This morning, we launch into a brand new message series titled, “Whereafter: a study of the paranormal phenomena.”

One of the reasons we’re doing this series now is because long gone are the days when spiritism, (the belief that the dead can communicate with the living) was confined to the periphery of our society. If you count the number of “life after death” shows on prime time TV and the top grossing movies in recent years, then you know that the paranormal is becoming the new normal in our society.

We’ve gone from movies like Poltergeist and Ghost in the 80’s to some eerie paranormal movies in the 90’s like the Sixth Sense, White Noise, and the Ring, all of them purporting that communication with the dead is inevitable.

But you don’t even have to go to the theaters anymore, you can get all the psychic feeding you want right in your living room with shows like Ghost Hunters, Paranormal cops, and a fairly new show on A&E called “Psychic Kids: Children of the Paranormal.” The show is hosted by a psychic investigator named Chip Coffey and in it they bring together children who reportedly have psychic abilities and pair them up with an adult psychic medium, with the stated purpose of “showing them how to harness their abilities and, ultimately, that they’re not alone in this world.”

For some of you, all of this might have hit a lot closer to home than you’d like in that you or someone you know has actually had a private reading session with a psychic or had unwanted experiences with spirit guides, ghosts, or the like.

In light of this growing trend, how are we as bible believing followers of Jesus Christ to respond? I think most Christians know that the bible doesn’t mince words about our
involvement in occult-like practices - it is a definite no-no for followers of Jesus Christ. But what we haven’t yet addressed is the why.

And so, with these this series, our goal is to pull back the veil of the paranormal phenomena and show you from the scriptures what’s really happening when people expose themselves to this world. This morning, we want to look at the truth behind psychics and mediums, and to do so – I’m going to take us back to an Old Testament account where a man chosen by God made the error of seeking life answers from a woman we know as the witch of Endor.

If you have your bibles, please open up to the book of 1 Samuel 28:3-20. And as you do, let me fill in the details so you know what’s happened up till this point. We are in a period where the nation of Israel had been rescued from 400 years of slavery, given their own land, and ruled by God Himself with instructions communicated through His prophets.

However, at some point the Israelites got a little weary of God’s direct rule and requested that God appoint them a human king so they could be like other nations, forgetting that they weren’t like every other nation but a chosen people. Well, God obliged their rebellious request and gave them their first king, a man named Saul. On the exterior, Saul is described as a very impressive and handsome man, but on the inside, his heart was almost always in a constant state of disobedience and rebellion towards God. His kingship eventually gets to a point where God had to reject Him as king, and a prophet named Samuel was sent to deliver the painful message.

Instead of repenting and turning back to God, Saul slips into a downward spiral of lunacy. He becomes so troubled that he spends the bulk of his time pursuing and harassing the replacement king God had chosen to take his spot, a young man named David. While Saul wastes most of his time trying to protect a dynasty God had already stripped away from him, enemy nations (Philistines) gather on his border preparing to attack his people, and that’s where we pick up the story.

1 SAMUEL 28:3-8 (THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL)

“Now (by this point in the story, the prophet…) Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. 4 The Philistines (enemy nation) 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. 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.” “There is one in Endor,” they said. 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.”

One of the disappointing aspects of Saul’s life is his constant wavering between dependence on God and outright disobedience. A clear example of this is in the latter part of verse 3 where it says he expelled all the mediums and spiritists from the land, but by verse 8, he assembles a search committee to go looking for one he can seek counsel from. Which brings up the question, why did he expel them in the first place.

Later on in verse 9, we’re told it was actually the prophet’s Samuel’s godly counsel that led Saul to make that decision. It’s certain he would have reminded Saul about passages like Deuteronomy 18:9-12, where it says, “When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. 10 Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, 11 or casts and conjures spells, or who is a medium or spiritists or who consults the dead. 12 Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.”

By the way, that’s an instruction that still holds true for you and I today. In the New Testament, in Galatians 5:19-21, those same activities are referred to as, “acts of the sinful nature.”

One of the reasons people will often give for consulting a psychic is that they were simply curious. Here’s the deal, there is no such thing as innocent curiosity when it comes to occult-like practices, it is almost always tied in with disobedience.

Saul’s visit to this medium wasn’t simply an act of curiosity, this man wanted answers because God wasn’t giving him the answers he wanted; forgetting the fact that it was his disobedience that invited
God’s silence. So from the very beginning, we are to understand that Saul was in the wrong path.

Something else that should raise a red flag for us in this account is the fact that verse 8 says he disguised himself and went to seek this woman at night under the cover of darkness. Wait a minute, wasn’t he king? Didn’t he have the rights to go see whomever he wanted? And even if he was trying to save face, wasn’t it easier if he simply asked his men to bring her to him?

The truth is that his downward spiral into sin and rebellion came about because HE GOT TIRED OF WAITING ON GOD. We’re told in verse 6 that he had apparently been trying all he could to get some answers on the outcome of the upcoming battle with the Philistines – but to no avail. God hadn’t sent any new prophets to give him insights, he hadn’t had any special dreams of revelations, and a process of determining God’s will called Urim and Thummim wasn’t giving any answers either. Finally, he decides, you know what? FORGET THIS! I’M GOING TO FIND MY OWN ANSWERS.

It’s an interesting thought process because it’s the same one many often go through before they end up in living room of a psychic who claims to have good news from a dead relative or knows the intimate details of the universe’s plan for their future. You know what the bible calls it when you go seeking counsel in those places? It calls it futility! Actually, it calls it foolishness, and God Himself assures whoever consults these mediums will have their wisdom turned to nonsense! (Isa 44:24-26).

But all of that still has to do with the surface issues.

(BEHIND THE VEIL OF MEDIUMS) - 1 SAMUEL 28:8-14

There’s a lot more evil to this deception than what meets the eye. Turn back to verse 8 with me. “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.” 11 Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” “Bring up Samuel,” he said. 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[a] 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.”

After sneaking out in the middle of the night to find a medium, he eventually makes contact the witch of Endor. His interaction with this woman gives us an inside look into the deception of Satan during these séance sessions. Though a few psychics are often playing deceptive mind games with people who consult them, a good number of them actually make real contact with real spirits; except these spirits are not who you think they are.

In one of the two upcoming messages in this series, pastor Armin will talk to us about what actually happens once a soul passes from this life, but I want to show you from this account that the spirit this witch makes contact with is not the real Samuel – in fact, it never is.

After Saul tells her whom to bring up, notice in verse 11 that this witch actually sees a real spirit in her house, and immediately there are two deceptions involved. Turns out, Saul is not really who she thinks he is, and even she seems shocked that this “spirit” actually showed up.

Secondly, when Saul asks her what the spirit looks like, note the description. She says in verse 14, “he looks like an old man wearing a robe.” If you’ve ever read or studied the biblical imagery of heaven and the saints residing there, you’ll instantly sense there is something wrong with this picture. In the book of Revelation and other biblical accounts of heaven, the saints there are always described as vibrant, filled with the joy of God Himself, dressed in glorious white, and singing a new song.

But according to verse 15, this spirit that shows up is sort of haggard, maybe even exhausted. He’s old, he’s got on a robe, and he complains a lot. First words out of his mouth are, “why have you disturbed me…?” Not quite our picture of the redeemed, is it?

There’s no reason for us to believe that the activities of man on earth interrupt the daily lifestyle of the saints of heaven. Hence, we’re forced to conclude that this spirit is NOT who he claims to be, but is in fact impersonating WHOM we’re supposed to think he is.

But there’s something else that has my curiosity peaked, and it’s the fact that when Saul bows in its presence at the end of verse 14, the spirit doesn’t reject his reverent worship. Once again, when you go back to the scriptures and watch human interaction with heavenly angelic beings, they consistently reject human worship. In the book of Revelation 22:9 when the apostle John mistakenly prostrates before an angel, it responds by saying, “...Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

But this spirit doesn’t do that. The only angelic being who seeks out human worship and got expelled out of heaven was who? Satan and fallen angels, right? Ok, so we’re getting closer to the true identity of this spirit being speaking to...
The third and last piece of this puzzle is the message itself the spirit gives. Though there are accounts in the bible where God has very strong judgments passed out on his people, there is something particularly dark and prideful to this prediction Saul receives from this spirit. This spirit sounds like it’s gloating and perhaps even taking delight in the fact that Saul’s life is about to end. But when you read earlier chapters, you’ll know that the real prophet Samuel, though he hated Saul’s rebellion, genuinely cared for his well-being. Earlier in chapter 16 when God first rejects Saul as king, the real prophet Samuel actually went into a period of mourning for him and God Himself had to help him snap out of it.

Let me read it to you as I perceived it and maybe you’ll hear what I heard. It says, starting in verse 15, “Samuel (the spirit) said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” “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 (the spirit) said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy? 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.”

This is not one happy spirit, it’s out for blood. Even if you reject my conclusion and maintain that this spirit was in fact the real Samuel, the message he gives builds a solid case for why you should absolutely not dabble with demonic mediums. It was a message of doom and gloom! And it only cost him $49.95 per minute!

If you haven’t gotten the point by now, let me spell it out plainly. When Psychics claim to make contact with a dead relative and they start interacting with a spirit in your presence, they are in actuality communicating with a demonic spirit impersonating whomever you are wrongly trying to re-establish contact with.

Some people might hear that and balk at it thinking, “Well, how come they knew so much intimate detail about my life and my family?” Here’s the deal, Satan and his demons do not spend their days running around haunting houses and hiding in closets scaring little kids. They have a governmental organizational structure set in place from which they currently manage the affairs of this world and daily attempt to lure people further away from God.

Have you ever wondered why it is the scriptures refer to Satan as, “the prince of this world”? John 14:30. The apostle Paul, who was shown a vision of the spiritual realm writes about Satan’s ongoing activity on earth in Ephesians 6:12, he says, “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.” And then elsewhere, he writes, “for we are not ignorant of the devil’s schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

Here’s what I’m getting at with that. You have to consider that if Satan has a worldwide organizational structure in place, then there is also a worldwide communication line in place. Hence it’s not too hard to correspond accurate information through demons internationally and locally about a specific individual’s life to his or her extended family member. Forgetting demons for a second, I can get most of the information I need to know about you if I looked at your Facebook account or somehow accessed your email account, but I digress.

Now, whether these psychics are aware of what they’re doing is not always known. Some very well could be aware that their source is demonic spirits, and others might have just so become accustomed to hearing spirits that they have embraced the sense of power it gives them. Either way, the goal is for you to steer clear of any dabbling in occult related practices.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF DABBLING (1 SAMUEL 28:20)

The reason why is ultimately because the scriptures says so, but in addition to that is the fact that dabbling with mediums doesn’t come without consequences. Look at what happened to Saul after this spirit spoke to him. Verse 20, “Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel’s words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and
all that night.”

That fear that began that evening would eventually carry over into the battle with the Philistines at the end of the book and would result in his death and the death of his two sons. But notice the immediate impact it had on him, he was filled with terror; he had a loss of appetite, and his strength was gone. That is a strong symbolic picture of what eventually happens in the life of an individual who consults mediums for answers to life’s questions. Your walls slowly come tumbling down and you become weaker and weaker in resisting demonic advances in your life.

One of Satan’s greatest tactics is subtlety because if he were to show himself as he truly is, then it would be easy to reject him. But as the scriptures say, “…for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

The demonic deception in consulting psychics is that in giving you accurate information about your past, it stirs your curiosity for more and drives you to look for more answers, which in turn eventually leads you down a path you never intended to get on.

With all of that said, let me address directly those of you who have recently lost a loved one or know someone who has. I understand the heartache and pain that comes with having to say your last goodbyes to a loved one, and I understand your need for closure especially in cases where things were left unsaid before the actual passing.

But the way to get closure in those instances is not by re-establishing contact through a psychic medium. Aside of the fact that you might be interacting with a fraud or worse yet, a demon, you’re already emotionally compromised.

Let me explain what I mean by reading to you what one Christian author says, “many religious observers have noted that people who seek contact with the dead really want to believe. They are so desirous of making contact with dead loved one, whom they grievously miss, that they become emotionally invested in the success of their session with a psychic medium. Even if the psychic medium gets some facts wrong, they are still emotionally committed to (and desperately hoping for) some genuine contact with dead loved ones.” (Ron Rhodes, “The truth behind Ghosts, mediums, & Psychics Phenomena”).

In the third message of this series, pastor Armin will walk us through reincarnation and paint for us the biblical picture of what happens to our loved ones who go ahead of us to eternity. But for today, might I suggest a more biblical approach to getting the answers to those difficult life questions that you might otherwise go seeking in the arms of a psychic?

It’s the words of the prophet Isaiah who says in Isaiah 40:30-31, “Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall…” In other words, yes you will have days when heaven seems silent and God isn’t spelling out the details of His game plan for our lives and loved ones.

But he goes on to say in verse 31, “but those who hope in and wait on the LORD will renew their strength.”

Note that it doesn’t say by waiting on the Lord, you’ll get the answer you want right away. It says, as you wait and trust and hope in the Lord, God Himself will give you the strength you need to make it through that painful season.

And when He’s done bring you through that season, your life will change so dramatically that it will feel like you are “…soaring on wings of eagles; it will feel like you are running but not growing weary, and walking for miles and not feeling the slightest bit faint.”

That is God’s game plan for those who hope and wait on the Lord. Amen? If you have dabbled with the occult and desire freedom, understand that apart from saving faith in Jesus Christ, you will only sink deeper and deeper into this dark world.

The good news is that Christ Himself longs to know you. Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” If God has so stirred your heart and you long for that relationship with Jesus Christ, begin by confessing your sins to God trusting that He is faithful to forgive (1 John 1:9).

When you’re done, tell Him you believe He died for your sins, rose again from the dead, and is seated in power at the right hand of God. Then ask Him to come into your life and be your Lord and savior.

When you’re done, WELCOME TO GOD’S FAMILY.