

**Part 9**  
**Give us a King**  
**1 Samuel 9**

**Background**

God had chosen Moses to lead the nation of Israel and Joshua to succeed him (Deut. 31:1–15), but Joshua wasn't commanded to lay hands on any successor.

He left behind elders he had trained to serve God, but when they died, the new generation turned away from the Lord and followed the idols of the land (Judg. 2:10–15).

There was an automatic (family) succession in the priesthood, -- and the Lord called prophets to action when needed, -- but who would lead the people and see to it that the law was obeyed?

During the period of the judges, God raised up leaders here and there and gave them great victories, but nobody was in charge of the nation as a whole.

“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25; see 17:6; 18:1; 19:1).

The “nation” of Israel was a loose confederation of sovereign tribes, and each tribe was expected to seek the Lord and do His will on their own.

The ark of the covenant was now out of enemy hands and resting in the house of Abinadab in Kiriath Jearim in the territory of Benjamin (1 Sam. 1—2; Josh. 18:28).

Shiloh had been destroyed by the Philistines and was no longer the location of the sanctuary of the Lord, and many years would pass before the ark would be moved to Jerusalem by King David (1 Chron. 15).

But having the ark in Jewish territory didn't automatically solve Israel's problems, for during those twenty years when the ark was in Abinadab's house, a new generation had arisen and was crying out for radical changes in Israel's government.

For centuries, the people of Israel had looked to Jehovah as their King, but now they asked the Lord to give them a king just like the other nations. It was a critical time in the history of Israel, and it took the prayers and guidance of Samuel to bring them safely through this dangerous time of transition.

**Question**

Why was it important to have a physical manifestation or symbol of God's presence in ancient times? (Ark – Tabernacle – Shrines)

1. What does this say about the people's relationship with their God?
  - a. How was Samuel's situation similar to and different from leaders in the church today?
  - b. Who chooses the leaders today?
    - i. What role does God play directly?
    - ii. What role do God's people play?

2. In the time of the Old Testament, God localized His presence on the ark of the covenant.

Would you prefer to have lived during this time, when God's presence was specific and measurable?

Why or why not?

In what ways were the Israelites practicing a kind of “blind faith”?

How does that faith compare to the faith you have today?

**Read 1 Samuel 9**

What's true of individuals is true of nations: You take what you want from life and you pay for it. Under the kingship of Jehovah God, the nation had security and sufficiency as long as they obeyed Him, and His

demands were not unreasonable. To obey God's covenant meant to live a happy life as the Lord gave you all that you needed and more.

But the key word in Samuel's speech is take, not give.

The king and his court had to be supported, so he would take their sons and daughters, their property, their harvests, and their flocks and herds. Their choice young men would serve in the army as well as in the king's fields. Their daughters would cook and bake for the king. He would take their property and part of their harvest in order to feed the officials and servants in the royal household.

While these things weren't too evident under Saul and David, they were certainly obvious under Solomon (1 Kings 4:7–28). The day came when the people cried out for relief from the heavy yoke Solomon had put on them just to maintain the glory of his kingdom (12:1–4; see Jer. 22:13–17).

### **Question:**

Why did the people insist that God give them a king?

What was uppermost in their minds with this kind of thinking?

What sorts of guarantees did they want from God?

One of the reasons Israel asked for a king was so the nation could unite behind one leader and have a better opportunity to face their enemies. The Lord condescended to reach down to their level of unbelief, and He gave them a king who looked like a natural warrior.

How sad it is that God's people trusted a man of flesh and blood whom they could admire, and yet they would not trust the Lord who throughout the nation's history had proven Himself powerful on their behalf.

### **Commentary:**

Probably twenty or twenty-five years elapsed between the events recorded in chapter 7 and those in chapter 8. Samuel was now an old man, about to pass from the scene, and a new generation had emerged in Israel with new leaders who had new ideas. Life goes on, circumstances change, and God's people must have wisdom to adapt to new challenges without abandoning old convictions. Like more than one great leader, Samuel in his old age faced some painful situations and had to make some difficult decisions. He left the scene convinced that he had been rejected by the people he had served so faithfully. Samuel obeyed the Lord, but he was a man with a broken heart.

When the elders asked to have a king "like all the nations" (8:5, 20), they were forgetting that Israel's strength was to be unlike the other nations. The Israelites were God's covenant people, and He was their King. The glory of God dwelt in their midst and the law of God was their wisdom. (See Ex. 19:3–6; 33:15–16; Lev. 18:30 and 20:26; Num. 23:9.) But the elders were concerned about national security and protection from the enemies around them. The Philistines were still a powerful nation, and the Ammonites were also a threat (1 Sam. 12:12). Israel had no standing army and no king to lead it. The elders forgot that it was the Lord who was Israel's King and who gave her army the ability to defeat the enemy. Samuel was a man of spiritual insight, and he knew that this demand for a king was evidence of spiritual decay among the leaders. They weren't rejecting him; they were rejecting God, and this grieved Samuel's heart as he prayed to the Lord for wisdom. This wasn't the first time the people had rejected their Lord.

Whenever leadership in a church decays spiritually, that church becomes more like the world and uses the world's methods and resources to try to do God's work. (sales training – Kathy and I)

God is never surprised by what His people do, nor is He at a loss to know what He should do. "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes midst and the law of God was their wisdom. (See Ex. 19:3–6; 33:15–16; Lev. 18:30 and 20:26; Num. 23:9.) But the elders were concerned about national security and protection from the enemies around them.

It wasn't Israel's request for a king that was their greatest sin; it was their insisting that God give them a king immediately. The Lord had a king in mind for them, David the son of Jesse, but the time wasn't ripe for him to appear. So, the Lord gave them their request by appointing Saul to be king, and He used Saul to chasten the

nation and prepare them for David, the man of His choice. The fact that Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin and not from Judah is evidence enough that he was never expected to establish a dynasty in Israel.

“So in my anger I gave you a king, and in my wrath I took him away” (Hos. 13:11 NIV).

The greatest judgment God can give us is to let us have our own way. “And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul” (Ps. 106:15 NKJV). However, the Lord wanted His people to go into this new venture with their eyes open, so He commanded Samuel to tell them what it would cost them to have a king.

## OBEYING THE LORD

The focus now shifts from Samuel to Saul, God’s choice for Israel’s king. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, which had almost been exterminated because of their rebellion against the law (Judg. 19—20). Jacob compared Benjamin to “a ravaging wolf” (Gen. 49:27), and the tribe was involved in numerous battles.

Benjamin’s territory lay between Ephraim and Judah, so Saul’s tribe was adjacent to the royal tribe of Judah. In spite of what Saul said to Samuel in 1 Samuel 9:21, he belonged to a powerful and wealthy family that owned real estate and animals and had servants.

Physically, Saul was tall, good-looking, and strong, the kind of king people would admire. Even Samuel, with all his spiritual perception, got carried away when he saw him (10:23–24). His weakness for admiring physical qualities even showed up when Samuel went to anoint David (16:1–7). Saul was obedient to his father and concerned about his father’s feelings (9:5), and he was persistent in wanting to obey his father’s will.

*1 Samuel 9:5 (NASB)*

*<sup>5</sup> When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, and let us return, or else my father will cease to be concerned about the donkeys and will become anxious for us."*

Samuel meets Saul (vv. 9:1–25). Saul’s home was in Gibeah, which was about five miles from Ramah where Samuel lived, and yet Saul didn’t even know what all Israel knew (3:20), that a man of God named Samuel lived in Ramah (9:6). How Saul could live so close to Israel’s spiritual leader and not know about him is a bit of a mystery and suggests that Saul simply lived and farmed with his family at Gibeah and minded his own business. Apparently he didn’t attend the annual feasts and wasn’t greatly concerned about spiritual matters.

Like many people today, he wasn’t against religion, but he didn’t make knowing the Lord a vital part of his life.

It’s a good thing the Saul’ servant knew about Samuel and that Saul heeded his advice! A rather insignificant event brought Saul and Samuel together—the loss of some of Kish’s donkeys. The animals were valuable, of course, and later somebody found them and returned them to Kish (10:2), but who would have thought that Israel’s first king would be called to the throne while searching for donkeys! David was identified with sheep (Ps. 78:70–72; 1 Sam. 17:15) and saw the people of Israel as sheep who needed protection and guidance (2 Sam. 24:17).

The Lord works in unusual ways, but if Saul had not obeyed his father and listened to his servant, the story might have been different. It was evening when the two men arrived at the gates of Ramah, because the young women were going out to draw water. Asking the girls if the seer was there, they were given a long, detailed answer. Perhaps the Jewish maids were happy to chat with a tall, handsome stranger!

Even the time of Saul’s arrival at the city was providential, for Samuel appeared just as Saul and his servant entered the city.

Samuel was going up to a “high place” outside the city where he would offer a sacrifice to the Lord.

Since there was no central sanctuary in Israel at that time, the people brought their sacrifices to a shrine that was dedicated to the Lord and located on a hill near the city.

The pagan nations also worshipped their false gods at the high places and also indulged in filthy practices there, but the people of Israel were forbidden to join them (Ps. 78:58; Hos. 4:11–14; Jer. 3:2).

The day before, the Lord had told Samuel that Saul was coming to Ramah, so he was prepared to meet him and give him God’s message. Samuel couldn’t say he was happy about the changes going on in Israel, but he was obedient to the Lord. The word “captain” in 1 Samuel 9:16 simply means “leader.”

When Saul appeared, the Lord spoke again to Samuel and confirmed that this was indeed the man of His choice and that Samuel should anoint him as king. “God’s anointed” was one of the titles for the king (12:3; 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16; Ps. 2:2, 6).

The Lord would use Saul as He did Samson (Judg. 13:5), to begin to weaken the Philistines and prepare them for David’s final conquest of this enemy of the Jews (1 Chron. 18:1).

Saul discovered that he was speaking to the man he was seeking, that he would feast with him that day, that Samuel had a special message for him, and that the missing donkeys had been found and returned to his father.

Furthermore, all the desire of Israel was fixed on Saul, because all Israel wanted a king. Saul didn’t understand what Samuel was saying, but everything would be explained to him the next day. Samuel ignored Saul’s protest that he was a nobody who belonged to an insignificant tribe, and he escorted Saul and his servant to the banquet hall at the high place where the feast would be held.

Saul was given the special portion of the fellowship offering that belonged to the priest (1 Sam. 9:24; Lev. 7:32–33), and the cook informed him that the portion had been set aside especially for him. Strange things were happening! After the feast, Saul returned with Samuel to his house, and there they had a long talk in which Samuel rehearsed for Saul the events that had led up to this meeting.

### **Samuel anoints Saul (9:26—10:16)**

Early the next morning, Samuel accompanied Saul and his servant to the edge of the city, sent the servant on ahead, and then anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. From that moment on, Saul was leader over God’s people (“inheritance”), but only Samuel and Saul knew it.

How could young Saul be sure that God had really chosen him? Samuel gave Saul three signs, special occurrences he would encounter as he made his way home.

**First**, he would meet two men who would tell him that the lost animals had been found (10:2), news that Saul had already heard from Samuel. Apparently these men knew who Saul was and that he had been away from home seeking the lost property. But this was a good experience for the young king, for it assured him that God could solve his problems.

One of Saul’s greatest failures as a leader was his inability to take his hands off of situations and let God work. In modern language, Saul was a “control freak.” Yet while Saul and his servant were dining with Samuel, God was at work saving the lost animals.

The **second** sign would take place at the oak of Tabor where he would meet three pilgrims heading for Bethel (vv. 3–4). In spite of the nation’s unbelief, there were still devoted people in the land who honored the Lord and sought His face. There must have been a sacred place at Bethel dedicated to the Lord (Judg. 20:18, 26), and perhaps the three kids, the wine, and the three loaves of bread were gifts for the Levites serving there. Since as yet there was no central sanctuary, the three kids may have been for sacrifices. These men would greet Saul and give him two of the three loaves, and he was to receive them. God was showing Saul that not only could He solve his problems, but He could also supply his needs. As the first king of Israel, he would have to raise up an army and provide the food and equipment the men needed, and he would have to depend on the Lord.

The **third** sign had to do with spiritual power (1 Sam. 10:5–6). Saul would meet a band of prophets returning from worship at the high place, and they would be prophesying. The Holy Spirit of God would come upon Saul at that time, and he would join the company of prophets in their ecstatic worship. In this sign, God told Saul that He could endue him with the power he needed for service. “And who is sufficient for these things?” is the question in the heart of every servant of God (2 Cor. 2:16), and the only correct answer is “our sufficiency is of God” (3:5).

However, later Saul would become very self-sufficient and rebellious, and the Lord would take the Spirit from him (1 Sam. 16:14; 28:15). When Saul turned from Samuel to start his journey home, God gave him “another heart” (10:9, see v. 6). Don’t read New Testament “regeneration” into this statement; it refers primarily to a different attitude and outlook. This young farmer would

now think and act like a leader, the king of the nation, a warrior-statesman whose responsibility it was to listen to God and obey His will. The Holy Spirit would further enable him to serve God as long as he walked in obedience to His will (v. 10:6). Because Saul became proud and independent and rebelled against God, he lost the Spirit's power, he lost his kingdom, and he eventually lost his life. Each of these events took place just as Samuel promised, but the only one actually described in the text is Saul's encounter with the company of prophets (vv. 10–13). In the Old Testament era, God gave His Holy Spirit to chosen people to enable them to perform special tasks, and God could take the Spirit away as well. Believers today, who are under the new covenant, have the Holy Spirit abiding within forever (John 14:16–17) as God's seal that we are His children (Eph. 1:13–14).

When David asked God not to take the Holy Spirit from him (Ps. 51:11), he must have been thinking of what the Lord did to Saul (1 Sam. 16:14; 28:15). Believers today may grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30) and quench the Spirit (1 Thess. 5:19).

The Spirit enabled Saul (probably for the first time in his life) to have a personal experience with the Lord and to express it in praise and worship. Had Saul continued to nurture this walk with the Lord, his life would have been much different. His pride and desire for power became his besetting sin. When the news got out that Saul had prophesied with a company of prophets, some of his friends spoke about him with disdain (1 Sam. 10:11–13). There's no evidence that he was overly wicked, but Saul was a secular person, not a spiritual person, and he was the last man his friends ever expected to have that kind of experience. The question, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" was asked of anybody who suddenly stepped out of character and did the unexpected.

Since prophets often inherited their ministry from their fathers (Amos 7:14), and were even called "fathers" (2 Kings 2:12), the second question was asked: "Who is their father?"

Even after Saul was presented to the people as their king, not everybody in Israel was impressed with him (1 Sam. 10:27). Saul returned home and went back to work on the farm as though nothing remarkable had happened. He said nothing to his family about being anointed king, and apparently the news about his prophetic experiences hadn't reached as far as Gibeah.

The experiences of the previous days should have taught him that God was with him (v. 7), and that He would take care of him and meet his needs, if only he would trust and obey. He also should have realized that he could trust Samuel to give him God's message, and that to disobey Samuel meant to disobey the Lord.

One more task awaited Saul, and that was to meet Samuel at Gilgal at a time that would be shown him (v. 10:8). This would be a test to see if Saul was truly devoted to the Lord and willing to obey orders. Unfortunately, he failed.

### **Samuel presents Saul to the people** (vv. 17–27).

Samuel called another convocation at Mizpah for the purpose of presenting the new king to the people. True to his prophetic calling, he first preached a sermon and reminded the people of their redemption from Egypt by God's grace and power as well as their obligation under the covenant to obey the Lord.

But they had disobeyed the Lord in asking for a king! They had sinned, but the Lord would answer their request. Only the Lord and Samuel knew that the king had already been selected and anointed, but Samuel wanted the tribes to realize that Jehovah was in charge of the selection process. He had the tribes present themselves, probably represented by their elders, and the tribe of Benjamin was selected.

This may have been selection by lot (14:40–42), or one of the priests may have used the Urim and Thummim to determine the Lord's will (Ex. 28:30).

The clan of Matri was selected next, and from that clan, the family of Kish and finally, the young man Saul. But Saul couldn't be found! And Samuel had to inquire further of the Lord to discover that the king was hiding among the wagons and baggage, certainly not an auspicious way to begin his reign! Was he hiding out of modesty or fear? Probably the latter, because true humility accepts God's will while at the

same time depending on God's strength and wisdom. As Andrew Murray said, "True humility isn't thinking meanly of one's self; it's simply not thinking of one's self at all."

Had Saul been focusing on the glory of God, he would have been present in the assembly and humbly accepting God's call. Then he would have urged the people to pray for him and to follow him as he sought to do the Lord's will.

This first official act on the part of Saul suggests that there was trouble ahead. Saul was a reluctant ruler who followed his emotions instead of building his faith. He would serve as a sacrificing, courageous soldier one day and become a self-centered autocrat the next day.

Shunning national popularity is one thing, but shunning God-given responsibility is quite another. "If God called a man to kingship," said G. Campbell Morgan, "he has no right to hide away."

Samuel did what he could to salvage an embarrassing situation. He presented Saul as God's chosen king, so the nation had to accept him, and he accented Saul's admirable physical characteristics. The people were impressed, but Samuel certainly knew that God didn't need tall, muscular men in order to get His work done. In a few years, He would use teenage David to kill a giant! (See Ps. 147:10–11.)

The wisest thing Samuel did that day was to link the kingship with the divine covenant (1 Sam. 10:25). His first speech about the king had been negative (8:10–18), but this address and document were positive and pointed out the duties of both king and people. Samuel no doubt elaborated on Moses' words from Deuteronomy 17:14–20 and reminded the people that even the king had to submit to the Lord and His Word. There was one God, one nation, and one covenant, and the Lord was still in charge.

When the assembly was ended, everybody went back home, including the king, and there accompanied him a group of valiant men who became his officers and inner circle. They followed Saul because the Lord moved them to do so. People gave Saul gifts as tokens of their homage to the king, but one group of men despised and ridiculed him. As king, Saul could have dealt severely with them, but he held his peace. And yet later, he was willing to kill Jonathan, his son, just because the boy had eaten some honey! Saul's emotional instability had him weeping over David one day and trying to kill him the next.

### **Question:**

The Philistines hedged their bets when it came to the ark of the covenant and the possibility that the God of the Israelites might be real (and stronger than their own).

In what ways do you hedge your bets with God?

Why are we tempted to do this?

What does it say about your faith? 13.

Have you ever bargained with God in order to get some kind of guarantee from Him? Explain. What led you to attempt this approach to God? How did the circumstance play out?