

1 Samuel 9:1-27

Introduction to Saul, the Future King

The next chapters are a pretty straight-forward introduction to Saul, the man Samuel would anoint as the first king of Israel.

The emphasis is on his physical stature and strength - Saul was taller than others and was the image of what the people wanted in a king. Nothing is said about his or his father's piety or interest in God.

This is in line with the spiritual principle of "first the natural, then the spiritual" (**1 Corinthians 15:46**). Saul was naturally fit for kingship. He was exactly what the people would want in a king, so that is what God gave them initially. He would be replaced by David, the spiritual type of the Messiah.

Initially, Saul displayed great humility and piety, which makes his later disobedience (see **1 Samuel 13** and **15**) and his final descent into bitterness and unhinged resentment toward David all the more tragic.

1 Samuel 9:1-2 - "Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiyah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people."

Searching for Lost Asses brings Saul to meet Samuel (verses 3-14)

Why so much trouble to find some donkeys? These were valuable animals, usually ridden by the wealthy or by nobles.

"It is important for us to learn that the smallest trifles are as much arranged by the God of providence as the most startling events. He who counts the stars has also numbered the hairs of our heads." (Spurgeon)

Saul's failed search for the asses is meant to humanize this future king, and focus on humility.

1 Samuel 9:5 - "And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us."

"Zuph" is Ramathaim Zophim, Samuel's home town (**1 Samuel 1:1**)

1 Samuel 9:7 - "Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?"

Usually when consulting a prophet or seer (or simply arriving as a guest at anyone's door), you would bring a gift out of simple courtesy. But Samuel was careful to take no gifts, to guard against abuses like those of the sons of Eli (and his own sons).

It's strange that Saul apparently seems not to have heard of Samuel, a judge of Israel. But this may just reflect the low state of spirituality in the time of the judges.

1 Samuel 9:8 - "And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way."

A quarter of a shekel was a "zuz." This is where we get the little children's rhyme on Passover, "One kid, one kid that father bought for two zuzim..."

1 Samuel 9:11 - "And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?"

Rabbi Akiba (In Pirke Eliezer, c. 36. fol. 39. 1. 2.) observes that whenever a man meets maidens coming out of a city before he goes into it, it is a token of prosperity to him; examples are the cases of Abraham's servant (Genesis 24:15), of Jacob (Genesis 29:6), and of Moses (Exodus 2:16), and here of Saul.

Jewish legends say that it was because Saul was so good looking that the young women wanted to talk to him, giving him more information than required.

A midrash explains that the Shekinah pillar of cloud was visible over Samuel's house. It points to **Psalm 99:6-7** - "Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them. He spake unto them in the cloudy pillar..."

1 Samuel 9:13 - "As soon as ye be come into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him."

Probably a peace offering - when a man offered his peace offerings, he not only had his family with him, but invited his friends, and the poor, and the fatherless, the strangers, and the Levites, to partake with him. (**Deuteronomy 12:18**)

God Chooses Saul

1 Samuel 9:15-17 - "Now the LORD had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me. And when Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said unto

him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people."

In this description, there is no mention yet of God's displeasure at the people's request for a king.

1 Samuel 9:19 - "And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart."

This reminds us of Jesus' prophetic insight into the life of the Samaritan woman at the well - "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did." (John 4)

1 Samuel 9:20 - "And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?"

Samuel gives a word of knowledge about Saul's immediate concerns - the asses. This confirmation is to increase Saul's confidence in Samuel's further prophecy to him that he would be king. In the Bible, prophets often give a short-term prophecy or word of knowledge that can be confirmed, and then a long-term prediction, usually concerning the Messiah or God's ultimate victory.

Saul's Humility

1 Samuel 9:21 - "And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?"

The tribe of Benjamin had been reduced to only 600 after the fatal war between that tribe and the rest, on account of the Levite's concubine (**Judges 20:47–48**). But Saul is being modest here about his family - his family was prominent (see verse 1).

1 Samuel 9:24 - "And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day."

This is a lot of detail about what was for dinner. Why is this "shoulder" detail important?

The right shoulder and breast of a sacrifice was, according to law, reserved for the priests. But in the troubled time of the judges, with the Ark and the Tabernacles separated, a lot of these rituals were dispensed with. Samuel was a Levite, but he performed sacrifices as a priest. By offering the priest's portion to Saul, Samuel was convincing him of his right to the kingship, and to show that he was to live in friendship with the priests of the Lord.

Saul later betrayed this trust when he massacred the priests of Nob (**1 Samuel 22:11–13**).

The shoulder also represented government - **Isaiah 9:6**: -“And the government shall be upon his shoulder.”

The right arm was considered the royal portion according to Josephus, a symbol of strength. And the breast was included, the seat of wisdom and prudence, of compassion, affection and love. All these were required of a king.

1 Samuel 9:25 - "And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house."

One tradition says Samuel took Saul up to his roof to teach him a crucial lesson. A rooftop represented arrogance to the rabbis. They note **Zephaniah 1:5** says God will cut off "them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops." David would lust after Bathsheba from his rooftop (**2 Samuel 11:2**). Pride could lead to idolatry and other sins, and Samuel reminded him of the limitations of kingship from **Deuteronomy 17:20** "that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren..."

1 Samuel 9:27 - "And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God."

The Jewish translation has "stand still at this time, and I shall let you hear the word of God."

This is the mission of every prophet - to be a conduit to deliver the word of God. And ultimately, to allow us to see the true Word of God - Jesus the Messiah.

It recalls Moses at the Red Sea - “Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord” (**Exodus 14:13**)

If Saul could only understand that God was in control, and he only had to wait on God, to follow, to obey, then Saul's reign would have turned out differently. But it was not to be.

Maimonides on Kingship

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Saul's journey to kingship begins in a failed search for his father's donkeys.

Similar to David's rise:

- **Psalm 78:70-71** - And He chose David His servant and He took him from the sheepfolds, from following ewes, and brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel

his inheritance."

Ancient civilizations usually considered the king or Pharaoh as either divine or a son of the gods. He was regarded as the actual author of the fertility of the land, and the flooding of the Nile, etc.

So it would seem that a mere man was at the pinnacle of power. Honor, pride, power and glory were elevated. Although all ancient kings described themselves as "good shepherds" to their people, humility was denigrated and their rule was mostly despotic — an absolute monarchy.

Maimonides considered Moses as the pattern for a king, although he was not one.

Moses' chief attribute was his humility:

- **Numbers 12:3** - "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth."

When the people complain to him about lack of food in the desert, he points them to God: "what are we? Your complains are not against us..." (**Exodus 16:8**)

A Restrained Authority

Humility was built into the governmental structure. Israel did not have an absolute monarchy. The king was forbidden from interfering or intruding into the priests' office. The judicial council of the Sanhedrin also served as a brake on royal power.

In fact, all the rituals unique to the Temple are designed to neutralize any illusions of self-importance or arrogance.

Any military campaign except a defensive one must be agreed to by the Sanhedrin.

So the Israelite monarchy is actually sharing power with both the priesthood and the Sanhedrin.

Humility

The king's rule is merely a reflection of God's rule over his creation. The Talmud says, "Wherever one finds the awesome power of God, there he will also find His humility." (B. Megilla 31a)

Isaiah shows an example of the king's ethical role:

- **Isaiah 57:15** - "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, [but also] with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble (the downtrodden), and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Maimonides says the "lowly in spirit" applies to orphans and widows, the poor, strangers and converts to Judaism, as well as slaves - i.e. those who have no autonomy and are vulnerable and reliant on those higher up in the social structure.

As the king demonstrates kindness to these marginalized people, he becomes the example for everyone, and this pushes the nation toward a more egalitarian society, toward nullifying class distinctions and feelings of superiority or inferiority.

Maimonides ties this kind of charity with the coming of Messiah:

"The throne of Israel will never be established, nor will the true religion be sustained except by way of charity... and Israel will never be redeemed except through the merit of charity."

Just to clarify this in terms we can understand - public, government charity is designed to be an example for private, individual charity and self-effacing humility among the people in general.

Jesus, the Messianic king, is the perfect model for this kind of kingship. He invites "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" to come to his banquet. To help "the least of these" is to do it unto Jesus Himself.

The ideal social arrangement is briefly glimpsed in the wilderness when the manna falls, in **Exodus 16:8**: "He that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating."

The king, according to Maimonides, should exemplify the message that having more or less of this world's goods has no essential meaning: "He who has obtained these luxuries has not gained thereby an increment in its substance, he has only obtained a false imagining or a plaything. And he who lacks the superfluities of life is not necessarily deficient."

God provides all that we need spiritually, as well. We all are on a level playing field regarding our opportunity to receive or reject the word of God, the true Manna, Jesus Himself, "the bread that comes down from heaven" (**John 6:58**).

The Humble King - A Contradiction in this world

This insistence on humility in kingship is remarkable. Humility was scorned in ancient societies as the opposite of honor and nobility.

Since Israel's king was supposed to be a type of Messiah's rule, it's important to look at Jesus, the "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (**1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14, Revelation 19:16**):

Philippians 2:3-11 - "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of

mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery (something to be grasped) to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation ("emptied Himself," or "made Himself as nothing"), [in this way...] and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

This is a template for every believer in any kind of position of authority.