FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 9

*Samuel Anoints Saul*

**There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. 2 He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others. 3 Now the donkeys belonging to Saul’s father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, “Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys.” 4 So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them. 5 When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, “Come, let’s go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us.” 6 But the servant replied, “Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let’s go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.” 7 Saul said to his servant, “If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?” 8 The servant answered him again. “Look,” he said, “I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I will give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take.” 9 (Formerly in Israel, if a man went to inquire of God, he would say, “Come, let us go to the seer,” because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.) 10 “Good,” Saul said to his servant. “Come, let’s go.” So they set out for the town where the man of God was. 11 As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and they asked them, “Is the seer here?” 12 “He is,” they answered. “He’s ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place. 13 As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward, those who are invited will eat. Go up now; you should find him about this time.” 14 They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place. 15 Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel: 16 “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.” 17 When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.” 18 Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, “Would you please tell me where the seer’s house is?” 19 “I am the seer,” Samuel replied. “Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is in your heart. 20 As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father’s family?” 21 Saul answered, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?” 22 Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited—about thirty in number. 23 Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the piece of meat I gave you, the one I told you to lay aside.” 24 So the cook took up the leg with what was on it and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said, “Here is what has been kept for you. Eat, because it was set aside for you for this occasion, from the time I said, ‘I have invited guests.’ ” And Saul dined with Samuel that day. 25 After they came down from the high place to the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house. 26 They rose about daybreak and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Get ready, and I will send you on your way.” When Saul got ready, he and Samuel went outside together. 27 As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go on ahead of us”—and the servant did so—“but you stay here awhile, so that I may give you a message from God.”**

**Chs 9–10** Although the story in chs 9–10 seems to flow, there may have been several years between each event—particularly when Saul returned to the home of his father. He is identified as a “young man” (9:2), yet that would have implied he was mature enough to serve in the military and also marry. By ch 13, Saul’s son Jonathan is capable of military leadership. (TLSB)

**9:1** *a man of wealth*. Lit, “a mighty man of power,” a noble warrior. Saul’s well-to-do father has a respectable lineage. (TLSB)

**9:2** *young man*. Hbr refers to a mature man in prime of life and capable of bearing arms. Good-looking and grand of stature, Saul presented a kingly visage. (TLSB)

*a head taller than any of the others.* Physically of kingly stature (see 10:23). (CSB)

Hbr idiom; a “head taller” than anyone else. (TLSB)

**9:3** *donkeys … were lost.* Saul is introduced as a donkey wrangler sent in search of donkeys that had strayed from home—perhaps symbolizing Saul and the rebellious people who had asked for a king (cf. Isa 1:3). David would be introduced as a shepherd caring for his father’s flock and later pictured as the shepherd over the Lord’s flock (2Sa 5:2; 7:7–8; Ps 78:71–72). (CSB)

Donkeys were valued as beasts of burden and for agricultural operations, particularly for threshing and plowing. Wealth was often tied to the number of donkeys owned (Ezr 2:66–67; Ne 7:68–69). (TLSB)

**9:4–5** Lands located strategically around the hill country of Benjamin and Ephraim. Hill country of Ephraim is north of Saul’s home in Gibeah. Perhaps Saul and his servant started near Gilgal, proceeding northwest to the land of Shual (13:17), and they may even have gone to Jabneh (2Ch 26:6) before arriving at Ramah. They made a circuit, returning to Zuph*,* most likely the area of Ramathaim-zophim (town of Ramah in district of Zuph), Samuel’s hometown (cf 1:1). (TLSB)

**9:6** *the servant replied.* Saul’s ignorance of Samuel is indicative of his character. (CSB)

*this town.* Probably Ramah (see 7:17), the hometown of Samuel, to which he had just returned from a journey (see v. 12; 7:16). (CSB)

*man of God.* See note on 2:27; here a reference to Samuel. (CSB)

Used throughout the OT for a professional holy man. Indirectly, Samuel is identified as a prophet (or “seer,” v 9). Saul does not seem to be aware of Samuel’s work, which could say something about Saul’s spiritual life up to this time. Saul’s servant believes Samuel may help, since his words always come to pass (Dt 18:22; 1Sm 3:19). (TLSB)

*everything he says comes true.* See 3:19 and note. (CSB)

**9:7** *what can we give the man?* Other examples of gifts offered to prophets are found in 1Ki 14:3; 2Ki 4:42; 5:15–16; 8:8–9. Whether Samuel accepted the gift and whether he was dependent on such gifts for a livelihood are not clear. Elisha refused the gift of Naaman (2Ki 5:16). In later times false prophets adjusted their message to the desires of those who supported them (1Ki 22:6, 8, 18; Mic 3:5, 11). (CSB)

Payment for Samuel’s responsibilities, similar to honorariums paid to speakers. Such gifts were occasionally abused and served as bribes to obtain a more favorable message (cf Nu 22:7). (TLSB)

**9:8** *a quarter of a shekel of silver.* See NIV text note. Before the use of coins, gold or silver was weighed out for each monetary transaction (see 13:21; Job 28:15). The value of that amount of silver in Saul’s time is not known. (CSB)

Probably equivalent to a quarter of a day’s wage. It was not much money, but it showed appropriate respect for services requested. (TLSB)

*shekel*. Not coins. Stone weights with one or more letters of “shekel” engraved on them have been found throughout Israel. There may have been different systems of shekel measurement, based on different locations. At Eshtemoa near Hebron (Judah), five pottery jugs were found containing odd-shaped silver ingots, c 100 shekels in weight. They were composed largely of melted-down jewelry. See p cx. A ram could be purchased with shekels (Lv 5:15), and a half-shekel was used for sanctuary worship dues (Ex 30:13). (TLSB)

**9:9** *the prophet of today used to be called a seer.* There was no essential difference between a seer and a prophet. The person popularly designated as a prophet at the time of the writing of 1,2 Samuel was termed a seer in the time of Saul. This need not mean that the term “prophet” was unknown in the time of Saul or that the term “seer” was unknown in later times (see Isa 30:10). The reference is to popular usage. (CSB)

Highlights popular usage of terms for this important office. Hipp: “One who sets forth in detail things to be, was rightly judged a prophet. Wherefore prophets were with good reason called from the very first ‘seers’ ” (*ANF* 5:205). A faithful seer (Hbr *chozeh*, “visionary”; 2Sm 24:11; 1Ch 29:29) or prophet primarily served as God’s messenger (Ex 4:15–16). He might, indeed, predict the future, but usually those predictions were given in the context of a larger message to the people. E.g., Micah’s prediction of Christ’s birth in Bethlehem (5:2) or Zechariah’s “Palm Sunday” prediction (9:9) are recorded in the larger contexts of the Lord’s promises to rescue His people. (TLSB)

*seer*. Hbr *ro’eh*, simply “one who sees.” Originally, one who could “see” into the future and offer help (a similar form of the word is used of God in Gn 16:13). (TLSB)

**9:12** *high place.* See Lev 26:30. After entrance into the promised land, the Israelites often followed the custom of the Canaanites in building local altars on hills. (At this time the central sanctuary was not functioning because the ark of God was separated from the tabernacle; Shiloh had been destroyed, and the priestly family, after the death of Eli’s sons, was apparently still inactive.) In later times, worship at these “high places” provided a means for the entrance of pagan practices into Israel’s religious observances and, for this reason, it was condemned (see note on 1Ki 3:2). (CSB)

Usually associated with illicit pagan deities (2Ki 18:4), yet here refers to appropriate altar area in the Israelite community. When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, they followed the Canaanite custom of building altars on nearby hills or mounds (cf Gn 22:2), probably replacing pagan Canaanite altars with altars dedicated to Yahweh. The central worship site in Shiloh had been destroyed, so the ark of the covenant may have had no regular resting place. The priestly family was not active after Eli’s sons died, so local communities continued their own practices, even setting up their own priesthood (cf Jgs 17:10). These sites, however, allowed for the entrance of idolatrous practices and, therefore, were frequently condemned (see note, 1Ki 3:1–2; cf 2Ki 23:8–10, 19–20). Luth: “In former times, the ceremonies conducted in some of the high places did not displease God, such as the great altar of Gibeon in I Kings 3[:4], upon which Solomon sacrificed, and the high place where Samuel lived and anointed Saul [I Sam. 9:25, 10:1]; because they lived in faith and did all things in faith” (AE 36:221). (TLSB)

**9:13** *he must bless the sacrifice.* Samuel presided over the sacrificial meal (see 1:4; 2:13–16), at which he gave a prayer, probably similar to those referred to in the NT (see Mt 26:26–27; Jn 6:11, 23; 1Ti 4:3–5). (CSB)

The Lord commanded that sacrifices be made for specific occasions. Samuel is likely carrying on the role he held under Eli in the tabernacle. Samuel was called on to preside over and offer a prayer of blessing upon the sacrifice, indicating that the sacrifice conformed to God’s will. This is the only reference to the blessing of a sacrifice in the OT. (TLSB)

**9:16** *Anoint him.* Priests were also anointed (see Ex 29:7; 40:12–15; Lev 4:3; 8:12), but from this point in the OT it is usually the king who is referred to as “the anointed of the Lord” (see note on 2:10; cf. 12:3; 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16; 2Sa 1:14, 16; 19:21; 22:51; 23:1; Ps 2:2, 6; but see also Zec 4:14). Anointing signifies separation to the Lord for a particular task and divine equipping for the task (see v. 6; 16:13; Isa 61:1). (CSB)

*leader.* The Hebrew for this word indicates one designated (here by the Lord) to be the chief in rank. It served as a useful term to ease the transition between the time of the judges and that of the kings. (CSB)

Lit, “one who has been announced,” but is not yet king. In a sense, Saul is still preparing for his kingly office, the prince-designate or crown prince. (TLSB)

*Philistines.* See note on 7:13. (CSB)

*their cry has come to Me*. God’s message to Samuel echoes Ex 2–3, where the cries of the Israelites in bondage resulted in the divine mandate given to Moses to set the Lord’s people free. Saul would also be a “savior” from the Philistine subjugation. TLSB)

**9:17** *restrain*. Though usually considered a negative action, it indicates a special form of ruling by keeping in check or within bounds through the Lord’s divine regulations. (TLSB)

**9:19** *I am the seer*. Samuel readily accepts this title for his prophetic office. He promises to tell not only the future but also what Saul himself desired in his heart. (TLSB)

**9:20** *all the desire of Israel.* A reference to Israel’s desire for a king. (CSB)

Or, “And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you?” Israel’s hopes are set on Saul’s future; what are a few donkeys in comparison? This also suggests that every desirable thing, whether wealth or power, will be Saul’s. (TLSB)

**9:21** *smallest tribe … least of all the clans.* Saul’s origins were among the humblest in Israel (Benjamin was the last of Jacob’s sons, and the tribe had been greatly reduced in the time of the judges; see Jdg 20:46–48). His elevation to king shows that God “raises the poor” (2:8), which is one of the central themes running throughout Samuel. God’s use of the powerless to promote his kingdom in the world is a common feature in the Biblical testimony and underscores the truth that his kingdom is not of this world. (CSB)

*clan*. Several related families who lived in close proximity. Although Saul’s father may have been powerful (or wealthy), he may have been an anomaly in an otherwise unremarkable clan. *humblest*. Samuel recognized true humility in Saul. Certainly, God uses the humble and the lowly (e.g., Hannah’s song in 2:8 and Mary’s song in Lk 1:46–55). This is a central theme throughout Scripture, as the Lord uses the powerless and weak to promote His work in the world (1Co 1:26–31). This humility is appropriate in Saul’s case, due to some inglorious episodes in his tribe’s history (Jgs 19–20). (TLSB)

**9:22** *the hall*. Main building this clan used for larger assemblies and social occasions (dining hall). (TLSB)

**9:24** Throughout biblical times, eating was a sign of community acceptance and a mark of hospitality. (TLSB)

*leg.* The Hebrew for this word specifies the thigh, which was normally reserved for the Lord’s consecrated priest (see Ex 29:22, 27; Lev 7:32–33, 35; Nu 6:20; 18:18). The presentation of this choice piece of the sacrificial animal to Saul was a distinct honor and anticipated his being designated the Lord’s anointed. (CSB)

Choicest cut of meat, reserved for honored guests or more properly for the Lord’s consecrated priest (Nu 6:20; 18:18). Samuel’s deference to Saul indicates to all assembled that Saul is being given special regard. Saul must have been dumbfounded at the honor and distinction. (TLSB)

**9:25** *high place*. Located at the summit of the city of Ramah, where Samuel lived, just north of Jerusalem. Some scholars suggest there were possibly two hills, one on which the city was built and another nearby higher hill for the altar area. (TLSB)

*a bed was spread*. Saul would sleep on specially prepared straw on the roof of the house. In the dry summer months in Israel, people often slept on housetops to catch cool evening breezes. (TLSB)

**9:27** Samuel wants to speak to Saul in private; there also seems to be a ritual significance to this action. Saul’s servant is to go ahead, and Samuel would provide a message to Saul that would have great significance: a revelation. (TLSB)

**Ch 9** While pursuing mundane things, Saul is stopped and anointed as Israel’s first king. Under trivial circumstances stand momentous realities. The Lord’s use of life’s circumstances is beyond our expectations. He shows us His plans for us (Jer 29:11), which ultimately are fulfilled in Jesus Christ (2Co 1:17–20). The events of our lives are never accidental but always providential. • Give me the confidence of faith to look beyond the petty concerns of my daily life, Lord. Especially as I gather for worship with my fellow sisters and brothers, let me see Your divine and gracious will for me. Amen. (TLSB)