a demonic deception.
- God does not contradict Himself, and He strictly forbids necromancy, spiritism, and any attempt to contact the dead (see Deuteronomy 18:9–12).

Final Warning and Encouragement

> *"There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus."*
> *(1 Timothy 2:5, NKJV)*

Christ is the only way to life, the only one who has conquered death, and the only voice we should seek beyond the grave.

Avoid all forms of occultism. Trust in the Scriptures. Follow Christ.

May the Lord bless you and keep you in truth.

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