

Notes on I Samuel 9 – 16

By Grant Thorpe

Available at
<http://www.corobaptist.org.au>

The following notes may be copied and distributed freely
if they are acknowledged and not used for profit.

Chapters 9 – 10

Saul came from a noble family and had a noble appearance, although he was strongly aware of the smallness of his family and his tribe (a fact brought about by a slaughter— Judg. 21:6). He did not appear to know the prophet Samuel or the possibility of seeking help from him. However, God had heard the cry of Israel for release from their oppressors. He had not ceased to care for them because they had rejected him and would give Israel the deliverer they needed. He prepared Samuel for a meeting with Saul. Then he led Saul to Samuel and to his destiny through a helpful servant.

Samuel showed Saul that he truly was a prophet. 'On the next day' he said, 'I will tell you all that is on your mind. 'For now', Samuel said, 'your father's donkeys are found'. Then he added, 'You and your family will have the riches of the land.' Samuel had already shown the nation the riches which a king would demand from them.

Saul thought himself and his family unworthy of honour but was tutored by Samuel in the greatness he should now wear. He was honoured as favoured guest at the town's sacrificial feast. On the next day, Samuel would proclaim to him the word of God. The welfare of the nation, and of Saul, would depend on this word (cf. 3:1, 7, 21; 4:1; 15:10, 23, 26). There would be no greater honour than to be the servant of the word and Saul needed to learn to wear it as a servant's coat.

So Saul was anointed as ruler over God's inheritance. Samuel emphasised God's ownership of Israel, which suggests that Saul should seek God's kingship above his own. He would meet two people who would confirm the safety of the donkeys and tell him his father wanted him home. Then he would meet three men from whom he would receive bread that was intended for presentation to God. After that he would encounter a troop of prophets and the Spirit would so strongly come on him that he would praise God in an ecstasy and be changed in his goals and affections, at least for a time. These would be signs showing that God was with him to enable him to do whatever was needed in his new role. The place where the prophets met him was near a Philistine garrison, emphasising the pressing need Israel had for deliverance. However, there was a limitation on his powers: Samuel alone could offer the sacrifices necessary before battle.

All these things occurred and Saul's prophesying became known. It had happened near to his home, and his neighbours knew the family. They could understand a son of Kish, but whose son was he now? Who was 'father' to the prophets? Was Saul

now one of them? Something new was afoot. Saul, however, kept the matter of the anointing from his family.

Israel was fragmented and only Samuel could bring them together. The time was ripe to give them the king they demanded and so Samuel summoned the nation. Through him, God reminded Israel that he had always taken care of them, and, that they had rejected him. However, God gave them the king they asked for and God's chosen one was publicly identified by drawing lots. God's choice of Saul, made known and confirmed privately had now been declared publicly. Saul should have had no doubts now about his place in Israel. However, the man chosen by God and so attractive to the people as a leader, had to be located, by God, among some baggage.

Samuel wrote the constitution for the newly formed monarchy. There was no structure for the exercise of kingly rule but the new leadership was clearly enough defined to attract godly men to support him and for evil men to resent him.

Prayer

Father, your ways are higher than ours. They are ways of grace and, by them, you lead us to know you and to do your will. We thank you that, even in our waywardness, you lead us. Make us ready to be servants of your word and to take the place you have assigned to us. Thanks be to you Father, that our true King, Jesus Christ, has not hesitated to take responsibility for us. We bless you that he never ceased to do your will but has loved us to the end. In his name we pray. Amen.

Chapters 11 – 12

The country still lacked the institutional fabric of monarchy and operated much as it had under the judges. The terror threatened by Ammonites brought messengers from Jabesh Gilead to Saul. God's love for his people is seen in the way he sent his Spirit to move Saul into action, and, by him, the whole nation, to defend one city.

Saul knew his victory was the work of God and would not have it soiled by vengeance on those who were tardy in acknowledging him. None of them deserved this victory and it was inappropriate for some to take action against others. Samuel again seized the opportunity to complete the work God had given him to do; he reproclaimed Saul as king, this time, with no dissenting voices. A peace offering was one that was shared by the people at a meal and so a great celebration was held.

Samuel wanted Israel to be clear about their present situation. Firstly, they could not say they had dispensed with Samuel because of his unfaithfulness. He had been utterly true. Secondly, they were the children of those whom God delivered from Egypt. Thirdly they were the children of those who had frequently abandoned the Lord, worshipped idols, and suffered God's judgments. Their forefathers had confessed their sins and been delivered. Would the present generation confess their sin, or foolishly think that they owed their deliverance to their own choice of monarchy?

Israel had said they wanted a king because Samuel was old (8:1–5) but, in fact, they had not wanted to live by faith in God but by faith in the things they could see. They wanted a system that preserved their idols.

Now was the time to listen to God. Israel was treated to yet another proclamation of the grace of God and the power of that grace to renew his people at any time. Lest they be tempted to credit their victory to kingship, Samuel called on God for an awesome storm to validate his testimony against them. Then, they confessed the sin of asking wrongfully for a king. Now, there was no confusion. The well being of Israel still depended on obedience, as it always had. If they and their king continued to hear God's word, they would prosper; if not, God would be the enemy of both them and their king. Nothing could be attributed to monarchy in itself. Everything depended on the Lord's purpose to have a people for himself and his grace in renewing them. Samuel himself would continue to represent that grace to the people in true prophetic and priestly ministry.

We are reminded of the day when Israel killed its King, Jesus Christ. God raised him up, brought the people to repentance and assured them, that if they walked in the way of this good news, they would be blessed. Where sin abounds, sin much more abounds.

Prayer

Lord God, how prone we are to seek human reasons for our prosperity and joy. Yet all that we have has come from you. We have loved idols. We have sought help in many directions. We have been vindictive. We have lost hope. But you have taught us to call on you. You have sent true servants of your word who have taught us your way—the way of Christ. You have brought us to repentance, and so, today, we know that you are gracious. Make us ever mindful of your mercy, that we, hearing your word may grow in grace, and so, in true strength. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Chapters 13 – 14

Saul now had a standing army of 3000 rather than the citizen militia that had sufficed before. However, his own tribal area remained under Philistine control and his kingship could not be affirmed without decisive action. This action came from his son rather than himself. As we see later, Jonathan was a man of faith, and so, of action. Saul seemed more ruled by his uncertainties than by God's call. The dilemma caused by mounting opposition and timid troops could be likened to the situation King Ahaz experienced later. Isaiah said to him: 'If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established' (Isa. 7:9).

The terms of God's call to Saul included waiting for Samuel to offer sacrifice before battle. The point was critical because a kingship with a life of its own, not tied to the word of the Lord, would undermine Israel as a theocracy. Saul's reasoning about waiting seven days seems reasonable but he admitted that he 'forced' himself. Offering sacrifice does not seem to have been the problem (cf. 14:34–35; II Sam. 24:25; I Kings 3:15) so much as disregarding the prophet. His thinking had become clouded with self-reliance. God made it clear that no dynasty would arise from this man.

Later on, David (II Sam. 24:10) and Asa (II Chron. 16:9) also acted foolishly (the word implies mental incapacity and self-reliance) in disregarding a prophetic command and they suffered severely.

When Saul was chosen by God he was chosen 'for yourselves'; ie. the people (8:18), but God would appoint another king 'for himself' (13:14). The appointment would arise from God's own heart (ie. choice) rather than out of the heart of the people. In this way, we are introduced to David who will occupy much of the latter part of the book. Saul would now have to live in the shadow of the one the Lord had in mind as his replacement.

Even still, Saul could have been like his father, a mighty man of valour (9:1), and remember Gideon whom God called a mighty man of valour (Jud. 6:12). Though the country was almost stripped of weapons and Saul had only 600 of his earlier 3000 men, victory could have been his. But it was his son Jonathan who showed what it meant to live under the kingship of God. 'Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few', he said.

Saul was informed that the Philistines had retreated, found that his son was missing (did Saul guess that he had caused the retreat?) but still lacked confidence to act and called for the ark to get a further word from the Lord. Then he dispensed with this when he saw that the confusion among the Philistines was increasing. With troops regathered from defectors (or forced mercenaries) and the frightened, God gave Israel a great victory that day.

More of Saul's folly now appears; he had commanded his troops to fast until victory had been gained. Jonathan, confident in God, was far more realistic and hopeful. Saul's prohibition led to an unnecessary problem of hungry people (not Saul this time) not waiting for a sacrifice to be offered. Saul had never built an altar to the Lord before but was implicated in building one now so blood could be separated from meat. Other leaders had and would build altars to express gratefulness to God (Jud. 6:24; I Sam. 7:17; II Sam. 24:25; I Chron. 21:18).

Saul's inability to entrust his fears to God tied him to needless piety when true piety was lacking, and apart from the intervention of his soldiers, Saul would not have spared his own son in order to satisfy his craving for properness. It was a priest and not Saul who requested that they seek God's will about further battle. Because this raised the matter of Jonathan's unwitting clash with his father's vow, all further action in that battle was brought to an end. Jonathan was grieved with his father but did his best to bring faith in God to bear on the running of the nation.

Some have suggested that, at this point, there was already rivalry between Saul and Jonathan and that the father was manipulating things to gain the death of his son. This must remain conjecture.

Saul's further victories and the enlargement of his army are recorded, but has he learned to fear God? Only by this could he find the wisdom needed for his task.

Prayer

Father, you have called us to believe in you and to believe in your Son. You have called us to share in his life and victory, and so, possess our inheritance. We commit to you all the fears and the reticence that would prevent us from being your servants. Forgive us for our foolishness, enlighten our minds, widen our affections and embolden our wills, that we may embrace all your gracious will. This we ask in the name of Christ. Amen.

Chapters 15 – 16

Samuel would have remembered the word of God that the Amalekites should be destroyed (Num. 24:20; 25:17–19) and heeded it now as God repeated the requirement. Saul understood what he was meant to do because he warned the Kenites that they need not be destroyed along with the Amalekites because they had not shared their sin. Saul could still have heeded the word of God and could have shown that he understood his anointing. Rather, he demonstrated the continuing direction of his life: by keeping Agag alive and by allowing the people to take plunder for their celebration (were they interested in sacrifice?).

Samuel must have longed for good leadership in Israel again. Perhaps he hoped that Saul would be spared. However, Saul was glorying in himself, preening himself on his 'obedience' to God, putting a religious twist on his own ambition. Littleness in his own eyes had now turned to bigness in his own eyes and the need to humour the people so they would continue to follow him. Sacrifice, even though commanded by God could not replace simple obedience. David and the prophets, and Jesus also, would never forget what was learned here (Ps. 51:16–17; Isa. 1:11–15; Micah. 6:6–8; Heb. 10:6–9). Finally, nothing could remove all the sins of rebellion and insubordination other than the body of Jesus offered up in simple obedience to his Father.

To take the kingship from Saul was now the worst thing that could happen to him, and he longed for the prophetic approval that was essential to his standing. Samuel, grieved yet loving, provided this last concession to Saul's failed kingship. Samuel discharged the task omitted by Saul, and then, the focus of our story moves to David. Samuel must leave Saul behind him.

The story moves to the king that the Lord would choose for himself, rather than for the people. Bethlehem's elders were not sure they stood in God's favour, but they need not have feared. From them would come Israel's next king. From them also would come the Messiah (Micah. 5:2). Then, Samuel and the elders of Bethlehem, with Jesse, witnessed God's selection process, leaving behind those deemed suitable to choose a lad. However, he was handsome, which seems to be acknowledged as a sign of God's favour (Exod. 2:2 with Acts 7:20). All present, including the brothers, witnessed David's anointing.

We are not told how the Spirit came on David, but he was soon known as a mighty man of valour. This, together with his skill on the harp, and especially his faith in God, placed him appropriately in the king's court. There, he assisted the man who had aspired to have something in his own right and who was now left to achieve it by his own power. Yet he was comforted by this gift from God.

Prayer

Father, we are in awe of your intention to fill the earth with your glory, to make a kingdom in which all your enemies are destroyed, and to do this by your anointed king, Jesus Christ. Save us all from lesser ambitions. Grant to us a heart like your Son Jesus Christ who lived by every word that proceeded from your mouth. May we always walk in the meekness and gentleness by which your Son has saved us. We ask this in his name. Amen.