

**1 SAMUEL 9-13 SAUL IS MADE KING; FIRST BLUNDERS**



What a marvelous account we are about to cover! Saul's election as king of Israel is a classic example of how God works with His servants. He often uses an ordinary person to carry out His work. Daniel the prophet expressed it this way, "Blessed be the name of God...for wisdom and might are His...He removes kings and raises up kings...the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men" (Daniel 2:21; 4:17).

This is what happens with the first king of Israel. Saul was from the most insignificant tribe and from a poor family, although his father was a courageous man (1 Sam. 9:1). Nonetheless, God saw in young Saul (his name means "Asked (of God)"), the *potential* to be a good instrument in His hands. Being handsome and very tall, he would also be a striking figure to the people who wanted a king.

So He designed an unassuming way for Saul to meet the prophet Samuel—by miraculously leading some of his father's donkeys to Samuel. As expected, Saul's father sends him after the donkeys, and after many days, he meets Samuel who tells him where the donkeys are. Then Samuel reveals to him that God had planned all of this and had chosen him to be king. He says to him, "And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on you and on all your father's house? And Saul answered, 'Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?'" (1 Sam. 9:20-21).

Before Saul leaves, in a private ceremony ordered by God, Samuel anoints him as king. Thus, as the proverbial mustard seed, God uses an insignificant person to carry out His purposes. Would Saul be up to the challenge? Would he stay humble and obedient to God in such a lofty position? Even God did not know how Saul would respond since it depended on Saul's free will and the choices he would make.

Then Samuel gives Saul three signs and a command to assure him this all came from God. Two men at Rachel's tomb would inform Saul the donkeys had been found. Then three men carrying certain animals by a large tree in Tabor would give him two loaves of bread. Then he would later meet a group of prophets playing instruments and prophesying. He was to join them and God's spirit would enter him, changing him into a more powerful and wise man.

Finally, in the future, he was ordered to wait seven days at Gilgal for Samuel to offer a sacrifice—this last one was a test of obedience.

The three signs were totally fulfilled. Regarding the "sons of the prophets," *The JFB Commentary* mentions, "The company of prophets were the pupils at this seminary, which had probably been instituted by Samuel, and in which the chief branches of education taught were a knowledge of the law, and of psalmody with instrumental music, which is called "prophesying." This meant proclaiming God's words.

Now, as God's spirit enters Saul, we see the biblical principle in action: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). *The JFB Commentary* explains, "God's spirit will endow you with a capacity and disposition to act in a manner far superior to your previous character and habits. Instead of the simplicity, ignorance, and sheepishness of a peasant, you will display an energy, wisdom, and magnanimity worthy of a prince."

When Saul returned home, he kept his being anointed king from everyone, showing a good first step of modesty and discretion.

After Samuel anointed Saul, he assembled the representatives of all Israel at Mizpah, the scene of national meetings. He again chided them for wanting a king, saying, "But you have today rejected your God, who Himself saved you from all your adversities...and you have said to Him, 'No, set a king over us!' Now therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your clans.' ...And when he had caused the tribe of Benjamin...Saul was chosen. But when they sought him, he could not be found. Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, 'Has the man come here yet?' And the Lord answered, 'There he is, hidden among the equipment. So they ran and brought him from there, and when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upward. And Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see him whom the Lord has chosen, that there is no one like him among the people?' So all the people shouted and said, 'Long live the king!' Then Samuel explained to the people the behavior of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. And Saul also went home to Gibeah, and

valiant men went with him, whose hearts God had touched. But some rebels said, 'How can this man save us?' So they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace" (1 Sam. 10:19-27).

Soon, Saul faced his first challenge. An invading army of Ammonites had surrounded the city of Jabesh in Gilead. They were so many that the inhabitants of the city wanted to surrender, but Nahash, the Ammonite leader, was so set on vengeance that he only agreed if they would all have one eye put out. How horrible!

As the *K & D Commentary* points out, "Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, attacked the tribes on the east of the Jordan, no doubt with the intention of enforcing the claim to part of Gilead asserted by his ancestor in the time of Jephthah (Judges 11:13), and besieged Jabesh in Gilead... This answer on the part of Nahash shows unmistakably that he sought to avenge upon the people of Israel the shame of the defeat which Jephthah had inflicted upon the Ammonites (some 90 years before)."

The town people were so desperate that they asked the king for a week to consider the terms. The Ammonite king was so confident of his military superiority that he gave them that time, knowing they would still have to give in. So the inhabitants belatedly sent out a distress signal to Israel, not really expecting much help. But when messengers arrived at Saul's village, God's spirit aroused his courage.

*The Expository Commentary* explains, "Upon hearing the Jabeshites' report, Saul was energized by a powerful accession of God's Spirit. He had already experienced a similar accession earlier, enabling him to 'prophesy.' This time, however, in the tradition of the judges from Othniel to Samson, the Spirit of God filled Saul with divine indignation ('he burned with anger') and empowered him as a military leader. Although the earlier accession had been temporary, this one was somewhat more permanent, apparently lasting until Samuel anointed David to replace Saul as king. Rallying the troops to defend a covenant was a common stipulation in ancient treaties. Like the Levite before him who had issued a call to arms by cutting up his dead concubine and sending the parts to each of the various Israelite tribes, Saul cut two of his oxen into pieces and sent them throughout Israel as a graphic illustration of what would happen to any tribe that failed to commit a contingent of troops. In Saul's energetic appeal the people discerned the

power of God, which inspired them with fear, and impelled them to immediate obedience. Saul and his troops told the messengers to return to Jabesh Gilead and inform its frightened citizens that divine deliverance would come to them the very next day. Confident of victory, the Jabeshites--tongue in cheek--promised the Ammonites that they would surrender to them the following day.

With a brilliant strategy of surprising them at dawn, Saul and his men utterly defeated the Ammonites. Afterwards, some soldiers wanted to put to death those who had despised Saul a few weeks before, but Saul did not allow it, showing his magnanimity.

Samuel then took Saul back to Gilgal to confirm the kingship upon Saul. He had passed the first test with flying colors. Then Samuel basically delegated his powers to Saul, also upholding his integrity and faithfulness before the people. No one could complain about Samuel's righteous reign.

He then told them they would have to heed a king as they had him. He warned them, "If you fear the Lord and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, the both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the Lord your God. However, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then the hand of the Lord will be against you, as it was against your fathers" (1 Sam. 12:14-15).

Afterwards, he performs a miracle to show the people God's power was still in him to have saved them. Yet they instead had chosen a king not as spiritual. Clearly it was going down a religious notch.

"So Samuel called to the Lord, and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And...said to Samuel, 'Pray for your servants to the Lord your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves' (12:18-19).

Yet, instead of being resentful, Samuel consoled them and told them he would still pray for them. This showed his humility, patience and greatness.

So Saul now takes on the reins of government and in just the second year, he makes some devastating blunders. Just as Samuel had warned, Saul expanded his kingship with a large standing army of 3,000 men. Two thousand were directly under his rule and a

thousand under Jonathan, his capable son. He didn't think he needed any more men to protect Israel so he sent the rest home—a foolish move as we will see.

He then orders Jonathan to attack the Philistine garrison in Geba. The Philistines considered this an act of war and bring a huge army to a place called Michmash. Saul's troops are at Gilgal, and when they see the size of the opposition, many begin to desert him. Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal before taking any action and he would come to offer a sacrifice and a blessing from God.

Samuel grew more impatient and scared by the day. "As for Saul, he was still in Gilgal, and all the people followed him trembling. Then he waited seven days, according to the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people scattered from him. So Saul said, 'Bring a burnt offering and a peace offering here to me.' And he offered the burnt offering. Now it happened, as soon as he had finished presenting the burnt offering that Samuel came, and Saul went out to meet him" (13:7-10).

The text in Hebrew indicates that Samuel was waiting in the wings, told by God to do so. This was a test of obedience for Saul—and he utterly failed.

Samuel asked him, "What have you done?" Saul said, 'When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, 'The Philistines will come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the Lord. Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.' And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord...which He commanded you. For now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the Lord commanded you.' Then Samuel arose and went up from Gilgal to Gibeah of Benjamin. And Saul numbered the people present with him, about six hundred men (from 3,000)" (1 Sam. 13:11-15).

This was a great tragedy in the history of Israel. Why was this command so important to obey? *The JFB Commentary* mentions, "Saul, though patriotic enough in his own way, was more ambitious of

gaining the glory of a triumph to himself than ascribing it to God. He did not understand his proper position as king of Israel and although aware of the restrictions under which he held his position, he wished to rule as an autocrat, who possessed absolute power both in civil and sacred things. This occasion was his first trial. Samuel waited till the last day of the seven, in order to put the constitutional character of the king to the test; and, as Saul, in his impatient and passionate haste knowingly transgressed by invading the priest's office and thus showing his unfitness for his high office (as he showed nothing of the faith of Gideon and other Hebrew generals), he incurred a threat of the rejection which his subsequent waywardness confirmed."

*Nelson's Bible Commentary* adds, "Saul lost his kingdom because of his craving for results. He wanted to defeat the Philistines so much that he offered a burnt offering, which it was not his place to do. He was determined to do things in his way and according to his timing rather than God's. So God found a man "after His own heart," a man who would get results, but do so by following God's plans. Actually, getting results is not a leader's main job. The primary task is to create a climate where others can make things happen and accomplish goals. That climate has a variety of dimensions: technical (task-oriented), behavioral (relationship-oriented), political (power-oriented), and spiritual (God-oriented). If a leader concentrates on the immediate task at the expense of the other dimensions, the outcome may be short-term results but long-term losses."

The Philistines sent three bands of raiders to harass the Israelites and hopefully incite them to fight. Then the Bible explains the technological superiority of the Philistines. They had learned to forge iron from the Hittites and held a monopoly in Israel. They charged an outrageous price for any iron tools the Israelites bought and they certainly did not sell any weapons to them. Only Saul and Jonathan possessed such weapons. Older translators did not know what a pim was and wrongly guessed it had to do with sharpening their tools until archaeologists discovered a round monetary weight with the name pim that shed light on this verse. It is another example of the astonishing accuracy of the Bible.