

Did King Saul go to Heaven?

By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, 2016

I believe that he did. We find evidence of this when Samuel anointed him as King of Israel. We read that “the Spirit of the LORD” came upon him, at which time he was “turned into another man” and given “another heart” (1 Samuel 10:6, 9). The context of the change is that of the beginning of his prophetic ministry, which authenticated his call to be king, as proclaimed by Samuel. Some interpret this passage as the point of salvation. But it is better understood as the record of those things associated with a special divine empowerment for service through the special agency of God the Holy Spirit, understanding that Saul had already placed his faith in God. Either way, the indication is that he was already saved through faith, in which case that faith was accounted to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). The second verse that indicates that Saul is now in heaven is 1 Samuel 28:19. It is not as definitive as the previous passage studied, but it does provide ancillary support for the view that Saul is in heaven. This is admittedly a difficult passage, and has been interpreted various ways throughout the centuries. However, if one takes the literal interpretation that Samuel himself appeared to Saul at the instigation of the witch at En Dor, the statement that he made that Saul and his sons would be “with me” is strong evidence that Saul would go to heaven. He would go to Abraham’s bosom and not to Hades for torment apart from Samuel (Luke 16:22-23). Some argue that it was not Samuel who appeared but rather a demonic impersonator. But the surprise of the witch, the simple reading of the account as it is written, and the ability of God to bring back Old Testament saints (e.g. Moses and Elijah at the Transfiguration) indicate that this was really Samuel.

Some would argue that Saul was never saved because his life had no fruit. This is generally true, but it is also true of most Christian believers today. Saul made three major mistakes: unlawful sacrifice to God, sparing King Agag in disobedience to God, and seeking a medium instead of the living God. For all of these he lost the kingdom, not his place in heaven. Saul was a disobedient believer who kept sinning instead of repenting. In the end, Saul fell down in a posture of worship, but the consequences for his disobedience has already been determined (1 Samuel 28:19-20). Others argue that because King Saul committed suicide, he did not go to heaven (1 Samuel 31:4). Suicide is self murder, and this sin he added to the others. However, murder does not exclude one from heaven. Moses and David were murderers, and they are there. There is no sin that Jesus did not die for (Hebrews 10:12). It is true that he did not have time to repent of the murder, as it ended his own life. However, if one takes that view, he gets into theological hot water. Since we all sin regularly, and often unknowingly, most of us die with at least one unconfessed sin. Therefore, that teaching leads to a denial of the eternal security of salvation and introduces works as an aid to salvation, thereby depreciating the value of the blood of Christ. So we conclude that not all those who commit suicide are eternally lost, although some are. It is theologically possible for one to be saved and commit murder because of disobedience and despair.