

The Witch of Endor: Reality Bites

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Background:

The main narrative block of 1 Samuel 28 begins with the narrator reminding the audience that Samuel had died. The first time this is mentioned is in 1 Samuel 25:

1 Samuel 25:1 (ESV)

¹Now Samuel died. And all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah. Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran.

What follows is the story of Abigail, Nabal, and David.

Then, as if to remind us that Samuel is not just mostly dead:

1 Samuel 28:3 (ESV)

³Now Samuel had died, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his own city. And Saul had put the mediums and the necromancers out of the land.

What do you notice about the difference between these two stories, which start from the same basic introduction?

1 Samuel 15:22–23 (ESV)

²²And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

*²³For rebellion is as the sin of **divination [דַּוְדָּן]**, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”*

1 Samuel 15:27–28 (NASB95)

*²⁷As Samuel turned to go, Saul **seized the edge of his robe, and it tore.***

*²⁸So Samuel said to him, “The **Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today** and has given it to your neighbor, who is better than you.*

1 Samuel 19:24 (ESV)

*²⁴And **he [Saul] too stripped off his clothes**, and he too prophesied before Samuel and **lay naked** all that day and all that night. Thus it is said, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”*

1 Samuel 24:4–5 (NASB95)

⁴The men of David said to him, “Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.’” Then **David arose and cut off the edge of Saul’s robe** secretly.

⁵It came about afterward that David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul’s robe.

1 Samuel 28:8 (ESV)

⁸So **Saul disguised himself and put on other garments** and went, he and two men with him. And they came to the woman by night. And he said, “**Divine [דַּוִּים]** for me by a spirit and bring up for me whomever I shall name to you.”

1 Samuel 28:17 (ESV)

¹⁷The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for **the Lord has torn** the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David.

In 1 Samuel 15, Saul’s critical sin was not killing the Amalekite king, Agag. However, in Samuel’s poem, he casts rebellion as the sin of divination. The poem might still have worked without this line about divination, but the narrator wanted us to have a subtle clue about Saul’s ultimate demise. The neat bookends of Saul’s downward arc are punctuated by images of his royal garb being marred, removed, or traded for commoner’s clothing.

Discussion questions:

1. If you were already familiar with this episode, has it been a “problematic” passage for you?
2. Saul has, in the past, prohibited his men from eating before a battle:

1 Samuel 14:24 (ESV)

²⁴And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.” So none of the people had tasted food.

Saul, the rebel king, is nourished (maybe even revived or saved) by a woman, he goes from there and meets his demise.

David, on the other hand, has already been saved twice by women. Once from death, and once from bloodguilt.

What does the narrator’s use of this pattern mean to us?

What would it have meant to the ancient audience?

3. Can you think of other time in the Bible when it was women who saved a prophet/priest/king figure?

Survey the meanings of the Hebrew word describing what Eve was to Adam, *ezer* [עֵזֶר] often rendered (unhelpfully) as “helper”. Psalm 70 is a good place to start:

Psalm 70:1–5 (ESV)

*¹Make haste, O God, to deliver me! O Lord, make haste to **help** me!*

²Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my life! Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt!

³Let them turn back because of their shame who say, “Aha, Aha!”

⁴May all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you! May those who love your salvation say evermore, “God is great!”

*⁵But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my **help** and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!*

Both times where *ezer*/help is used by David in this psalm, it speaks of rescue, protection, deliverance by God. God does for David what he could not do for himself. This is the typical usage of the word in the Bible.

How do the women in your list (perhaps going back to Eve herself) fit the description of an “*ezer*”?