

Text: 1 Sa 28.19

Today's ask the pastor question comes from 1 Samuel 28 and the encounter of Saul with the witch of Endor.

There are a lot of things going wrong in Saul's life. God refused to communicate with him through the appointed means (the priests and the Urim and Thummim). On this last night of his life, he resorted to something God's Law forbade, and which he had earlier tried to stamp out, consulting witches and mediums.

Normally, such people used trickery and falsehood to deceive those who consulted them, but on this occasion, the prophet Samuel actually appeared and spoke to Saul.

In 1 Sa 28.19, Samuel said to Saul:

1 Sa 28.19 "Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, **therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.** Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!"

The question is, did Saul go to heaven?

The commentaries tend to say this meant Saul would be with Samuel in the grave, not in heaven. Here is one example:

"Saul ... and his sons would join Samuel in death. This does not mean that they shared the same eternal destiny. If we judge them by their fruits, it would appear that Saul was an unbeliever whereas Jonathan was a man of faith."¹

However, in another commentary, this time on Psalm 51, J. A. Motyer says,

"Saul had lost the immediate benefits (1 Sa. 16:14) but not the ultimate reality (1 Sa. 28:19) of salvation..."²

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 319.

² J. Alec Motyer, "The Psalms," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 519.

Beyond these few words, my commentaries don't give us too much more information. I can recall hearing Christians debate the question quite hotly, however!

So, what can we do?

- We need to note that OT terms are different from NT terms
- Also, we need to note that the Spirit "came upon" people in the OT, but not the same way he "indwells" in the NT era
- And we know very little about the afterlife, especially in the OT, but really in the whole Bible

We will look first, however, at the life of Saul.

I. The life of Saul

A. Saul meets Samuel and is anointed to be king (1 Sa 9.11-10.16)

1. Searching for donkeys
2. Decides to consult Samuel
3. Finds Samuel preparing a sacrifice with a chief portion reserved for him
4. Samuel anoints him king (10.1)
5. Samuel prophesies concerning the next things that will happen to Saul (a confirmation)

B. Saul crowned king at Mizpah (1 Sa 10.17-27)

1. Saul identified by lottery, but "hiding among the stuff"
2. Saul taller than all, an impressive man
3. Saul immediately followed by men moved by the Lord to serve him (26)
4. But some oppose him (27)

C. Saul decisively defeats the Ammonites (1 Sa 11.1-15)

1. After victory, people want to execute those who opposed Saul (12)
2. Saul nobly refuses to allow it (13)
3. The people renew the kingdom wholeheartedly (14-15)

D. The subsequent battles of Saul

1. Provokes a fight with the Philistines (13.1-4)
2. Calls Israel to battle, doesn't wait for Samuel to officiate at a sacrifice, dynasty taken from him (13.11ff. — read esp vv. 11-12)
3. Insists Israel fast during battle with Philistines, Jonathan eats honey, and Saul is ready to kill him (14.43-46)
4. Called to destroy the Amalekites, but spares the best, sets up a monument to himself, and is shocked when Samuel prophesies the kingdom is taken away (15.12, 24-29)
5. The coming of an evil spirit from the Lord (16.14)
6. Humiliated when David is praised over him (18.6-8)

E. The long pursuit of David (19-27)

F. The last battle with the Philistines (28, 31)

1. God will not give Saul any guidance (28.6)
2. Saul decides to consult a medium (28.7)

This brings us to the passage where we started and Samuel's dreadful prophecy:

1 Sa 28.19 "Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, **therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.** Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!"

3. Saul dies on the battlefield (31.4)

II. Evaluating Saul's life

A. In Saul's favor

1. Early humility
2. Spirit of God falling on him and becoming a prophet (but we don't know much about what that means)

B. Against Saul

1. Rash, impatient, petulant (rushing the sacrifice, holding Israel to the vow of fasting)
2. Disobedient (Amalekites)
3. Depressed (evil spirit from Lord)
4. Obsessed (with David)

III. Comparing Saul with other bad characters who had faith

A. All the characters in Heb 11 had flaws, but note especially

1. Rahab, who we looked at recently (Heb 11.31)
2. Four named after Rahab (Heb 11.32)
 - a. Gideon
 - b. Barak
 - c. Samson
 - d. Jephthah

These men had decided flaws, yet are named for their faith

B. The final verdict on the men of faith (Heb 11.39-40)

1. Gained approval through faith
2. Will gain that perfection to come with us

Conclusion:

You will notice I still haven't answered the question.

From a human perspective it is impossible to give a definitive answer, God knows.

However, I will say this:

1. If Saul was a believer, his disobedience put him in the wilderness and most of his life was spent in futile jealousy, far from the ways of God
2. Most likely, though, Saul had no faith, and Samuel simply meant, "tomorrow you will join me in the grave."

The key for anyone is real faith. You can look like a king and have good qualities in your life, and still be lost.