



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Irony in Life (I Samuel 9)

6 JULY 2010

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Capitol Commission state directors are missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and as a matter of first importance, to pray for their salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our desire is witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

Introduction

The events of chapter 8 reveal the Israelites demand for a king, with the purpose of conformity to the surrounding nations and to have someone lead them in battle (1 Sam 8:19-20). Although God promised the nation a king (Deut 17:14-15), it was not expedient for them to become a monarchy at this point in their history. Although the request for new leadership was valid, the response and the timing were wrong.

The people ignored Samuel's warning that a king would tax them without mercy, draft sons to serve in his army, and take the people for other responsibilities (1 Sam 8:11-18). Israel adored expediency, and God granted their request for a king. The nation believed the king would develop a continuing dynasty, which would make life easier for Israel (*to walk by sight*) since they would not have to seek God's choice for a new leader each time (*to walk by faith*). Samuel's words were fulfilled literally under the reign of King Solomon. Saul's reign became with success (chs. 8—11), and he was even "changed into another man" (10:6). The new man would soon encounter his first test as a changed man in a battle against the Ammonites (ch. 11).

THE IRONY OF THE EVERYDAY

(9:1-14) First Samuel 9—10 detail the events culminating in the choice of Saul as king. Israel did not trust God to remedy the lack of leadership, but sought the example of the surrounding nations by demanding a king. The action was not a rejection of Samuel; rather, the people rejected the kingship of God. The Lord will use the rejection as an occasion to demonstrate His mercy. Israel rejected the kingship of God, but the Lord chose the new king, David, and confirmed his divine choice. God instructs us today that He will meet all our needs, if we "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

God used a search for lost donkeys to introduce Saul to the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 9:1-14), who anointed him as king (10:1).¹ The account is an ironic reminder that God may use an everyday errand to accomplish His will. The reason is both simple and profound as revealed by God: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:8-9).

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The account begins with an introduction to a Benjamite named Kish, "a mighty man of valor." His son, Saul, was "a choice and handsome *man*" and "taller than any of the people" (1 Sam 9:1-2). Saul was probably in his forties at this time (cf. the age of his son in 13:2). The tribe of Benjamin had likely recovered by this time from the events of Judges 19—21, which was disastrous for the Benjamite city of Gibeah. Of course, the tribe's history was not always dishonorable (Gen 35:11, 16-21; 43:34), but the remaining accounts of 1 Samuel do demonstrate the transition from a Benjamite to a Judahite king (cf. 44:18-34; 49:8-12). Consequently, the Benjamite genealogy is not an insult to Saul, but the tribe did have a desolate history, and demonstrates that God often chooses the unlikely things of the world to confound the wise (1 Cor 1:27). Similar to words spoken with regard to Jesus (Luke 23:6; John 1:46; 7:52), one may ask, "Can anything good come from Gibeah?" "The despised God has chosen" (1 Cor 1:28).

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES ~ GEORGIA

LEGISLATORS AND LOBBYISTS: TUESDAYS @ 7:30AM, 514 CLOB (DURING THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION)

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Verse 3 does not indicate how Kish's donkeys were lost. Perhaps their loss is an earlier indication of Saul's future failure as king since the description of "shepherd" was commonly applied to kings in the Ancient Near East.² Considering the contrast with Eli's sons, it is encouraging to read that Saul obeyed his father's instruction. Saul and his servant searched through five different territories without finding the donkeys (9:4-5). Saul was ready to stop when they reached the land of Zuph because they had been gone for several days and his father would "become anxious" (9:5, 20).

The suggestion to seek Samuel for help would forever change the life of Saul (9:6-10). Donkeys were sought, but a kingdom would be found. The search for the prophet led Saul and his servant to some young women who were going "to draw water," and who informed the two men that Samuel was in town for a special occasion (9:11-13). When Saul met Samuel as he "was coming out toward them to go up to the high place," it is obvious that the meeting was not a chance encounter, but was ordained by God. "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Prov 16:9). "Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?" (20:24). God's providence extends to all humanity.

THE IRONY OF THE UNEXPECTED

(9:15-27) The narrative ceases with verse 14, and provides the Lord's revelation to Samuel the day prior to the meeting. Although verses 15-17 stop the narrative, these verses are crucial for understanding the account when it resumes with verse 18. The emphasis of the Hebrew text confirms this understanding because verse 15 begins with the words, "Now the LORD [Yahweh] uncovered Samuel's ear." There is not to be any misunderstanding that Saul's selection as king was happenstance; it was entirely within the Lord's providence. God may not always reveal His actions, as in 1 Samuel 9. You may find yourself just as unaware of God's providence as Saul at this moment; in which case, you must simply continue the search for lost donkeys or fulfill your current responsibility.

YOU MAY FIND YOURSELF JUST AS UNAWARE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE AS SAUL AT THIS MOMENT; IN WHICH CASE, YOU MUST SIMPLY CONTINUE THE SEARCH FOR LOST DONKEYS OR FULFILL YOUR CURRENT RESPONSIBILITY.

"He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10; cf. Matt 25:14-30). Faithfulness is not dependent upon the amount or significance of what is entrusted, but on the sense of responsibility. There is not any distinction between great and small responsibilities. The value of an action is dependent solely upon the

motivation, not its prominence. The only exception between faithfulness in little and faithfulness in much is whether your actions are done in obedience to God's Word, or to merely pleasure yourself. Not only does this thought affect our understanding of sin, but also any act of obedience.

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Perhaps faithfulness in the small actions of life is even greater than faithfulness in those events of seemingly great importance. Faithfulness in little is often preparation for a greater means in which to obey and to glorify God. "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave, You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master'" (Matt 25:21). Your responsibility in trifles demonstrates who you are in all things. Consequently, faithfulness in little things is not trifles because it is the little things that will result in ruin (Song 2:15; Matt 6:22-23; Mark 7:20-23; Gal 5:9), whereas genuine faith as a mustard seed may result in accomplishing the virtually impossible (Matt 17:20; 21:21; 1 Cor 13:2; cf. Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:15; 16:8).

The irony of the account of 1 Samuel 9 is not that someone lost a valuable item and was unable to find it, but contains within it the account of one who uncovered buried treasure will seeking a virtual seashell. Moreover, this one was among "the smallest of the tribes of Israel," and his family was "the least of all the tribe of Benjamin" (9:21). Saul was obviously perplexed by Samuel's unexpected words (9:19-20). Samuel brought an unknown into the festival hall and seated him as guest of honor (9:22-24). "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time" (1 Pet 5:6).

¹ Some commentators have been perplexed by "the fact that Saul apparently knows little or nothing about Samuel," who was the "theocratic judge of all Israel." Perhaps one explanation is that Saul resided in a restricted country, and as a farmer's son had little interest in either political or religious movements of his time. One commentator noted, "the fact that Saul apparently knew little about Samuel only reveals his own lack of interest . . . it is significant that even the servant (who may be assumed to be less well educated than his master's son) knew that Samuel was there, and that he was *a man of God* [9:6]. . . . Obviously, the fame of Samuel had reached this comparatively ignorant man at a distance from Ramah, though Saul knew so little about him" (A. M. Renwick, "I and II Samuel," in *The New Bible Commentary*, 2nd ed., ed. Francis Davidson [1954; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958], 267-68). How tragic that even today individuals can become so engrossed in their shyness and occupation that they do not know the political and religious events that influence their lives so profoundly.

² Amélie Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, 2 vols.* (London: Routledge, 1995) 1:175; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008) 53-54.



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