

Too Late (1 Samuel 28:3-25)

1. Decisions (v.3-6)

- The narrator reminds us, for the second time, that Samuel is dead (25:1; 28:3).
- Many years ago, after Saul was anointed, the prophet was to receive new revelation from the LORD and pass it to the king; prophet-king duties (10:25).
- Shortly after the kingdom was renewed (11:14-15), Saul refused to wait for Samuel's direction (13:8) for fear of the Philistines (13:11-12) at Gilgal, and as a result, forfeited his future kingdom (13:13).
- Saul then enacts the foolish ban on eating as Israel is pursuing the Philistines westward (14:24). Saul has with him Ahijah (14:3) and consulted the ark (14:18, 36-37). The LORD did not answer either of them.
- Saul assumes that someone in the camp has sinned. He casts the Urim and Thummim, and the lot fell on Jonathan; they were not functional (14:38-46).
- The LORD commanded Saul to kill the Amalekites (15:1-3) yet he disobeyed because of the will of his soldiers. Since Saul did not listen to the Word of the LORD, he has forfeited his kingship.
- Saul, in jealous anger will later kill all the priests from Nob through the hands of Doeg (22:18-20), except for Abiathar, who brings with him the ephod (also the Urim and Thummim) to David.

When the Philistines gather against Israel, Saul becomes terrified (Deut. 20:1; 1 Sam. 28:6). As of now, the LORD is silent. The ark is useless to him (14:36-37), the Urim and Thummim are duds (14:38-42), Abiathar, who is the only named surviving priest, is with David. Samuel is dead, and Gad is nowhere in sight. The LORD is silent.

All that has transpired for Saul is the result of his willful rejection of the LORD.

2. Disguise and Demand (v.7-11)

- Since the LORD did not answer Saul, he sought out a medium /necromancers. These were individuals who claimed the ability to contact the dead, either by serving as intermediaries through whom the dead would speak (Isa. 8:19) or rousing the dead to speak for themselves.
- These mediums are banned by the Torah (Ex. 22:18; 19:31; Lev. 19:26-32; 20:6, 27 Deut. 18:10-11). Saul has banned mediums either by decree, or through Samuel, as he penned the rights and duties of the kingship (10:25).
- Why aren't all the mediums driven from the land? How do Saul's servants know where to find one?
- Saul strips himself of his royal robes and disguises himself in common clothes (19:24; 28:8), departs at night, and travels several miles northward through Philistine territory to reach the household of the medium.
- Saul demands that this woman bring up Samuel from the grave, despite her fear and reticence if the king were to find out. She is unaware that she is speaking with King Saul and fears death if word gets out.
- Saul tells her not to be afraid when ironically, he is driven by fear (v.5). He blasphemes the LORD (v.10) by swearing by Him and granting immunity to her.

3. Discussion (v.12-17)

- Saul consults this woman because he wants to speak to the only prophet that may give him a "word" from the LORD. During these rituals, the necromancers would appease the dead, or gods, to secure favor. Sheol, or the place of the dead, prior to Christ's death and resurrection would have two chambers: Abraham's Bosom, and Hades/Hell. Under the old dispensation, the dead would descend into Hades: both the righteous and unrighteous.
- The woman did see Samuel. Her response when she "saw" Samuel was a shriek, or a loud scream. This is unlike anything she has seen before. Her reaction suggests that this may have been the first time she has actually contacted the dead, rather than a demonic spirit.
- The Torah prohibits necromancy, not because it is a hoax, but because it works.
- While the narrator does not specify whether the medium was able to perform her rituals (v.11-12), her reaction indicates that she never performed them.
- Saul cannot see Samuel, but he can hear him. She notes that she sees a "god" coming out of the earth who is "wrapped in a robe."
- Many ancient Near Eastern religions believed that the deceased became "gods" as they lived in the netherworld (realm of the dead). The woman expected a ghost or a shade. She saw something even more terrifying.
- Somehow, she recognizes Saul after she sees Samuel (v.12).
- Samuel complains that he is being disturbed from the grave (Isa. 14:9) and reminds Saul that he has already been rejected (15:19-23; 28:17) because he did not destroy the Amalekites (15:3, 24-28; 1 Chronicles 10:13-14). Additionally, the spirit of the LORD has departed from Saul (16:14) and is with David (16:13; 18:12).
- This is not the first time that the LORD has used pagan means to further his agenda (1 Sam. 6; Matt. 2:12), nor the only time saints from Sheol have been summoned in "person" (Matt. 17:3).
- The LORD raised Samuel from Sheol to pronounce the final judgment upon Saul; Saul and his sons will die tomorrow in battle (28:19).

4. Doom (v.18-25)

- Ironically, Saul has turned to illegitimate use of magic as a means of guidance, while closing his eyes to the prophetic words. The magic that is used confirms the prophetic word which he has rejected.
- He believes that he can discover the needed divine guidance only from Samuel, who is dead, even though divination is the sin Samuel previously said is equivalent to his earlier rebellion (15:23).
- By seeking a medium to receive guidance, and through blaspheming the LORD (28:10), he initiated immediate judgment on himself, his sons, and Israel.
- The king who was selected by the people, to defeat the Philistines, is going to be killed by the Philistines himself. While his trip to the witch was avoidable, his death tomorrow is not. The once tall and impressive Saul is now full-length on the ground and collapses due to fasting and discouragement. He fasts to meet the oracle requirements of a witch from Endor and his last supper is with her.
- He departs as he arrives: in the darkness of night (28:8, 25).