

BaptistWay Press® Premium Commentary

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Studies in Character and the Crown (1 Samuel)

Lesson Four

Appointed and Anointed

Focal Text

1 Samuel 9:1-4, 15-21; 10:1, 9-24

Background

1 Samuel 8-10

Main Idea

God chose Saul to serve as the first king of Israel.

Question to Explore

Who or what occupies the throne of your life?

Quick Read

God longs to rule as the king of our lives. As God reigned in Saul's life, the nation flourished and prospered. If we keep God on the throne of our lives, we experience abundant and fulfilling life.

Introduction

God has blessed my wife Brenda and me with nine beautiful grandchildren. Our first one was born in 1999 while I was teaching at the Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary in Ogbomosho, Nigeria, on a short-term mission assignment. During my time there I grew a beard. I have used that beard to tickle every one of the nine without mercy; therefore, my Grandpa name is "Hairy." Our first grandchild, Lexi, is now finishing her first year at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas.

Carter, my only grandson (and namesake), is Lexi's younger brother. When Carter was born, Lexi and her sister Courtney, were seven and four years of age, respectively.

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Brenda and I went to San Marcos to keep the girls so our son Tim could be with Lindy in the hospital and enjoy their newborn son.

After one of our visits to the hospital, we were driving the girls home and discussing what we were going to do. The plan was to watch one of their DVD movies and then take a nap. Lexi and Courtney had different preferences for what movie to watch and could not agree. The disagreement got louder when the girls became more assertive about their movie. When no compromise was reached, I declared to the girls, “We are not going to watch any movie when we get home; instead, you are going to take a nap.” The van became silent for the remainder of the short trip.

When we arrived at their house, Lexi whispered quietly to my wife, “Who made Hairy the boss?” During the closing years of the period of the Judges, when Samuel led Israel, some of the people seemingly began to ask, “Who made Yahweh the boss (king)?” They desired to have a king like all the other ethnic groups around them.

Commentary

1 Samuel 8-15 contains the account of how Israel transitioned to a new political structure or social reality. That transition from judgeship to kingship was character-driven. Samuel, Saul, and David dominate the narrative. The key issue was how to integrate the new political structure with the “old” established theological system of faith in the God who was the Lord (Boss) of all the Israelites.

“Like father, like son” was not the case with Samuel. His sons did not possess the same faithfulness to God as their father (1 Sam. 8:1-3). Their sinfulness generated the dialogue about the people of Israel wanting a king. This dialogue dominates the rest of this chapter (8:4-22).

The account of God’s selection of Saul to be king contains two distinct emphases. It declares that these things happened at the clear initiative of God who was at work through his Spirit. Secondly, God did this work by using unexpected persons and working through surprising circumstances.

The Introduction of Saul (9:1-4)

The narrator introduced Saul by stating his tribal and family connection, a personal description, and a task that his father had assigned him to complete. Saul was a member of the tribe of Benjamin (9:1-2). This tribe received the smallest territory among the tribes. It was squeezed between the large, important tribes of Ephraim to the north and Judah to the south. This tribe was almost wiped out as the other tribes responded to an abominable act that members of this tribe committed (Judg. 20-21).

Saul belonged to a significant clan within the tribe of Benjamin. His father Kish was a “man of standing” (1 Sam. 9:1). This Hebrew phrase, *gibbor chayil*, is frequently found

in the Old Testament. The biblical writers used this phrase to describe either a person who was a very successful military warrior (Joshua 1:14; 8:3; Judg. 6:12), or a wealthy person of social status within the community (Ruth 2:1; 1 Kings 11:28). Kish was probably the latter. Saul belonged to a small tribe but to a substantial and influential family in that tribe.

Saul was a striking individual in his physical appearance. “Impressive” (1 Sam. 9:2) was a word that refers to someone who is attractive or who possesses handsome features. Good looks were frequently associated with “heroes” of Israel’s faith like Joseph (Genesis 39:6); David (1 Sam. 16:12); and Esther (Esther 2:7). He might have been a young man, but he was old enough to have his son fight in his army soon after he was anointed as the first king. He was blessed with imposing physical height, a characteristic that in many cultures seems to provide an advantage.

Searching for a runaway pet is not fun. Whether you are walking near your house or driving the streets of the subdivision, these are anxious moments. One of my deacons and his wife have a dog named “Precious.” I know this business executive never enjoyed whistling and saying “Here, Precious” when walking down the sidewalk, searching for that lost pet.

Saul was searching for a lost animal, but it was no pet. While most people during this time walked everywhere they went, wealthy people enjoyed the privilege of riding donkeys. Donkeys were a source of pride and prestige. Sometimes one’s wealth was determined by how many camels and donkeys one possessed (Gen. 12:16; 32:15; 1 Chronicles 27:30; Job 1:3). Saul’s father wanted Saul and one of his servants to find these animals.

The search area covered parts of two tribal sections, Ephraim and Benjamin. It is impossible to know for certain the locations of the geographical place names “Shalisha” and “Shaalim” (1 Sam. 9:4). They were unsuccessful in finding the lost donkeys. The servant proposed they seek the assistance of one who was a prophetic figure (9:6-10). On their way to find the prophetic figure, they encountered Samuel, the acknowledged leader of God’s people (9:14).

God Appointed Saul (9:15-21)

The day before Saul and his servant saw Samuel, Yahweh and Samuel engaged in a private conversation. Everything that occurs in the story hinges on this private word God shared with Samuel. The language “had revealed this” (9:15) is literally “the uncovering of the ear.” It is the phrase commonly used for God’s communication to humans (2 Sam. 7:27; Job 33:16; 36:10) and sometimes for human communication (1 Sam. 20:2, 13; 22:8, 17).

God’s private communication with Samuel was about the emergence of a new leader. The people have requested a king, but God will be the one who takes the initiative in

determining who this new leader, a king, will be. God was in control. The sequence of actions clearly demonstrates that fact. “I will send” (Yahweh); “[you will] anoint him” (Samuel); and “he will deliver” (a man from Benjamin) is the sequence (1 Sam. 9:16).

Previously, when Israel cried out to God, he delivered or saved them (7:3-11). This “cry out—save” pattern appears again here as the explanation for God’s decisive action (9:16). God will act to save because he has fully committed himself to Israel in a covenant relationship. God calls them “my people” three times (9:16) demonstrating his commitment to that relationship.

“Leader” (9:16), *nagid*, is not the Hebrew word for “king.” This word always has the connotation of being singled out from others. It sometimes refers to the one who has been appointed or designated to become king in the future, a crown prince (1 Kings 1:35; 2 Chronicles 11:22).

When Samuel saw Saul, God identified Saul to Samuel as the man to be anointed as the leader of Israel. “Govern” (1 Sam. 9:17) means literally “to keep within the boundaries.” God chose Saul to guide his people in staying within the bounds of their covenant relationship with God. Although Saul was impressive physically and came from an influential family, this was not the rationale for his becoming Israel’s new leader. God’s appointment of Saul was an act of God’s sovereign and free choice.

The first of several encounters between Samuel and Saul began with a question. Saul posed the question, and Samuel answered it. “Seer” (9:17, 18) was another word used to describe a prophet. It may denote the fact that sometimes God revealed his word through a vision and the prophet “saw” God’s truth to be proclaimed (9:9).

Samuel gave direction and instruction to Saul, but it concerned something far more significant than lost donkeys. The Hebrew language reveals an ironic connection between what Saul requests and what Saul receives, a connection that cannot be duplicated in English translations.

“Tell” (9:18) renders the Hebrew verb *higgid*. It means “to make known.” It is a prominent verb in this story, appearing six times (9:6, 8, 18, 19, 10:15, 16). The noun derived from this verb is *nagid* or “leader.” Saul wants Samuel to inform (*higgid*) him, and Samuel will respond by informing (*higgid*) him that he is God’s designated leader (*nagid*).

God is in control of this appointing of a new leader. The reader detects the divine initiative in the authoritative demeanor of his prophet Samuel. He gave Saul specific instructions about what they would do that day and the next one. Samuel put Saul’s mind to ease about the lost donkeys for they had been found (9:20). That allowed Samuel to proceed with “telling” Saul the more important word he had received from God.

The Israelites strongly desired a king to lead them. Could it be that Saul, from the distinguished family of Kish, would be the one to fulfill their desire? Saul understood enough of the implication of that question to be thoroughly confused. He responded in the same way as Gideon previously responded to the call of God (Judg. 6:15). It was true that Benjamin was the smallest tribe in Israel, but the declaration that his clan was an insignificant Benjamite family seems to contradict what the reader already knows.

Samuel and Saul shared the meal that Samuel had spoken about (1 Sam. 9:22-24). Samuel was now ready to communicate God's message to Saul (9:25-27).

Samuel Anointed Saul (10:1, 9-16)

Samuel obeyed Yahweh's command to anoint Saul (9:16). Samuel poured a liquid over the head of Saul and possibly rubbed it in or smeared it. The "oil" (10:1) was olive oil mixed with aromatic spices, usually myrrh and cinnamon. The "flask" (10:1) was either the horn of an animal or a small clay vessel. This act symbolized the transfer of holiness from God to a designated person or object and set the person or object apart for God's use.

After anointing Saul, Samuel gave instructions to Saul to go to three places, near Rachel's tomb (10:2); the tree of Tabor (10:3-4); and Gibeah (10:5-7), where he would meet various people. These interactions would be "signs" to be fulfilled (10:7).

Before any of these signs were fulfilled, "God changed Saul's heart" (10:9) or literally, "turned another heart to him." The transformation of Saul's character did not result from any of the "sign" experiences; instead, it was the direct work of God. God brought about the complete transformation and empowerment of Saul.

The three signs were fulfilled (10:9), although the narrator only recorded for us one of the signs, the one regarding prophets at Gibeah. Samuel typically functioned in his prophetic role as an individual representative of God; however, that was not the only prophetic pattern.

The "procession of prophets" that Saul encountered (10:10) represents prophetic persons who ministered together. They may have lived communally and traveled in groups. These groups were the more mystical expression of Hebrew prophets. They probably played musical instruments and danced until they entered some kind of trance. In this trance, they contacted the Spirit of God. That connection provided them words to utter and caused a change in behavior. The leader of these groups, sometimes referred to as "sons of the prophets" (2 Kings 2:3, 5), was called the "father" of the group (1 Sam. 10:12; 2 Kings 2:12; 6:21; 13:14).

When Saul joined in the activity of this group, he too experienced the presence of the Spirit of God for the first time (1 Sam. 10:10). This phenomenon signified that this new political structure of kingship developed not through human mechanism but at the

initiative of God. This positive experience of the Spirit (also 11:6) would change as Saul's reign deteriorated. The Spirit would depart from Saul (16:14; 18:12), and an evil spirit terrorized him at times (16:14-16; 18:10; 19:9).

The presence of the Spirit in these prophets and Saul produced an unusual, out of the norm, or strange behavior. Some considered it to be behavior that was not appropriate or becoming for a son of Kish (10:11), a notable man of status within his tribe.

The narrator brings closure to the dimension of the lost donkeys (10:14-16). It is quite surprising that an unnamed uncle, rather than his father, questions Saul about where he had been. Saul was willing to tell his uncle what Samuel said about the lost donkeys, but he did not share Samuel's word about becoming a "leader," and the anointing that accompanied that word. This explains why the selection process that occurred in the next paragraph was not merely a confirmation of what everyone already knew. David also was secretly anointed (1 Sam. 16) before he was acclaimed as king (2 Sam. 2).

The Affirmation of Saul (10:17-24)

Samuel had summoned the tribes of Israel to Mizpah before for a solemn time of repentance and confession (1 Sam. 7:5). He summoned them again to Mizpah for another significant moment. It is significant because they gather "to the LORD" (10:17). On this occasion at Mizpah Samuel made a formal announcement to the people (10:18-19), and the people made a formal acknowledgement of Saul as their chosen king (10:20-24).

Samuel made his announcement in the form of a prophetic speech. The prophets often began their word from God with the introductory phrase "this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says" (10:18). Messengers used words similar to this phrase when they announced a proclamation issued by the king to his subjects.

God strongly asserted all that he had done in their behalf. He emphasized two aspects of his saving or delivering. He reminded them that he was the one who defeated the gods of Egypt and who liberated them out of Egyptian slavery. "Brought Israel up" (10:18) is the technical term for the Exodus deliverance by God. God's deliverance from "all the kingdoms that oppressed you" (10:18) probably refers to the period of the Judges when God repeatedly delivered them from other people groups/nations who brought distress upon them.

Despite the saving work of God, the Israelites responded negatively to him. The judgment speech delivered by Israel's prophets included two components. The first component was God's accusation of wrongdoing. "Rejected" (10:19) was the term the prophets used frequently to describe this sin and rebellion against God. They turned away from the very one that was good to them.

The second component of the judgment speech was the punishment that would be carried out because of the sins committed. In this instance, the declaration that God would give

his people a king occupies the place where the stated punishment normally would be. Was the institution of kingship itself in some way a punishment for the insistence of the people to have a king to rule over them?

“Set a king over us” (10:19) is exactly what the people had said (8:19-20). 1 Samuel 9:1—10:16 is essentially an “off stage” interlude unknown to the people. God was now responding to their request to give them a king.

The last sentence of verse 19 is the terminology of the process called the casting of lots.¹ The use of this process appears in both the Old Testament (seventy times) and the New Testament (seven times). None of these texts, however, provides any explanation of how the process worked. The consensus is that some “dice-like” piece of stone or wood was thrown on the ground. The lot was used only to give “yes” or “no” answers to an inquiry.

The Israelites did not believe it was a completely random process. It was not their counterpart to our flipping a coin or a game of chance. They believed it permitted the people to become aware of a decision God had already made. God used the casting of lots to reveal himself and his purpose in the same way he uses the Scripture in our relationship with him.

God directed Samuel to the tribe of Benjamin, then to the clan of Matri, and then to Saul. Saul “was chosen” (10:21) by lot because Saul was the man “the LORD has chosen” (10:24). The use of the lot casting revealed to the people the decision Yahweh had already made through his designation of Saul to Samuel.

Sometimes stores seek to attract consumers by holding a “drawing” to receive a designated gift. You simply sign an entry form and then wait for the drawing to be held and the winner to be announced. Since they want you in the store to shop for other things, they declare that “you have to be present to win.” Evidently one did not have to be present to win the privilege of being Israel’s first king.

Is it not ironic that while Saul once searched for lost donkeys, now the people searched for Saul? “Inquired” (10:22) translates the verb that is the root of Saul’s name. Essentially the people “sauled Saul.” God directed the people to where Saul could be found. He was in control of this process.

Two phrases describe Saul. His physical height is again noted (10:23; 9:2). The second phrase is puzzling. Elsewhere only the outstanding servant Moses (Deuteronomy 34:10) and King Josiah (2 Kings 23:25) are described in this way.

Conclusion

All of us live our lives with certain priorities to which we devote our attention and energy. These priorities dominate our attitudes and actions. In other words, they tend to “rule” our lives. We determine what those priorities are and therefore determine what

rules our lives. It is infinitely better for us when those priorities are aligned with God's purpose for our lives. That is when we say to God, "your will be done" in my life.

Sometimes our priorities are not aligned with the purpose of God. The things we let dominate or rule our lives are detrimental in their impact to us. We rebel against God and go our own way. When that happens, tragically God may say to us, "your will be done."

Calling Jesus "Lord" is to declare that you are willing to let God be the king or ruler of your life.

Meet the Writer: Dr. Ron Lyles

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¹ The utilization of the lot casting here is similar to the way it occurred when God identified to Joshua and the people that it was Achan who had taken a prohibited object during the battle for Jericho (Josh. 7). In both instances, God directed through the lots by identifying the particular tribe, then the particular clan or extended family, and finally the individual.