

# CHAPTER 9

Samuel had promised Israel, from God, that they should have a king; it is strange that the next news is not of candidates setting up for the government, making an interest in the people, or recommending themselves to Samuel, and, by him, to God, to be put in nomination. Why does not the prince of the tribe of Judah, whoever he is, look about him now, remembering Jacob's entail of the sceptre on that tribe? Is there never a bold aspiring man in Israel, to say, "I will be king, if God will choose me?" No, none appears, whether it is owing to a culpable mean-spiritedness or a laudable humility I know not; but surely it is what can scarcely be paralleled in the history of any kingdom; a crown, such a crown, set up, and nobody bids for it. Most governments began in the ambition of the prince to rule, but Israel's in the ambition of the people to be ruled. Had any of those elders who petitioned for a king afterwards petitioned to be king, I should have suspected that person's ambition to have been at the bottom of the motion; but now (let them have the praise of what was good in them) it was not so. God having, in the law, undertaken to choose their king (<sup>45175</sup>Deuteronomy 17:15), they all sit still, till they hear from heaven, and that they do in this chapter, which begins the story of Saul, their first king, and, by strange steps of Providence, brings him to Samuel to be anointed privately, and so to be prepared for an election by lot, and a public commendation to the people, which follows in the next chapter. Here is,

- I.** A short account of Saul's parentage and person (v. 1, 2).
- II.** A large and particular account of the bringing of him to Samuel, to whom he had been before altogether a stranger.
  - 1.** God, by revelation, had told Samuel to expect him (v. 15, 16).
  - 2.** God, by providence, led him to Samuel.
    - (1.)** Being sent to seek his father's asses, he was at a loss (v. 3-5).
    - (2.)** By the advice of his servant, he determined to consult Samuel (v. 6-10).
    - (3.)** By the direction of the young maidens, he found him out (v. 11-14).

(4.) Samuel, being informed of God concerning him (v. 17), treated him with respect in the gate (v. 18-21), in the dining-room (v. 22-24), and at length in private, where he prepared him to hear the surprising news that he must be king (v. 25-27). And these beginnings would have been very hopeful and promising if it had not been that the sin of the people was the spring of this great affair.

## <000>1 SAMUEL 9:1-2

### THE PARENTAGE OF SAUL

We are here told,

1. What a good family Saul was of, v. 1. He was of the tribe of Benjamin; so was the New-Testament Saul, who also was called *Paul*, and he mentions it as his honour, for Benjamin was a favourite, <500>Romans 11:1; <1005>Philippians 3:5. That tribe had been reduced to a very small number by the fatal war with Gibeah, and much ado there was to provide wives for those 600 men that were the poor remains of it out of that diminished tribe, which is here called, with good reason, *the smallest of the tribes of Israel*, v. 21. Saul sprang as a root out of a dry ground. That tribe, though fewest in number, was first in dignity, *God giving more abundant honour to that part which lacked*, <4124>1 Corinthians 12:24. His father was *Kish, a mighty man of power*, or, as the margin reads it, *in substance*; in spirit bold, in body strong, in estate wealthy. The whole lot of the tribe of Benjamin coming to be distributed among 600 men, we may suppose their inheritances were much larger than theirs who were of other tribes, an advantage which somewhat helped to balance the disadvantage of the smallness of their number.

2. What a good figure Saul made, v. 2. No mention is here made of his wisdom or virtue, his learning or piety, or any of the accomplishments of his mind, but that he was a tall, proper, handsome man, that had a good face, a good shape, and a good presence, graceful and well proportioned: *Among all the children of Israel there was not a goodlier person than he*; and, as if nature had marked him for preeminence and superiority, he was taller by the head and shoulders than any of the people, the fitter to be a match for the giants of Gath, the champions of the Philistines. When God chose a king after his own heart he pitched upon one that was not at all

remarkable for the height of his stature, nor any thing in his countenance but the innocence and sweetness that appeared there, ~~Q1017~~ 1 Samuel 16:7, 12. But when he chose a king after the people's heart, who aimed at nothing so much as stateliness and grandeur, he pitched upon this huge tall man, who, if he had no other good qualities, yet would look great. It does not appear that he excelled in strength so much as he did in stature; Samson did, and him they slighted, bound, and betrayed into the hands of the Philistines; justly therefore are they now put off with one who, though of uncommon height, is weak as other men. They would have a king like the nations, and the nations commonly chose portly men for their kings.

## ~~Q1018~~ 1 SAMUEL 9:3-10

### SAUL SEEKS HIS FATHER'S ASSES

Here is,

**I.** A great man rising from small beginnings. It does not appear that Saul had any preferment at all, or was in any post of honour or trust, till he was chosen king of Israel. Most that are advanced rise gradually, but Saul, from the level with his neighbours, stepped at once into the throne, according to that of Hannah, *He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to set them among princes*, ~~Q1019~~ 1 Samuel 2:8. Saul, it should seem, though he was himself married and had children grown up, yet lived in his father's house, and was subject to him. Promotion comes not by chance nor human probabilities, but God is the Judge.

**II.** A great event arising from small occurrences. How low does the history begin! Having to trace Saul to the crown, we find him first employed as meanly as any we meet with called out to preferment.

**1.** Saul's father sends him with one of his servants to seek some asses that he had lost. It may be they had no way then to give public notice of such a number of asses strayed or stolen out of the grounds of Kish the Benjamite. A very good law they had to oblige men to bring back an ox or an ass that went astray, but it is to be feared that was, as other good laws, neglected and forgotten. It is easy to observe here that those who have must expect to lose, that it is wisdom to look after what is lost, that no man should think it below him to know the state of his flocks, that children should be

forward to serve their parents' interests. Saul readily went to *seek his father's asses*, v. 3, 4. His taking care of the asses is to be ascribed, not so much to the humility of his spirit as to the plainness and simplicity of those times. But his obedience to his father in it was very commendable. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business*, and dutiful to his superiors, willing to stoop and willing to take pains? he does as Saul stand fair for preferment. The servant of Kish would be faithful only as a servant, but Saul as a son, in his own business, and therefore he was sent with him. Saul and his servants travelled far (probably on foot) in quest of the asses, but in vain: they found them not. He missed of what he sought, but had no reason to complain of the disappointment, for he met with the kingdom, which he never dreamed of.

**2.** When he could not find them, he determined to return to his father (v. 5), in consideration of his father's tender concern for him, being apprehensive that if they staid out any longer his aged father would begin to fear, as Jacob concerning Joseph, that an evil beast had devoured them or some mischief had befallen them; he will *leave caring for the asses*, as much as he was in care about them, and *will take thought for us*. Children should take care that they do nothing to grieve or frighten their parents, but be tender of their tenderness.

**3.** His servant proposed (for, it should seem, he had more religion in him than his master) that, since they were now at Ramah, they should call on Samuel, and take his advice in this important affair. Observe here,

**(1.)** They were close by the city where Samuel lived, and that put it into their heads to consult him (v. 6): *There is in this city a man of God*. Note, Wherever we are we should improve our opportunities of acquainting ourselves with those that are wise and good. But there are many that will consult a man of God, if he comes in their way, that would not go a step out of their way to get wisdom.

**(2.)** The servant spoke very respectfully concerning Samuel, though he had not personal knowledge of him, but by common fame only: *He is a man of God, and an honourable man*. Note, Men of God are honourable men, and should be so in our eyes. Acquaintance with the things of God, and serviceableness to the kingdom of God, put true honour upon men, and make them great. This was the honour of Samuel, as a man of God, that *all he saith comes surely to pass*. This was observed concerning him when he

was a young prophet (<sup><HB></sup>1 Samuel 3:19), *God did let none of his words fall to the ground*; and still it held true.

**(3.)** They agreed to consult him concerning *the way that they should go; peradventure he can show us*. All the use they would make of the man of God was to be advised by him whether they should return home, or, if there were any hopes of finding the asses, which way they must go next — a poor business to employ a prophet about! Had they said, “Let us give up the asses for lost, and, now that we are so near the man of God, let us go and learn from him the good knowledge of God, let us consult him how we may order our conversations aright, and enquire the law at his mouth, since we may not have such another opportunity, and then we shall not lose our journey” — the proposal would have been such as became Israelites; but to make prophecy, that glory of Israel, serve so mean a turn as this, discovered too much what manner of spirit they were of. Note, Most people would rather be told their fortune than told their duty, how to be rich than how to be saved. If it were the business of the men of God to direct for the recovery of lost asses, they would be consulted much more than they are now that it is their business to direct for the recovery of lost souls; so preposterous is the care of most men!

**(4.)** Saul was thoughtful what present they should bring to the man of God, what fee they should give him for his advice (v. 7): *What shall we bring the man?* They could not present him, as Jeroboam's wife did Ahijah, with loaves and cakes (<sup><HB></sup>1 Kings 14:3), for their bread was spent; but the servant bethought himself that he had in his pocket the fourth part of a shekel, about seven-pence halfpenny in value, and *that* he would give to the man of God to direct them, v. 8. “That will do,” says Saul; “*let us go,*” v. 10. Some think that when Saul talked of giving Samuel a fee he measured him by himself, or by his sons, as if he must be hired to do an honest Israelite a kindness, and was like the false prophets, that *divined for money*, <sup><HB></sup>Micah 3:11. He came to him as a fortune-teller, rather than as a prophet, and therefore thought the fourth part of a shekel was enough to give him. But it rather seems to be agreeable to the general usage of those times, as it is to natural equity, that those who sowed spiritual things should reap not only eternal things from him that employs them, but temporal things from those for whom they are employed. Samuel needed not their money, nor would he have denied them his advice if they had not brought it (it is probable, when he had it, he gave it to the poor); but they brought it to him as a token of their respect and the value they put upon his

office; nor did he refuse it, for they were able to give it, and, though it was but little, it was the widow's mite. But Saul, as he never thought of going to the man of God till the servant proposed it, so, it should seem, he mentioned the want of a present as an objection against their going; he would not own that he had money in his pocket, but, when the servant generously offered to be at the charge, then, "Well, said," says Saul; "come, let us go." Most people love a cheap religion, and like it best when they can devolve the expense of it on others.

(5.) The historian here takes notice of the name then given to the prophets: they called them *Seers*, or *seeing men* (v. 9), not but that the name *prophet* was then used, and applied to such persons, but that of seers was more in use. Note, Those that are prophets must first be seers; those who undertake to speak to others of the things of God must have an insight into those things themselves.

## 1 SAMUEL 9:11-17

### SAUL INTRODUCED TO SAMUEL

Here,

**I.** Saul, by an ordinary enquiry, is directed to Samuel, v. 11-14. Gibeah of Saul was not twenty miles from Ramah where Samuel dwelt, and was near to Mizpeh where he often judged Israel, and yet, it seems, Saul had lived so very privately, and had taken so little notice of public affairs, that he had never seen Samuel, for when he met him (v. 18) he did not know him, so that there was no cause to suspect any secret compact or collusion between them in this matter. *I knew him not*, says John Baptist concerning Christ, ~~John~~ John 1:31. Yet I do not think it any commendation to Saul that he was a stranger to Samuel. However,

**1.** The maid-servants of Ramah, whom they met with at the places of drawing water, could give him and his servant intelligence concerning Samuel; and very particular they were in their directions, v. 12, 13. We should always be ready to give what assistance we can to those that are enquiring after God's prophets, and to further them in their enquiries. Even the maid-servants could tell them,

(1.) That there was a sacrifice that day in the high place, it being either an ordinary festival or an extraordinary day of prayer and thanksgiving, with which sacrifices were joined. The tabernacle being deprived of the ark, the altar there had not now the reputation it formerly had, nor were they confined to it, as they would be when God had again chosen a place to put his name in; and therefore now other places were allowed. Samuel had built an altar at Ramah (<sup><0077></sup>1 Samuel 7:17), and here we have him making use of that altar.

(2.) That Samuel came that day to the city, either from his circuit or from his country seat. He was such a public person that his movements were generally known.

(3.) That this was just the time of their meeting to feast before the Lord upon the sacrifice: “About this time you will find him in the street going up to the high place.” They knew the hour of the solemn feast.

(4.) That the people would not eat till Samuel came, not only because he was the worthiest person, and they ought in good manners to stay for him, and he was, as some think, the maker of this feast, the sacrifice being offered at his charge and upon his account; but because, as a man of God, whoever made the feast, *he* must bless the sacrifice, that is, those parts of the sacrifice which they feasted upon, which may be considered,

[1.] As a common meal, and so this is an instance of the great duty of craving a blessing upon our meat before we partake of it. We cannot expect benefit from our food without that blessing, and we have no reason to expect that blessing if we do not pray for it. Thus we must give glory to God as our benefactor, and own our dependence upon him and our obligations to him. Or,

[2.] As a religious assembly. When the sacrifice was offered, which was the ceremony, Samuel blessed it, that is, he prayed over it, and offered up spiritual sacrifices with it, which were the substance; and afterwards, when the holy duties were performed, they did eat. Let the soul first be served. The feast upon the sacrifice being a sacred rite, it was requisite that it should in a particular manner be blessed, as is the Christian eucharist. They feasted in token of their reconciliation to God by virtue of the sacrifice, and their participation of the benefits of it; and Samuel blessed the feast, that is, he prayed to God to grace the solemnity with his special presence, that it might answer those great ends. Bishop Hall observes what a particular

account those maid-servants could give of the usages of those sacred feasts, and infers from it that, “where there is the practice and example of piety in the better sort, there will be a reflection of it upon the meanest. It is no small advantage to live in religious places; for we shall be much to blame if all goodness fall beside us.”

2. Saul and his servant followed the directions given them, and very opportunely met Samuel going to the high place, the synagogue of the city, v. 14. This seemed purely accidental, but the divine providence ordered it for the forwarding of this great event. The wise God serves very great and certain purposes by very small and casual occurrences. A sparrow falls not to the ground without our Father.

II. Samuel, by an extraordinary revelation, is informed concerning Saul. He was a seer, and therefore must see this in a way peculiar to himself.

1. God had told him, the day before, that he would, at this time, send him the man that should serve the people of Israel for such a king as they wished to have, *like all the nations*, v. 15, 16. He *told him in his ear*, that is, privately, by a secret whisper to his mind, or perhaps by a still small voice, some soft and gentle sounds conveyed to his ear, probably when he was praying in secret for direction in that and other affairs of the nation. He had spoken *in the ears of the Lord* (<sup><OR2></sup>1 Samuel 8:21), and now God *spoke in his ear*, in token of friendship and familiarity, for *he revealeth his secret to his servants the prophets*, as secrets in their ear, <sup><OR7></sup>Amos 3:7. God told him before, that it might not be a surprise to him; and perhaps it was in expectation of it that he appointed the feast and the sacrifice, for the imploring of God's blessing upon this great and important affair, though he might keep the particular occasion in his own breast, God having only told it to him in his ear. The Hebrew phrase is, *He uncovered the ear of Samuel*, to which some allude for the explication of the way of God's revealing himself to us; he not only speaks, but *uncovers our ear*. We have naturally a covering on our ears, so that we perceive not what God says (<sup><OR14></sup>Job 33:14), but, when God will manifest himself to a soul, he uncovers the ear, says, *Ephphratha, Be opened*; he takes *the veil from off the heart*, <sup><OR16></sup>2 Corinthians 3:16. Though God had, in displeasure, granted their request for a king, yet here he speaks tenderly of Israel; for even in *wrath he remembers mercy*.



(1.) He calls them again and again his people; though a peevish and provoking people, yet mine still.

(2.) He sends them a man to be captain over them, that they might not be a body without a head, and to *save them out of the hand of the Philistines*, which perhaps was more than many of them aimed at in desiring a king.

(3.) He does it with a gracious respect to them and to their cry: *I have looked upon my people, and their cry has come unto me*. He gratified them with what they cried for, as the tender mother humours the froward child, lest it should break its heart. And (as bishop Patrick observes), though he would not hear their cry to relieve them against the oppression of their kings (~~GENES~~ 1 Samuel 8:18), yet he was so gracious as to make those kings instruments of their deliverance from the oppression of their neighbours, which was more than they had reason to expect.

2. When Saul came up towards him in the street God again whispered Samuel in the ear (v. 17): *Behold the man whom I spoke to thee of!* Saul being a man of unusual stature, it is natural to think that Samuel fixed his eye upon him at a distance, and perhaps looked the more wistfully towards him because the hour had now come when God would send him the man that should be king of Israel, and he fancied this might be he; but, that he might be fully satisfied, God told him expressly, *That is the man that shall restrain* (for magistrates are heirs of restraint) *my people Israel*.

## ~~GENES~~ 1 SAMUEL 9:18-27

### SAUL ENTERTAINED BY SAMUEL

Providence having at length brought Samuel and Saul together, we have here an account of what passed between them in the gate, at the feast, and in private.

**I.** In the gate of the city; passing through that, Saul found him (v. 18), and, little thinking that he was Samuel himself, asked him the way to Samuel's house: *Tell me where the seer's house is;* for there he expected to find him. See how mean a figure Samuel made, though so great a man: he took not any state, had no attendants, no ensigns of honour carried before him, nor any distinguishing habit, no, not when he went to church, but appeared, in

all respects, so much a common person that Saul, though he was told he should meet him, never suspected that it was he, but, as if he looked more like a porter than a prophet, asked him the way to the seer's house. Thus is great worth oftentimes hidden under a very despicable appearance. Samuel knew that it was not the house, but the man, that he wanted, and therefore answered him, "*I am the seer, the person you enquire for,*" v. 19. Samuel knew him before he knew Samuel; thus, though all that are called to the kingdom of glory are brought to know God, yet first they were known of him, <sup>(40B)</sup>Galatians 4:9. Now,

**1.** Samuel obliges him to stay with him till the next day. The greatest part of this day had been spent in sacrificing, and the rest of it was to be spent in holy feasting, and therefore, "*To-morrow I will let thee go, and not sooner; now go up before me to the high place; let us pray together, and then we will talk together.*" Saul had nothing in his mind but to find his asses, but Samuel would take him off from that care, and dispose him to the exercises of piety; and therefore bids him *go to the high place*, and go before him, because, it may be, some business obliged Samuel to call by the way.

**2.** He satisfies him about his asses (v. 20): *Set not thy mind on them, be not in further care about them; they are found.* By this Saul might perceive that he was a prophet, that he could give him an answer to the enquiry which he had not yet made, and tell him what he thought; and thence he might infer, if a man of God can do this, much more doth God himself *understand our thoughts afar off.*

**3.** He surprises him with an intimation of preferment before him: "*On whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not a king that they are set upon, and there is never a man in Israel that will suit them as thou wilt.*" It does not appear that the country had as yet any eye upon him for the government, because they had left it wholly to God to choose for them; but such a one as he they wished for, and his advancement would be the advancement of his family and relations, as Abner, and others.

**4.** To this strange intimation Saul returns a very modest answer, v. 21. Samuel, he thought, did but banter him, because he was a tall man, but a very unlikely man to be a king; for, though the historian says (v. 1) his father was a *mighty man of power*, yet he himself speaks diminishingly of his tribe and family. "Benjamin, the youngest of Jacob's sons, when grown up to be a man, was called a *little one* (<sup>(41B)</sup>Genesis 44:20); that tribe was

diminished by the war of Gibeah; and *I am a Benjamite, my family the least,*” probably a younger house, not in any place of honour or trust, no, not in their own tribe. Gideon had expressed himself thus, <sup><0015></sup>Judges 6:15. A humble disposition is a good presage of preferment.

**II.** At the public feast; thither Samuel took him and his servant. Though the advancement of Saul would be the deposing of Samuel, yet that good prophet was so far from envying him, or bearing him any ill-will for it, that he was the first and forwardest man to do him honour, in compliance with the will of God. If this be the man whom God has chosen, though he be none of Samuel's particular friends or confidants, yet he is heartily welcome to his table, nay, to his bosom. We may suppose it was no unseasonable kindness to Saul to give him a meal's meat, for it seems, by what he said (v. 7), that all their meat and money were spent. But this was not all. Samuel treats him not as a common person, but a person of quality and distinction, to prepare both him and the people for what was to follow. Two marks of honour he put upon him: —

**1.** He set him *in the best place*, as more honourable than any other of the guests, to whom he said, *Give this man place*, <sup><0141></sup>Luke 14:9. Though we may suppose the magistrates were there, who in their own city would claim precedence, yet the master of the feast made Saul and his servant too (who, if Saul was a king, must be respected as his prime minister of state) *sit in the chief place*, v. 22. Note, Civil respects must be paid to those who in civil things have the precedence given them by the divine providence.

**2.** He presented him with the *best dish*, which, having had notice from heaven the day before of his coming (v. 16), he had designed for him, and ordered the cook to secure for him, when he gave orders for inviting the guests and making preparation for them. And what should this precious dish be, which was so very carefully reserved for the king-elect? One would expect it should be something very nice and delicate. No, it was a plain shoulder of mutton (v. 23, 24). The right shoulder of the peace-offerings was to be given to the priests, who were God's receivers (<sup><0072></sup>Leviticus 7:32); the next in honour to that was the left shoulder, which probably was always allotted to those that sat at the upper end of the table, and was wont to be Samuel's mess at other times; so that his giving it to Saul now was an implicit resignation of his place to him. Some observe a significancy in this dish. The shoulder denotes strength, and the breast, which some think went with it, denotes affection: he that was king had *the*

*government upon his shoulder*, for he must bear the weight of it; and the people in his bosom, for they must be dear to him.

**III.** What passed between them in private. Both that evening and early the next morning Samuel communed with Saul upon the flat roof of the house, v. 25, 26. We may suppose Samuel now told him the whole story of the people's desire of a king, the grounds of their desire, and God's grant of it, to all which Saul, living very privately, was perhaps a stranger; he satisfied him that he was the person God had pitched upon for the government; and whereas Saul would object that Samuel was in possession, and he would not for all the world take it out of his hands, Samuel, we may suppose, gave him all the assurance he could desire of his willingness to resign. Early in the morning he sent him towards home, brought him part of the way, bade him send his servant before, that they might be private (v. 27), and there, as we find in the beginning of the next chapter, he anointed him, and therein showed him the *word of the Lord*, that is, gave him full satisfaction that he was the person chosen to be king, for he would not jest with that sacred rite. It is by the *unction of the Holy Ghost* that Christ, the great prophet, *shows us the word of the Lord*. ~~1~~ 1 John 2:27, *the same anointing teacheth you of all things*.