

A VERY Long Distance Call for Help

Unfortunately, not all Bible stories have happy endings—especially the ones concerning Saul, the first king of Israel. This one is about the last time Saul disobeyed God. The ‘witch’ Saul visits is what we would call a ‘medium,’ someone who claims to contact the dead. While theologians disagree on whether it’s possible to contact the dead or not, it’s clear from the witch’s reaction that God made sure she “got through” this time... and she wasn’t very happy about it either! The original story is recorded in 1 Samuel 28:3-25.

King Saul had disobeyed God so many times
that God would no longer speak to him—
not through dreams,
not through sacred lots
not even through the priests and prophets.
But now, faced with a vast Philistine army ready to destroy Israel,
Saul was terrified and could think of only one thing to do.
He needed to talk to Samuel,
the prophet who had anointed him king.
Samuel had always cared deeply for him
and maybe he could convince God to tell Saul what to do.

There was a problem, however... **SAMUEL WAS DEAD!**
Saul’s only hope was to find a witch
who could call Samuel back from the grave...
but Saul himself had outlawed all types of witchcraft
and expelled all the witches from Israel.
Come now—would any witch be foolish enough
to admit her guilt to the king *just because he asked?*

Still, Saul was determined.
He called in his advisors and demanded they find him a witch...
and they finally found one
in a small Galilean village called Endor.
So Saul took off his royal robes,
disguised himself as a commoner and,
with two of his men,
went by night to visit the witch at Endor.
When they arrived at her home, Saul was blunt:
“I wish to talk to a man who is dead,” he said.
“Will you call up his spirit for me?”

The witch was suspicious, as any outlaw should be.
“What are you trying to do, get me killed?
Everybody knows that Saul expelled
all the mediums and psychics from Israel.
You aren’t fooling me—this is a trap!”

But Saul swore an oath on God's name.

“As surely as the Lord lives, I promise that
nothing bad will happen to you if you do this for me.”

Finally the witch agreed to help him. “Who do you want me to call up?”

“Samuel,” he said.

So the witch did as he asked

but as soon as she saw Samuel she screamed.
“You lied to me—you're King Saul himself!”

“Don't be afraid,” Saul said, trying to calm her down.

“Just tell me what you see.”

In a trembling voice the witch said,

“I see a god coming up out of the earth.
He looks like an old man in a robe.”

“That's him!” Saul exclaimed, and he knelt face down on the ground
as Samuel appeared in front of him.

But Samuel was angry. “Why have you disturbed me?

Why have you called me back?” he demanded of the groveling king.

“Because I'm in deep trouble,” Saul said.

“The Philistines plan to destroy us and God has left me.

He won't even talk to my prophets.

I need your advice. What should I do?”

“If God won't help you, what makes you think I can?” Samuel asked.

“God warned you that he would take your kingdom away from you
and give it to David, but you wouldn't listen.

Now the Lord has had enough of your disobedience.

Tomorrow the Philistines will destroy your army

and you and your sons will join me here.

The entire army of Israel will be defeated by nightfall tomorrow.”

Then Samuel vanished.

Saul collapsed on the ground, terrified and weak from hunger

for he had not eaten in more than a day.

The witch felt sorry for him and said,

“My lord, I have done as you asked, even though I risked my life.

Now, please, do as I say. Let me fix you something to eat

so you'll be strong enough for your trip back.”

The king refused, but his men begged him to listen to her.
At last he got up and sat on her couch
while the witch went and fixed him a meal suitable for a king.
And after Saul and his men ate,
they went out into the night
and returned to Saul's camp at Gilboa.

Everything happened as Samuel predicted:
Saul and his sons all died in battle the very next day
and the Philistines humiliated the Israelite army.
David became the new king of Israel
and he avenged the death of Saul...

But those are stories for another day.