

THE LORD ANOINTS SAUL AS KING

1 Samuel 8:1-9:27

Key Verse: 9:16

“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.”

In this passage, the Israelites demands Samuel to appoint a king over them. They want to be like their neighboring nations who had strong kings. This displeases Samuel, but he takes the matter to God in prayer. God warns them about what a king would do to them, but allows them to do what they wanted. God calls the Israelites “my people,” even as they reject him as their ruler.

I. ISRAEL ASKS FOR A KING (8:1-18)

All the days of his life, Samuel served the Lord as Israel’s judge, shepherd and Bible teacher. But his sons, Joel and Abijah, did not walk in his ways (3). Samuel must have seen enough potential in them to appoint them to serve as judges for Israel at Beersheba. But they abused their office by accepting bribes and perverting justice (3). No doubt Samuel felt the pain of watching his sons going astray. As parents, we do our best to raise our children in God. But they don’t always turn out according to our expectations. We have to pray for them continually.

Look at verses 4-5. *So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”* The elders of the nation came to Samuel to say three things to him: he was old, his sons were bad, and they wanted a king. At first glance, they seemed to be saying that they couldn’t trust Samuel and his sons as effective leaders and thus, they wanted a regime change. But the first two reasons, though they were valid, were used only as a pretext for their real motive. What they really wanted was this: they said, “Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

Samuel was unhappy to hear their demand for a king (6). We also want a strong leader for our nation. So what’s wrong with asking for a king? After all, God seemed to have known that there would be a king in Israel when he gave detailed instructions about kingship in Deuteronomy 17. But the problem in their asking for a king is seen in their statement, “such as all the other nations have.” In other words, they wanted to be like the other people around them. They envied the neighboring countries that seemed to have strong leaders and military security (e.g., the Ammonites whose king was Nahash, a cruel man who had the habit of gouging out the right eyes of his enemies). Perhaps they viewed that having a



decentralized system like theirs was a distinct disadvantage compared to the neighboring countries that had a strong central power to make decisive decisions. It was not easy for the 12 tribes to work together. It was especially difficult for Israel to fight an enemy like the Philistines without a central government and military force, given their different geographical locations of the tribes. For example, the Philistines were no imminent threat to the eastern tribes of Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh. They had little incentive to cross the Jordan River to fight against the feisty Philistines.

Despite the political advantages of having a king, the elders revealed their spiritual problem in asking for a king. God had called them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:5-6). He had warned them not to follow the ways of the Canaanites. God had told them not to be like other people who were idol worshipers. God had promised that he would bless them if they submitted to his rule. He promised that he would protect them from the powerful kings in the region (Dt 7:24). He also promised them a material prosperity (Dt 7:12-15). God told them: “You will be blessed more than any other people” (Dt 7:14). But the Israelites asked for a king. They did not trust in God and his promises. They had rejected God as their ruler.

Today, we also want to be like the people of the world. We often envy their wealth and prosperity. Their grass seems greener than ours. We may not envy the lives of non-believers. Still we may envy those who are nominal believers—those who seem to enjoy the world while living as Christians, one day of the week. But God wants us to be his people with full commitment of the heart. He wants us to be different from the people of the world with different hopes and value system. We are in the world, but we are not to be of this world. At this time, let us search our hearts to see if we have become like the Israelites who wanted to be like the Canaanites.

When the elders criticized Samuel and asked for a king, he was displeased. So what did he do? Verse 6 says: “... *so he prayed to the Lord.*” He didn’t get back at them saying things like, “You are discriminating against me based on my age,” or “It’s not my fault that my sons are dishonest.” He didn’t even argue with them why having a king was a terrible idea. Instead, he fell on his knees and prayed to the Lord. This is a mark of a great servant of God.

What was God’s reply to Samuel? God told him to listen to them (7). God essentially said, “Samuel, don’t feel bad. Their rejection is more about me than about you. They have rejected me as their king. This is not a new problem either. Ever since I brought them out of their slavery in Egypt, they have disobeyed me and my word, serving other gods.” Still, God told Samuel to listen to the rebellious people. Look at verse 9. *Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.*

So Samuel delivered the words of the Lord to the people of Israel. He listed the problems they would have to face under the reign of a king. The king would enlist their sons to fight his wars as infantry men, cavalry, charioteers and commanders. Many of them would die in battles. The king would make their sons work for weapons factories. The king would take their daughters to use them as perfumers, cooks and bakers. The

king would take away their fields, vineyards, and olive groves. The king would impose a 10% tax on their grain and wine, and also on their live stocks. The king would take away their servants and also the best of their cattle and donkeys. And the king would make them his slaves. After enumerating the troubles they would have under the reign of a king, Samuel gave them a final warning. Look at verse 18: *“When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day.”*



God's words for his people couldn't be clearer. He laid down specifically what would happen to them under a king's rule. In spite of the clear warning, the people refused to listen to Samuel. It is interesting to notice that God told Samuel to listen to his people (7,9). And Samuel did. But they refused to listen to Samuel (19). Look at verses 19-20. *But the people refused to listen to Samuel. “No!” they said. “We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.”* They were fixated in what they wanted and refused to listen to God. Still, God told Samuel to listen to them yet again (22). He told Samuel to give them a king.

From the very beginning, God gave us the freedom of choice. In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam and Eve that they could enjoy all the wonderful things he provided for them, but they should not eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. “When you eat of it, you will surely die” he told them (Ge 2:17). God gave them the freedom to choose after laying down clearly the consequence of their choice. Of course, Satan came into the scene and presented them with an alternative view of the things. He suggested that God's warning about the fruit was evidence that God did not love them enough. He suggested that fantastic things would happen if they disobeyed God's words. He said: “You will not surely die” (Ge 3:4). It was a lie. Of course, we know what happened. They made the wrong choice and nothing good happened to them. Sin entered into the world and they died. We are still suffering from the consequence of their disobedience. If not for Jesus who came to die for our sins, we would be condemned to the lake of burning sulfur eternally.

The freedom of choice is a wonderful gift from God. Without it, we cannot be truly happy. But we must make a good choice, weighing carefully the consequence of our choice. As we do so, we should remember that God gives us straight the consequence of our choice. That's why we should study the word of God carefully. We should also remember that Satan puts different ideas in our heads. He tries very hard to muddle the picture so that we may be fixated on the things we desire rather than what God wants us to give because he loves us. Unfortunately that is the choice the Israelites made in Samuel's time.

II. GOD CHOOSES SAUL TO BE THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL (9:1-27)

So God decided to let his people have their king. He told Samuel to anoint a man named Saul to be the first king of Israel. What kind of person was Saul? He was a son of Kish who was a Benjamite and a man of standing (9:1). Physically, Saul was *an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites--a head taller than any of the others* (2). He was tall like Yao Ming and perhaps more handsome than Josh. Saul was obedient to his father. When his father told him to go and find his lost donkeys, Saul traveled through many towns looking for them.

(Donkeys were important to their daily life. It was like a car or bicycle today). He traveled through Ephraim and Benjamin, covering extensive areas. He went beyond what was expected of him (This reminds us of Joseph in Genesis who went beyond what was expected of him in finding his brothers). When it took longer than expected, Saul began to worry about his father who might be more worried about his son than the donkeys.

And he was right. He knew his father's mind well (10:2). They must have had a good father-and-son relationship. Saul was not a spoiled brat. He even listened to his servant and followed his suggestions. He did not ignore the servant just because he was a servant.



Saul also had an attitude of respect toward God's servant. When they happened to be near the town of Ramah in their search for the donkeys, his servant told him about a man of God there who was highly respected. So he suggested to Saul that they see the man of God and ask him for their directions (6). Saul agreed but he was concerned that they did not have a gift to give the man of God. Look at verse 7. *Saul said to his servant, "If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?"* Saul didn't want to see the man of God without a gift for him. He had respect for the man of God. Later he also showed his humility before the servant of God (21). A tall, handsome man with a humble and thoughtful heart! Now we can understand why God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. This is how God led Saul to Samuel.

So Saul and his servant set out for the town of Ramah with a quarter of a shekel of silver as their gift for Samuel. *As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and they asked them, "Is the seer here?" "He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place"* (11-12). Little did Saul realize that according to God's directions, Samuel had planned dinner for his honor. As they were entering the town, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place (14). In fact, the day before Saul came to town, *the Lord had revealed this to Samuel: "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me"* (15-16).

God told Samuel to anoint Saul to be a leader over his people Israel. (It is interesting to note that God didn't use the term "king." He called him "leader." God wanted him to lead his people in the right direction.) God also told Samuel that his purpose for anointing Saul to be leader over his people Israel was to deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. In revealing his purpose for Saul, God repeatedly said "my people." He used the term four times in verses 16 and 17. Let us read verse 16 together. *"About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."* God said, "I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me." Despite their sins of idolatry and unfaithfulness, God still cared about his people. A loving father cares about his son, no matter how bad the son behaves, just because he is the son. This is the heart of God. God called the Israelites "my people" even as they said, "Give us a king," meaning they didn't need God. Let us not make the same mistake that the Israelites made. Let us remember that God is our God. He is our heavenly Father. We are his people. We are his sons and daughters. Let us never forget this. God loves and cares about us, just because we are his children.

Apparently Samuel never met Saul before. So how would they recognize each other when they met for the first time? But Samuel didn't have to worry. *When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, "This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people."* The conversation between Samuel and Saul in their first meeting went something like this.

Saul: (approaching Samuel in the gateway): "Would you please tell me where I can find the seer in this town?"

Samuel: "You are looking at him."

Saul: "It's so nice to meet you, sir. My servant and I are kind of lost and wanted to ask you for directions."

Samuel: "Well, why don't you have dinner with me tonight at the high place? I will tell you where to go in the morning."

Saul: "But we"

Samuel: "I know what's on your mind. Don't worry about the donkeys. They have been found. And what I am about to tell you is much bigger than the donkeys. I tell you that you and your family are focus of all Israel's hopes."

Saul: "But sir, I am from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of all tribes. And my family is the least important among the Benjamites. Why are you telling me such a thing?"

Samuel: "This is not from me. It's from God who has a purpose for you. I will tell you more about it later. Come, let us go up to the high place for dinner."

Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited--about thirty in number. Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the piece of meat I gave you, the one I told you to lay aside." (22-23). Saul was treated as an honored guest of Samuel for the dinner party. A prime cut of meat had been reserved for Saul. The cook brought out the leg meat and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said to him, *"Here is what has been kept for you. Eat, because it was set aside*

for you for this occasion, from the time I said, 'I have invited guests'" (24). So Saul dined with Samuel. And on that day, Samuel became Saul's shepherd and spiritual advisor. Sharing a meal together is always a good way to establish a relationship. Jesus often had eating fellowship with his disciples. If we want to have a close relationship with our Bible student, we can take our cue from Samuel and share lunch or dinner together with him or her.

What did Samuel do after dinner? They came down to the town, Samuel took Saul to his house. That night, on the roof of his house, Samuel talked with Saul. The Bible does not say what the topics of their conversations were. Perhaps Samuel shared his wisdom about how to be a good leader. We learn another point about how to establish a good personal relationship with others. We should take our time to talk with our Bible students. It does not have to be on the roof of a house. We just need to spend time together sharing God's word and what is on our minds.

At daybreak, they got up and Samuel sent Saul on his way. They went out together and when they reached the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Send your servant ahead so that I may give you a message from God" (27). And this is how Chapter 9 ends. The story is to be continued. As we will learn next week, Samuel did more than giving a message from God. He did something for Saul involving a flask of oil. Stay tuned.

In today's passage, we learned that God called the Israelites "my people" even as they rejected his rule and asked for a king. God is our God and we are his people. God is our Heavenly Father and we are his beloved children. He loves us and cares about us. May God help us to listen to our God and his word! May God help us to live as his people faithfully rather than envy the unbelieving people of this world! Let us read our key verse (9:16): *"About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me."*