

• *Saul rejected from the kingship*

The result of Saul's rebellion

• *He could not be renewed to repentance in the sense of getting back to where he was before his rebellion*

• *In despair he tries to get access to Samuel through a woman who has given herself over to contact with evil spirits*

• *But God will not give guidance before restoration – which he is not seeking*

• *He contacts a medium in disguise*

• *Dramatically and unexpectedly God allows Samuel to return – something unprecedented and exceptional*

Samuel speaks

1. *He confirms that Saul will get no guidance from God*

Saul had been rejected from the kingship. He had lost his usefulness, his joy, his experience of hearing God's voice, his ministry as leader of Israel.

If he had accepted the decision of 1 Samuel 15:28-29 and sought to obey God from that point, who knows what blessing might have come to him? Saul could not be renewed to repentance in the sense of getting back to where he was before his rebellion, and before the decision of 1 Samuel 15. As Esau wept and pleaded for his inheritance but could not get back to where he was before Jacob took an oath¹, so Saul could not get back to where he was before the decision of God. Yet 1 Samuel 15:26 does not say 'The LORD has rejected you'; it says '*The LORD has rejected you from being king.*' What could Saul have done? If at that time he had fallen on his knees before God and had recognised that God was about to raise up a successor, who knows how God might have used him as a colleague of David and Jonathan?

However, following God's decision of 1 Samuel 15 there has only been further wickedness. Saul has lost the possibility of hearing God speak to him **in connection with kingship and conflict with the Philistines**. God might have spoken to him about other matters, but Saul has only revealed more and more his unwillingness to hear God's voice. In despair he tries to get access to Samuel by going to a woman who has given herself over to contact with evil spirits. Saul himself had banished such people from the land¹.

The Philistines were about to invade¹; Saul is terrified². God will not answer his attempts to get guidance³. If he had sought through forgiveness for his sins he could have re-established some kind of fellowship with God. But God will not give him guidance before he is thoroughly restored and Saul is not taking the pathway of thorough restoration. His ministry is lost for ever. The right thing would have been to call upon David for help.

Instead Saul contacts a medium and visits her in disguise¹. The woman knows that what she is doing is forbidden in Israel² but Saul reassures her³ and the séance proceeds⁴.

Then something dramatic and totally unexpected occurs. God allows Samuel to come back. This was not what normally happened! Delusions and deceptions from evil spirits were all that had taken place before. But on this occasion she sees Samuel, and simultaneously she knows she has been deceived by Saul. The woman cries out in terror. This was not the way her sessions normally went¹. Saul questions the woman and knows that the vision is indeed an appearance of Samuel². The text is clear. It does not speak of 'one who had the appearance of Samuel.' It says '*Samuel said to Saul*'³. This is unique and unprecedented in the Bible. The fact that the woman was so shocked is a sign that this was not what usually happened.

1. Samuel confirms that Saul will get no guidance from God concerning his kingship. What is the point, Samuel asks, in this consultation? There is nothing Samuel can say that will help Saul in being the leader of the Israelites against the Philistines¹. On this matter Saul will never hear from God and will only face God's enmity

¹ Genesis 27:34

¹ 28:3

¹ 28:4

² 28:5

³ 28:6

¹ 28:7-8

² 28:9

³ 28:10

⁴ 28:11

¹ 28:12

² 28:13-14

³ 28:15

• 2. He confirms that Saul is rejected from being king

• 3. He does, however, have a message of mercy as well as judgement

God speaks so that we might respond

• The sure knowledge of imminent death was a call to Saul to fall on his knees and be right with God.

• Saul goes out to face what he knows will be his last day on earth

• He is saved by fire but will receive no treasure in heaven

as he continues to attempt to be the king of Israel.

2. He confirms that Saul is rejected from being king. It does not necessarily mean that Saul is rejected altogether, but his work of kingship had ended a long time ago and is given to David. Saul's ministry of kingship was finished¹.

3. He does have a message of mercy as well as judgement. Saul's life is at an end. He will be facing the Philistines the next day. His lifelong rebelliousness will reap its consequence in Israel's defeat. But, Samuel adds, 'you and your sons will be with me'¹. In many ways this is a statement of great mercy. It was mercy that God spoke to Saul at all. It shows that the refusal of God to speak was connected with Saul's ministry having been lost. If Saul had been willing to amend his ways God might have been willing to bless him in other ways. The fact that one thing in our life may be lost beyond recovery does not mean that everything has been lost.

When God speaks it is that we might hear his voice and respond to him in faith. God was speaking to Saul - but his words were not words of guidance concerning the kingship. It was mercy for Saul to be told he and his sons would be with Samuel. They were a believing family. Saul had once been a godly person. Jonathan had shown himself to be a man of great faith. Saul and his sons would be in the unavoidable battle the next day. All of them would lose their lives. Using New Testament language, all of them were about to go to heaven. All of them would be with Samuel. The sure and certain knowledge of imminent death was a call to Saul to fall on his knees and be right with God. Something similar happens today whenever a person has some kind of terminal illness.

Sheer terror follows. It is a mercy to know for a certainty that one is about to go through one's last day. But it is a mercy that is fearful¹. His appetite is totally lost². He eats reluctantly and goes out to face what he knows will be his last day on earth³.

It was a fearful thing for Saul to fall into the hands of the living God. The Lord was judging one of his people. Saul discovered it is possible to be rejected from ministry after having once had a ministry. He had ruined his life. He would be saved through fire¹, since there was nothing he had laid up as treasure in heaven.

1 28:16

1 28:17-18

1 28:19

1 28:20

2 28:21-23a

3 28:23b

1 I Corinthians 3:15



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