

Saul & the Medium of Endor

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn back this evening to the chapter we read, 1 Samuel 28, and we're going to take up the reading again at verse 15.

1 Samuel 28, then Samuel said to Saul, Samuel, of course, had already died at this stage, but Samuel said to Saul, why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?

But Saul answered, I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams.

Therefore, I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do. And Samuel said, why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and become your enemy?

This chapter has got to be one of the most tragic, frightening, perplexing, distressing warnings in the Bible.

[1 : 1 1] You can't read it comfortably at all. Every part of it just oozes with perplexity. And it also raises some very interesting, no, not just interesting, but important questions, personal questions about Saul.

What kind of man was Saul? He was a notable man, a man who God had chosen to be the king over Israel. He was a covenant king, and yet here now, God is saying that he has become his enemy.

Saul has also experienced much of the power of God, the presence of God. He's heard the voice of God. He's known many of the truths of God.

He was himself personally chosen, selected by God, and now he has been abandoned by God. God has become his enemy.

And of course, the most, I suppose, important question that this raises is, is it possible for a person who knows the Lord to be ultimately and finally abandoned by the Lord, and for that person to be lost?

[2 : 3 0] Is it possible for a person to be a true believer, and then to be lost? I suppose it comes down to that, doesn't it? Well, in order to answer that question, I'm afraid that you're going to have to wait until next week, because next week I'm going to again choose another perplexing passage in the Bible, Hebrews chapter 6, which talks about those who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God, and those who have been enlightened, and those who have shared in the Holy Spirit, and yet, who fall away.

And the Bible tells us that it is impossible to bring such a person to repentance. Now, we're going to look at that, God willing, next week.

What does that mean? Is it possible for a person who knows the Lord truly and savingly to come, to lose that?

I suppose the question is this, is it possible to lose your salvation? Is it possible? Well, there are no easy answers to that question. I could say no, but yeah, I want to qualify that, and I want to see, I want to ask, what that passage in Hebrews chapter 6 tells us.

And again, I want to choose it in preparation for the communion service in two weeks, the communion season in two weeks' time. But let's just stick right now to what we know about this passage, and particularly about Saul and Samuel.

[4 : 04] Let's first of all try and unpack it by asking ourselves what the background to this chapter was. Saul was the first king of Israel. Israel had asked Samuel.

Samuel was the prophet who had judged Israel for many years before that. And Israel had come as a whole and asked him to appoint a king over them. And God had given him permission to do so.

God had therefore, he had organized the circumstances in which Saul would be chosen as the first king of Israel. But very soon into his reign, he showed that he wasn't going to be faithful to the word of God.

There were two incidents in particular in which God said, he judged Saul in such a way that he told him that he was going to take the kingdom from him.

First of all, Saul made unlawful, unauthorized sacrifices. But then he failed to do what God had commanded him to do, 1 Samuel in chapter 15.

[5 : 10] And in these two instances, God declared that he was no longer going to be the king over Israel. But that rather, alternatively, God had chosen someone else to be the king.

And of course, we know who that king was. It was David, who God called a man after my own heart. Now, when Saul found out about this, when he discovered that this is what God was doing, he became filled with hatred for this young man, David.

And he spent years pursuing him relentlessly, hunting him down. And that meant, of course, that David and his small band of followers had to live in caves and in mountains, being pursued by Saul, who was filled with envy and jealousy and fear.

And he wanted nothing more than to kill David once and for all. But God was with David. And God had promised that one day David would be the king of Israel.

And God fulfilled that promise against all the odds. Saul had the might of his whole army. David had nothing except the Lord. But that was enough. That was all that David needed.

[6 : 19] He knew that God had promised. And miraculously and providentially, God protected David every step of the way until that day when he did receive the kingship.

Meanwhile, the Philistines were fighting Israel. And there was the ongoing threat from the Philistines. And so Saul was wasting his strength on trying to pursue David when he should have been spending his strength rightly on fighting the Philistines.

But, of course, this is what happens when we allow ourselves to become obsessed with something that we should never be obsessed with. If we're going to be obsessed with anything, it's got to be obedience to the Lord and obedience to his word.

And whenever we are distracted by our own jealousies and by our own emotions, and whenever we become slaves to what we shouldn't become slaves to, we go all over the place.

We become completely uncontrolled. And we end up wasting our lives. And that's exactly what happened to Saul. And that's part of the tragedy of this great chapter. It could have been so different for Saul if only he had kept God's word.

[7 : 30] And when he failed to keep God's word. Because we all fail in some respect or another. The problem here is that when Saul failed, he didn't repent. He apologized.

He made some kind of lip service acknowledging his wrong. Well, he was very good at that. So are we all. But there's one thing to pay lip service to something and to appear as if we're apologetics.

Another thing altogether to truly and sincerely and ultimately repent. Because when we repent, we're turning away from what we've done. And we're confessing it to the Lord. And we're asking the Lord for his forgiveness and depending alone on God's mercy.

Now, Saul didn't do that. And interestingly enough, in this chapter, he doesn't do it either. Even though he's filled with fear, this man is utterly terrified. And yet there's not a single instance here in this chapter of his repentance.

Not any glimmer of his repentance. It's really quite an incredible fact that here is a man who has known something of the Lord in his presence. And yet he just does not repent and turn away from the sinfulness in his life.

[8 : 42] And that, of course, is a sure sign of someone who belongs to the Lord. Someone who knows what repentance is and who knows the grief. Who knows the real heartfelt sincerity of turning to the Lord and depending upon him and his grace alone.

And, of course, that's a great difference between Saul and David. Saul was apologetic but not repentant. David, of course, when he fell, he came to the Lord with all his heart.

But in any case, the threat of the Philistines was still there. And things were going to come to a head. And eventually, David, in a moment of despair, he decided that him and his band of followers would actually cross the border into Philistine territory.

Now, they shouldn't have done that. This was a mistake that could have been fatal for David. In actual fact, it was the providence of God that it wasn't fatal. But in any case, that was the decision that he took.

And that's why we read in the beginning of chapter 28, In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, just in case you're wondering, Well, wait a minute, hold on.

[9 : 53] Why is Achish, the king of the Philistines, talking to David as if David is on his side? He was on his side. That's what had happened. David had, in a moment of madness, he had jumped ship.

And he had crossed the border into Philistine territory. And he was living amongst the Philistines himself and his men. And he was fighting for them. Not fighting Israel. But fighting other common enemies.

And Achish had taken him into his trust. And Achish believed that David was going to support him in his war against Israel. Now, David could never... It would have been very interesting to find out.

Would David have been willing to do that? Thankfully, he never got to that point because God intervened and rescued him beforehand. But that's why we read at the very beginning of that chapter, this conversation between Achish and David, in which he's asking.

David said to Achish, very well, you shall know what your servant can do. And Achish said to David, very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life. And then we leave the story. We leave that side of the story, that side of the enemy line.

[11 : 00] And the writer comes all the way into, meanwhile in Israel. And meanwhile in Israel, there was absolute terror on the part of Saul and the Israelite army.

Because they looked across and they saw this massive number of Philistine soldiers. And their hearts melted for fear. And Saul simply didn't know what to do.

He was frozen. He was paralyzed in terror and panic. And in a moment of panic, he turned in somewhere and tried to find out what God had to say in all of this.

He tried three ways. He tried to find a prophet. There was no prophet. He tried sleeping. Because often, God spoke to men and women in dreams in the Old Testament.

Nothing. He tried the Urim. Now, I don't have time tonight to go into what the Urim and the Thummim was. It was a way in which it was part of the high priest's clothing in which God made his mind known and his will known to Israel.

[12 : 09] In which God spoke. Nothing. Didn't say a thing to him. And Saul knew that his days were up.

And that there was nothing more left. But maybe just once. You know, it's amazing what someone will do in a moment of desperation. And the tragedy here is that Saul, he did something that he knew.

Even knowing, as he did, that he stood in that position of defeat because of his own sinfulness and disobedience to God. He actually went even further in sinning against God by doing something that God had completely forbidden.

And that was to consult a medium. Now, if you want to know what the Bible has to say about that, there are several passages I could cite to you. One of them is in Deuteronomy. Another one is in Exodus.

In the Exodus. In which God made absolutely clear. That someone who traded in the occult was not to be consulted or even tolerated in the land.

[13 : 17] Now, again, I'm not going to go into what kind of occult practice that might or might not have been. You'd have to read all the books to find out. But isn't it interesting that throughout the entire course of human history, there's always been this fascination in the unknown and the dangerous and the unseen and the mysterious.

Particularly when it comes to powers that you might have or that you might experience that you don't normally experience in everyday life.

Isn't it interesting that there seems to be part of our fallen humanity that wants to see and to experience more. There's a hunger in the heart of every one of us that knows that what you see and what you hear and experience around us is not everything and we want more.

God's message to us, his answer to us, he says this, I am what you need. I am the answer to the hunger that's in your heart and what you need to be doing is to be seeking me through Jesus Christ.

Not to be seeking to have an experience through someone who is a medium or an occultist. And even today in our highly technological world, you still have the same fascination.

[14 : 40] And I want to warn you once again, I've said this before. I would like to issue just a cautious warning that God has already made, he's made it very clear what he thinks of such practice.

As far as God is concerned, the occult is completely forbidden. So don't go near it. If you want to serve God, don't go near it.

Now what's so wrong about you? Well I'll tell you one thing is wrong about you. Part of the occult, just as it is today, was this idea that you could see into the future. That you could not, in fact this is what this chapter is all about.

Seeing into the future. Why does God not want us to find out about the future? Well the reason is because the future belongs to God. He has determined the future.

And for us to try and dabble in trying to find out what the future holds is basically saying, well forget about what God is saying, I want to find out for myself what the future holds.

[15 : 47] But the Lord says to us tonight, you want to know what the future holds? You ask me. I have already given you everything that's going to happen. Not next week. Not whether or not you're going to marry some tall, dark, handsome stranger.

Or whether you're going to win the lottery. That's not the kind of stuff that I'm going to tell you at all. God has no interest in these things. These are trivialities as far as the Lord is concerned. And if we want to, if we're concerned about who we're going to marry.

If we're concerned about our finances. If we're concerned about our job prospects. Yes. And all of these things that are going to happen to us in the future or not. Then commit it to the Lord.

Ask the Lord to order and arrange your life for you. And he promises to do that if we trust in him. It might turn out entirely different from what we want.

But if we're in the Lord's hands, we're safe. Ultimately safe. And besides, he has told us everything in his word that he wants us to know about the future. What we need to know is that one day we're going to die.

[16:50] And that after death, we will all appear before the judgment seat of Jesus. And God is going to, the Lord Jesus is going to come again. One day he's not told us when. But he's told us it's an absolute certainty.

And when he comes, then the dead will rise. The graves will be opened. And Jesus will judge the world. And so on. That's the future that God wants us to know.

Not individually what's going to happen to us next week or what not. Because for the most part, I believe there's an awful lot of speculation.

But it has captivated the attention of so many people. But of course, if you're hungry and if you're empty, you'll believe. Who was it that said, if a man decides not to believe in God, he won't believe in nothing.

But he'll believe anything. And it's amazing to me how many people are hungry after the occult rather than hungry after the truth of God in Jesus Christ.

[17:50] Well, enough about that. That's what Saul did. He went even behind enemy lines. If you look at the geography of this passage, it tells us that Saul was prepared to cross the enemy line in disguise to go and consult this person.

He was also prepared to be a hypocrite. Hypocrite. I mean, have you ever seen such hypocrisy? This is the man who, when he was king, he evicted the mediums and spiritists out of the land of Israel.

And now when she says to him, don't you know that Saul has evicted me out of the land? He says, do not be afraid. He says, as the Lord lives, no punishment shall come upon you.

How hypocritical and desperate is that? That he's prepared to deny the Lord and his allegiance to the Lord in order for him to find out he's so desperate.

And I wonder, you know, it comes to me tonight. What we are prepared to do in a moment of desperation. It's really quite a strange thing.

[18:58] It's easy for us to sit back in an armchair in our own comfort zone and to discuss what is right and what is wrong. But in a moment of desperation, that's the test.

That's when we have to face up to the reality of what we really believe. And it looks to me as if Saul, while he paid lip service once again to the Lord, and he evicted the spiritists and mediums out of the land, wasn't really sincere about it at all.

Because he very easily turns to her in a time of desperation. And our prayer tonight is that when we are desperate, that we will, more than anything else, that we will remain faithful to the truth.

Because even if we die in poverty, we know that if we remain faithful to the Lord, we are in the safest possible place, and there is nobody richer and nobody more secure than a person who belongs to Jesus Christ.

Well, in any case, he went to see the woman. He disguised himself, and it became very apparent very quickly that he was Saul. And, of course, this really caused the woman to panic.

[20 : 20] And the king said to her, Do not be afraid. What do you see? Now, this is the next question. And the woman said to Saul, I see a God coming up out of the earth.

Now, it appears, this is quite interesting, it appears that the woman herself got the shock of her life when she saw Samuel, or what she believed, or who she believed, was Samuel appearing before her.

Who knows? Maybe she was a bogus medium. I don't know. I don't know. There are many of them around. People who will take, to make stacks of money, and tell you what you want to hear, and then disappear.

Maybe she was like that. I don't know. I'm not sure. But in any case, she got the shock of her life when, lo and behold, when Saul asked her to bring up Samuel, she saw something.

She, too, became afraid. Now, here's the question. She said, I see a God coming up out of the earth. Now, who was it? Samuel?

[21 : 18] Was it really Samuel? His spirit? His soul? Or was this a vision?

And if it was a vision, then who gave her the vision? And if it wasn't Samuel, was it a trick of Satan? And the question is, would God really allow, if Samuel had died, and we know that the souls of believers who were at their death made perfect and holy, so they go immediately into glory.

So, Samuel, having lived his life as a child of God, was now in glory. Would God allow Samuel's soul to go back to earth and reappear for the sake of satisfying Saul and his questions?

And that is what causes the great commentator Matthew Henry to say, no, he wouldn't. But, he believed that this was a trick in which Satan was deliberately creating something that looked like Samuel in order to deceive Saul even further and to give him some kind of message.

But if you read it again, all the indications are that it was Samuel. Let's read it again. He said to her, what is his appearance?

[22 : 51] And she said, an old man is coming up and he is wrapped in a robe. Saul knew that it was Samuel. He bowed his face to the ground and paid homage. Then Samuel said to Saul, why have you disturbed me?

By bringing me up, Saul answered, I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me and God has turned away from me and answers me no more. Therefore, I have summoned you.

Imagine the cheek of the guy. I have summoned you. What authority did he have? The man was deluded. I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do. And Samuel said, why do you ask me since the Lord has turned from me and from you and become your enemy?

Now, read this. The plain sense of the passage is absolutely clear that this wasn't a trick of Satan. It wasn't a vision. It was actually an appearance of the spirit or the soul of Samuel.

It says Samuel. Verse 16, Samuel said. Samuel said. Verse 15, the plain sense of the passage, and unless there is a good reason to contradict the plain sense of the passage, then we should accept the plain sense of the passage.

[24 : 05] It's as it happened. So this is Samuel. And God has somehow or other in his providence allowed Samuel to reappear in order to give his message to Saul one last time.

But it's not a message that is pleasing to Saul at all. It's an awful message. It's a fearsome and awesome message. One in which Saul discovers once again that this day was going to be his last.

And the battle he and his army are just about to enter into is a battle in which he and his son and many of his people were going to die. And not only was he going to die, but many of his men, men who had followed him and given allegiance to him, he through his own foolishness and disobedience was now leading them into a futile battle in which their lives were going to come to an end.

And it was all because it should never have been like this. That's the most awful tragedy. It should never have been like this because Samuel, Saul, had every opportunity under the sun.

When God chose him to be king, he did so for the sake of Israel. Israel had fought difficult battles in the past. You remember how Moses had stood on the top of the mountain and they had fought the Amalekites and how Moses had held up his arms and he had watched as, and as long as he kept his arms up, God fought on the side of the Israelites.

[25 : 47] There were all kinds of stories in the Bible where, remember Gideon, for example, and the Midianites. How many Midianites were there? There was many as a sand on the seashore and yet Gideon, with 300 men, he defeated them.

And now here was Saul shaking and quivering in fear because God had abandoned him. And it should never have been that way. God had given him so much privilege and so much opportunity.

There was nothing clearer than the commands that God had given him and he had fragrantly and deliberately turned his back on God. And now he was reaping the consequences.

There are consequences to the way in which we deal with God. There are consequences to whether we listen to God or refuse to listen to him. And I'm sure that Saul could have argued it all kinds of different ways.

Like he tried to make an excuse with Samuel when he ended up making sacrifices himself. Something that God had forbidden him, expressly forbidden him to do. And when Samuel appeared, he said, oh well you were taking too long.

[26 : 53] That doesn't matter. God's word is not negotiable. You don't just change God's word depending on circumstances. It's not negotiable. You should have known.

And it was the same with the Amalekites when he refused to put to death every living thing God said. I'm sure he made up his own mind on whether the problem is when we do, when we make up our own mind on what God says, when there's no need to, it's absolutely clear.

And the gospel is the same tonight. God is coming to us in complete simplicity and he's telling us, he's asking us, he's commanding you to come to Jesus to be saved.

He's telling us what will happen if you don't. He's telling us why you need to be saved. He's telling us that we're lost and dead in trespasses and sins that we're fallen human beings and he's holding out his hands to us and saying that whilst your sin deserves my wrath and my eternal punishment yet, yet, I have sent my son into the world to lay down his life for you, take him, come to him, believe in him and what do we do?

We ignore it. We make up our own mind. We try and reason using our own thought processes just like and we're going to reach the end of our lives and we will be godless.

[28 : 16] there will be no God. There will be no hope. There will be no comfort. There will be no light.

It will be darkness for you. That is what it was for Saul and it could all have been so different and tonight if you reach that point in your own life where you persist in your unbelief and you come to that point of nothing but darkness, the greatest pain in your mind and in your soul will be this.

It could all have been so different. Don't come to that point but come to Jesus now and believe in him and trust in him and follow him so that when that time comes so that you will live the rest of your life in victory and in fellowship with God knowing that your sins are forgiven and knowing that whatever happens that God is with you.

Restoring your soul and making you to walk in righteousness and upholding you and leading and guiding every step of the way. oh what a tragedy it was for Saul.

I don't know how he died. Oh I know how he died but I don't know how he died. Do you know what I'm saying? Don't know what his dying thoughts were.

[29 : 54] Maybe in those last few moments that he truly did repent and come to the Lord. I don't know but all the indications are that he didn't. There was a huge question mark over his head.

You know there are people in the Bible you know some of the people in the Bible there's no question at all about how they lived and how they died or they made mistakes they fell they tripped they drifted away sometimes they came back but you know you know that this man was a man of God or a woman a woman of God.

There are other people in the Bible and you know that they had absolutely no time for God at all. They lived and died completely lost. But there are one or two individuals in the Bible and you just don't know you can't figure them out because they had all the privileges under the sun they heard the voice of God even and yet as far as we can tell when they died they were lost.

Is that going to be you? Well I really hope not. I really hope not. I hope that you listen to God listen to the Lord and come and experience his grace.

Let's pray. Father in heaven we pray tonight once again that you will that you will smite us with the solemnity the seriousness of your word.

[31 : 26] We ask Lord that you will open up our hearts and give us to believe in the Jesus who came into our world to be the door to be the gate the very gate of heaven itself.

We ask Lord that none of us will be foolish like Saul who though he recognized the sound of God's voice yet he made up his own mind and he chose his own path.

keep us Lord from being so foolish in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.