

# 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16

Intro June 29, 2008 Providential Politics

Are you prepared for the next round of politics? If you've survived the pugnacious primaries are you ready for the polemics of the conventions, candidates posturing to garner the sufficient votes? As you make a decision this year from the variety of candidates from which to choose, is there a grid by which you should think about this process?

I'm not going to discuss for whom you should decide. If you've been at Cornerstone any length of time, you will know that I do not step foot in that arena. I will not compromise the proclamation of the good news of Christ to promote a candidate or political party.

Yet, this area is not neutral and matters greatly to God. My goal is never to tell you what to think in this area, but how to think. What truths does God's Word give us to digest what takes place in His world, and in particular, in the US in 2008?

Earlier I read from Romans 13, a passage that both comforts and confuses believers. At the heart of this passage is God's sovereignty over all political structures. All authority is derived from God and serves at God's behest. Politics is about providence.

We define providence as God's most holy, wise and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions. So in Romans 13 we are told that God's governance of his universe goes down to our government, our leaders, who are His servants. Does this then place these servants above critique? 1 Samuel 9-10 will give us some help here. The story describes the choosing of Israel's first king, a process that shows God's providential hand in each step, but a process that allows us to see the fallenness of our world and our leaders.

Again we have a lengthy passage that I will read in segments as we unpack this story. Up to this point we saw the consistent failure of Israel to govern themselves. The elders assess the wretched conditions of their times, but again and again are inept to set the people on the right path. Leaders consistently raise messed-up kids who should not rule.

Israel now clamors for a king. They will not trust God's mercy to govern them as He had up to this point. Instead, they want a king like the other nations. The system they have is so full of sin they're convinced that what others have will work better.

Samuel knew what the people asked for was reprehensible, for the request set God on the shelf. Yet God gave them what they sought, for despite the sinful nature of their request, God would show them that only He could be the king they so desperately needed.

But in this process notice how God is intimately involved, how the leader God chooses is far from perfect, and that, in the end all this drives us to trust God and not the process we think best by which we are governed. READ 1 Samuel 9:1-6

## SAUL LOOKS LIKE A LEADER

### He comes from a fine family

With the simple lineage we meet a new character: "There was a man of Benjamin." But that intro serves also as a warning. During the time of the Judges, the name Benjamin was not always positive. The story of Ruth presented the Benjamites well, but the end of Judges tells the sordid tale of perversion and near genocide.

Yet Kish was a man of wealth. He came from the right side of the camel tracks, whose possessions spoke well of God's blessing on his family.

But the story is not about him. It is about his son, Saul. The mere mention of his name would have perked the interest of the Hebrew reader, his name tells us what will happen.

Saul is a form of the verb *to ask*. The elders of Israel asked for a king and next we are introduced to one whose name means *Asked For*.

### He comes with a fine physique

Saul was no ordinary boy. He was tall, dark, and handsome...and rich. His stature accentuates his good looks. He was head and shoulders taller than any other. Studies today confirm that height has advantages, as increased height in corporate America increases one's opportunity for advancement and pay.<sup>1</sup> It looks like this guy will make a great king!

This height fixation is not just a passing interest, as though he'd be a great forward for the Hebrew Hoops B-ball team. Remember what the people wanted, a king like the nations. What characteristic of those other nations put fear into the hearts of the Jews when they entered the Promised Land? The Nephilim were in the land. Now they have one of their own.

### **He comes unexpectedly**

What we'd expect next is some heroic task for him to prove his virility. Some Herculean mission to show all Israel that this is the man for the throne. But what do we have, something as mundane as a son helping his father by locating lost donkeys. It appears kings are born in crucibles such as these. But what we see next is someone unlikely to take on the mantle of a monarch.

## **SAUL LOOKS LOST**

### **He's lost looking for his father's donkeys**

V4 lists the region they sought these donkeys, but to no avail. Saul is about to give up; concerned his father may be worried more about a lost son than lost donkeys. But his inability to retrieve errant asses is the least of his shortcomings. For all his positive qualities, we begin to see that pretty boy Saul has the spiritual depth of a rock. Yet, at every turn, notice how God works.

### **He's lost as to what to do**

Saul is ready to give up, but his servant has an idea: there is a man of God in the city. We glimpse Saul's blindness and God's providence. They haven't traveled all that far, encircling their home turf.

The servant knows something Saul does not. There is a first hint of spiritual impotence in this man who would be king. Saul is unaware of the Judge of Israel, oblivious to the one who provided spiritual leadership in the dark time, who lived only a few miles away. The servant knew what to do, Saul didn't. Yet, by chance, they find themselves in the perfect place.

Saul doesn't want to go, as they have nothing to offer the Seer as a gift. But his servant is prepared. Again, Saul is ill equipped. With gift in hand they go up the hill to the city, only to be meet by young women going down to fetch water (11). To someone with an inkling of literary form would sense something about to happen. Earlier in Israel's history others found their destiny with a circumstantial encounter with maidens carrying watering pails, such as Isaac's wife, Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Jethro's daughters. The reader knows, but not Saul.

There are clues throughout, like the color red in the Sixth Sense, while it happens you don't see it, but upon further review it jumps out at you...Rosebud was a sled!

They inquire whether the Seer is there and they are in luck. He's come (12) to the city and is about to go up to the high place for a sacrificial meal.

Again, Saul is merely looking for lost property. God has told Samuel that a man from Benjamin would arrive and he is to be anointed to be prince over Israel. As Samuel made his way to the high place (17) God revealed more specifically that Saul's the man. (read 15-21)

Samuel sees what is happening. God has worked all this out. Saul on the other hand can't see the Seer (18) standing in front of him. Samuel announces who he is, tells Saul that his donkeys have been found and that he, Saul, is what all Israel have desired to have.

Saul is invited to stay for the meal, given the seat of honor and a specially prepared choice piece of meat. They stay the night and the next day prepares to leave. But through all this Saul appears clueless, but through it all God is at work.

Saul does not come out of this first encounter looking very good. Israel's first king is not painted with patriotic colors we'd expect. He's a clueless piece of eye candy...but God is at work.

Remember the heroes of Scripture are not the characters out in front. Scripture is not to be read as a moral tale, instructing us to be like Saul or to avoid Saul's errors. Rather, the power behind the story is God who will govern his people even through a man like this.

What does this tell us for us today?

Do we have good cause to live in fear of the political process? No. What Romans 13 instructs us, 1 Samuel 9 illustrates. The power behind the politics is not a random process, but God's working all things for His glory. Politics is about providence.

Does this mean then that we disengage? Look at the minutiae of the story, of the servant's quarter shekel, the young women getting water, the those who prepared the meal, each step God used common human working in order to identify a king. God works through the common aspects of our lives, so that we are not to be uninvolved. Providence is about God working through us for His glory.

If this is true on the big scale of kings and leaders, is God any less competent and capable to guide your life today? We really aren't any more with it than Saul. We will not frustrate God's gracious guidance by our dullness. But there is still a warning given.

## **SAUL LOOKS TO GOD'S GUIDANCE**

### **He looks like he'll be king**

The next morning Saul and Samuel leave the town. (Read 10:1-8)

Samuel takes Saul aside to reveal God's word...and it is not about donkeys. Samuel (10:1) takes a flask of oil, pours it on Saul's head, kisses and announces that Saul is prince over God's people, Israel. That he will save them from their enemies. For as dense as Saul may have been, he could not miss what was said and done.

Oil on the head was reserved for the priests (Ex 29:7) as a sign of God's special setting apart of a leader. It was God's claim on a person. The words spoken confirmed this special status. But there was also much said and done that could not be confused.

Oil on the head of a leader signified something else. The words Samuel used likewise clarifies what Saul is and what he is not. Oil was used in Egypt by the Pharaoh for vassal kings who served at Pharaoh's bequest. Saul's status is not declared to be that of a king, but a prince (a leader, someone out in front). At the end of v1, he is a prince over the Lord's heritage, a word that refers to an indisputable possession that can not be conferred to another. God is not surrendering his claim over Israel.

Saul will be king, but he will never be truly a sovereign. He will always serve at the order of God. It is no less for any leader today. Romans 13:4 likewise tells us that the government leaders of Rome were called God's servants. That term, *diaconos*, our word deacon, is used in many western nations as ministers of state. That status remains for all those who govern us today.

### **He looks for the signs of God's favor**

Samuel gives Saul three progressive signs that point to God making him leader of Israel.

- That day he will meet two men by Rachel's tomb. They will confirm the good news that the donkeys are safe, but his father is worried.
- Next he will encounter three men on their way to Bethel, a worship center in Ephraim, carrying food for sacrifice. They will give two loaves of bread, as Saul and the servant had run out of food. This sign will show God's care of Saul.
- Finally they will arrive in Saul's hometown of Gibeath-elohim. There they will meet a band of prophets coming down from worship. The Holy Spirit will rush on Saul and he'll prophesy with them. As those signs are fulfilled, Saul will know that God is with him.

After that, Saul is to meet Samuel at Gilgal, another important place in Israel's history, the entry point into the Promised Land with Joshua and there Samuel will offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

As Saul left, God's promise was fulfilled. He was given a new heart, and all the signs came to pass, the most notable being his joining the prophets in worship. But there is an undercurrent here, a reminder that takes us beyond the finding moral lessons in the life of Saul. Just because God chooses a leader does not mean the leader is flawless, above critique.

There is a fundamental failure in Saul. God certainly guides Saul and the process each step of the way. There is comfort in knowing God's attention to every detail, his leading each step. But we are left with a nagging feeling about this man who will be king. There is something missing.

### **He fails to lead with actions**

In 9:16 God tells Samuel that this man from Benjamin who will be prince over God's people will save God's people from the hand of the Philistines. That is repeated to Saul in 10:1, as he will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. In 10:4, as Saul returns home to Gibeath, notice who is encamped in his own town...Philistines.

The signs given to Saul are not just for a fascinating coincidence. In v7 as these signs are fulfilled, Saul is to do what his hands find to do, for God is with you. That odd statement is

used in Judges 9:33. It is a call to military action against the Philistines. But notice what the passage says in 10:9-13 (READ).

We have the first indicator that something is wrong with this leader. We get a taste of his personal failure to simply obey God. But there is more.

He fails to lead with words

There are two examples of this failure here. First we read of the fulfillment when Saul meets up with the band of prophets coming down the mountain. Saul, the guy who didn't see the Great Seer of his own day is suddenly in the company of Seers. God certainly change him – for now he utters prophecies.

But not everyone is convinced. In v11 when the question is asked with certain amazement “Is Saul among the prophets?” the response is sarcastic. Who’s the father of all this? Is Saul among the prophets? Became a slogan of disbelief.

At best, this response is one of amazement at the seemingly impossible. Or worse, it is utter unbelief at something that is so out of place it is laughable. It is the equivalent of saying: “Is Chris among the athletes?”

How well does Saul do as a prophet? Take a look at 10:14-16. He’s fairly evasive with the words he heard from God. Modesty? Perhaps. But there is a red flag that tells us something is amiss.

Saul’s uncle knew that if Saul spoke to Samuel, some important news must be shared. Notice how in v15-16 the word *tell* is repeated. There is a play on words, as *tell* and *prince* come from the same root. The uncle asks Saul to tell, to be upfront, a leader. Saul speaks the truth, but only partially. He refuses to tell him anything about the kingdom.

Have you ever wondered why is God’s Word so brutal on its own people, showing the warts of the leaders of God’s people?

There is a simple reason – our hope is not found in them. This is not to say that leaders are not servants of God, that they deserve our respect and obedience. Yet, in the end, they are not our saviors. They are servants of God, but they are not God.

There is another who would come and he lead by words and deeds. Jesus Christ did not hold back from proclaiming the kingdom of God. In Mark 1:15 we are told that the call of the gospel goes out because the kingdom of God is at hand.

Our worldly leaders, in government or in the church, will not save us. They will constantly fail. That is no reason to give up on them or the process we call politics or the church. They serve as reminders that there is another, Jesus Christ who has not and will not fail. His leads us through acts of providence in our everyday life. He leads us through His Word. We can trust Him to securely guide us.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald B. Egolf and Lloyd E. Corder, Height differences of low and high job status, female and male corporate employees. Springer Netherlands Volume 24, Numbers 5-6 / March, 1991.