

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Chapter 9

### *Saul Chosen to Be King*

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. 2 And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people. 3 Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys." 4 And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them. 5 When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us." 6 But he said to him, "Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go." 7 Then Saul said to his servant, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" 8 The servant answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way." 9 (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come, let us go to the seer," for today's "prophet" was formerly called a seer.) 10 And Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was. 11 As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, "Is the seer here?" 12 They answered, "He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. 13 As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately." 14 So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place. 15 Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: 16 "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me." 17 When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people." 18 Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Tell me where is the house of the seer?" 19 Samuel answered Saul, "I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. 20 As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?" 21 Saul answered, "Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?" 22 Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons. 23 And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Put it aside.'" 24 So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests."

**So Saul ate with Samuel that day. 25 And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep. 26 Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Up, that I may send you on your way.” So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. 27 As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of 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** *behold there is.* Saul’s ignorance of Samuel is indicative of his character. (CSB)

*this city.* 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.* 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)

**9:7** *what can we bring 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.* 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** *prophet...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. (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.” 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)

*prince over my people.* 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)

*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** *desirable in 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)