

Last time we saw that 1 Samuel 8 is not anti-king.  
It is anti-Israel!

Deuteronomy 17 had presented the kingship as a dangerous institution that is fraught with peril.  
The only time you adopt the kingship is at the uttermost end of need.  
When Israel has reached the nadir of its existence,  
*then*, and only then, do you turn to the last resort: the kingship.

Look back at God’s warning (chapter 8, verse 7):  
*Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you,  
for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.*

Okay.

This sounds like God is saying that *their request for a king* is the rejection of him,  
but that is not what verse 8 says:  
*According to all the deeds that they have done,  
from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day,  
forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.*

They are doing to you, Samuel, what they did to Moses  
(And God had told Moses that the people were not rejecting Moses, but Yahweh,  
whenever they rebelled).

The request for a king was simply the logical outcome of the failure of Israel.  
Israel had failed to be and to do what God had called them to be and to do.

It wasn’t the request for a king that was the problem.  
For that matter, it wasn’t even the way that they asked for a king.

It was the fact that with the exception of Joshua’s generation,  
the people of Israel had continued to forsake the LORD  
more and more in each generation.

God had called Israel “my firstborn son,” (Ex 4:22)  
and had called his son to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6).

What should the son of God have looked like?

What would a kingdom of priests look like?

A holy nation would have been faithful to God’s law.

A kingdom of priests would have been a place  
where the surrounding nations would have marveled at the righteous laws  
which characterized Israel,  
and would have repented of their sinful ways and joined with Israel!

Of course, a holy nation would also have endured the mockery and scorn of the unrighteous.

Israel would have suffered at the hands of the nation–  
but they would have suffered for righteousness' sake!

In other words,  
a kingdom of priests and a holy nation would have looked an awful lot like Jesus!

Because that is what the firstborn son of God is supposed to look like!

And so when Israel asks for a king,  
they are confessing that they have failed to be the son of God.

Israel is supposed to be holy.  
Israel is supposed to be a people set apart to the LORD.

But Deuteronomy 17 had recognized that the only way that Israel would need a king  
is if Israel had failed.

And of course, Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy make it clear that Israel *would* fail!

So 1 Samuel 8 is simply saying that what Moses had said in Deuteronomy 17 has happened.  
Israel *has* failed.

This is why we spent so much time on Ebenezer and Ichabod in chapters 4-7!  
God has forsaken Shiloh –  
the ark of the covenant was captured –  
because Israel has degenerated into a Canaanite nation!

Eli's sons, the priests, were acting like pagan priests.  
And now Samuel's sons are acting like pagan judges.

The glory has departed from Israel!  
Prophet and priest alike – all practice deceit.

But now Israel is making the same mistake they made in chapter 4.  
In chapter 4, Israel thought that the ark was a magic box –  
if they just brought the ark of the covenant – God would give them victory!  
In chapter 7, it appeared that Israel had learned from their mistake!  
In chapter 7, Israel recognized that they had to turn away from their sin –  
and turn to God himself.  
Samuel had said “if you are returning to the LORD with all your heart,  
then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you  
and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only...”

But Israel's heart is fickle.  
Sometimes they serve him only – and sometimes they don't.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves!  
Because before we can talk about David,  
we must first understand Saul.

Israel has asked for a king like all the nations,  
a king to “judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” (8:20)

And so God gives them Saul.

### **A. Handsome and Tall – Saul the Son of Kish (9:1-2)**

*9 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth.*

The ESV translates this “a man of wealth” – but the Hebrew, *gibor hayil*  
conveys the idea of a mighty man of power.

That certainly might imply wealth – but the picture is of a strong warrior.

*<sup>2</sup> And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*

1 Samuel gives us quite a bit of detail about the calling and anointing of Saul.

The key to Saul is found in verse 2 of chapter 9:

*There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he.  
From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*

Saul is everything that a king should be.

He is an impressive specimen of a man.

He is good-looking.

He is tall (remember that when we get to Goliath!)

And as chapter 9 tells us, he is pious and faithful.

(We’ll hear about his ability in battle in chapter 11)

We tend to be rather dismissive of Saul because of the end of the story.

But at the beginning of the story, Saul comes off rather well.

Our passage begins chapter 9 and ends chapter 10 with the physically impressiveness of Saul.

There is also a second framing device in our passage –  
the Lost Donkeys of Kish.

### **B. The Lost Donkeys of Kish (9:3-4)**

*<sup>3</sup> Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, “Take one of the*

*young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys.”<sup>4</sup> And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them.*

The story of the anointing of Saul is framed by “the donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father.”

The story begins with Saul being sent in search of the donkeys.

Saul’s encounter with Samuel comes about because Saul wishes to inquire of the man of God regarding his donkeys.

At the very center of the story in 9:20 Samuel tells Saul that the donkeys are found.

One of the signs of God’s choice of Saul involves a message concerning the donkeys.

And the story concludes with Saul and his uncle talking about the donkeys.

Saul is portrayed as a conscientious and diligent young man, pursuing the lost donkeys.

You might wonder – what’s the big deal?

So what if you are missing a few donkeys?

What does it mean for a farmer to be missing a few donkeys?

Well, that’s like telling an engineer to design a project without a computer.

Yes, he *might* be able to do it by hand – but it will take a *lot* longer!

Or like telling a contractor to get a load of lumber – without a truck.

Sure, he can carry the lumber to the job site – eventually!

The donkey is the basic tool of how a farmer gets things done!

So – not surprisingly – Saul sets out to go find his father’s wandering tools!

### **C. “All That He Says Comes True” – Seeking the Seer (9:5-14)**

<sup>5</sup> *When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant<sup>[B]</sup> who was with him, “Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.”*

When they came to the land of Zuph...

I understand if you don’t remember the importance of Zuph!

We haven’t heard that name since chapter 1...

But Elkanah was the great-great-grandson of Zuph –

and so the “land of Zuph” refers to the area where Samuel was born.

But our author is using this reference back to 1 Samuel 1 in order to “sneak up on us” slowly.

Notice how Samuel is referred to as “a man of God,” a “seer,” and “a prophet.”

But only in verse 14 do we discover that this “man of God” is in fact Samuel!

But in verses 5-13, we are given lots of hints:

first he lives in the “land of Zuph” (v5),

“all that he says comes true” (v6) – which echoes 3:19 – “the LORD...

let none of his words fall to the ground.”

<sup>6</sup> But he said to him, “Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go.”

But Saul is not convinced –

    since it was considered rude to inquire of the man of God without giving him a present.

This is part of a “gift-exchange” culture.

    We tend to be much more “transactional” –

        we want to have fixed prices for services!

    But a gift-exchange culture operates on a very different value system.

(Incidentally, the church of Jesus Christ still operates – in some ways – on the older system.

    We don’t have “membership fees” in the church.

    If we were going to follow a modern business model for church services –

        we would have a base membership fee for basic services.

    And then, if you wanted to upgrade to premium service...

    That is abysmal! – straight from the abyss!)

<sup>7</sup> Then Saul said to his servant, “But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?” <sup>8</sup> The servant answered Saul again, “Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel<sup>[e]</sup> of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.” <sup>9</sup> (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for today’s “prophet” was formerly called a seer.) <sup>10</sup> And Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.” So they went to the city where the man of God was.

It may seem somewhat trivial to ask a prophet about lost donkeys,  
    but neither Samuel nor the writer of 1 Samuel seems to think so.

You can bring anything to God!

    Don’t think that it’s too small for him to notice.

    Did you lose your keys?

        Ask God for help!

In fact, the lost donkeys are the occasion that God uses to bring Saul to Samuel.

    So Saul and his young man come to Samuel seeking after their lost donkeys.

<sup>11</sup> As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, “Is the seer here?” <sup>12</sup> They answered, “He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. <sup>13</sup> As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.” <sup>14</sup> So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.

Finally, in verse 14, we hear that the seer is Samuel.

He is going up to the high place for a sacrifice.  
(Remember that right now, the ark of the covenant is in hibernation –  
and there is no central sanctuary – since the destruction of Shiloh.  
So Samuel – as the LORD’s prophet – is doing his best  
to lead in the midst of a situation that is not the way it should be!)

But then, in verses 15-17 we discover that the LORD had prepared Samuel for this moment:

#### **D. Samuel Honors Saul at the Feast (9:15-27)**

*<sup>15</sup> Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: <sup>16</sup> “Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince<sup>[d]</sup> over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen<sup>[e]</sup> my people, because their cry has come to me.” <sup>17</sup> When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people.”*

Because God has sent Saul to Samuel not just to find his donkeys,  
but to “save my people from the hand of the Philistines.” (9:16)  
And not only that,  
but Saul is to “restrain my people.” (9:17)\

In other words, Israel is very much like a stubborn donkey...  
and Saul has been sent to find the wandering, stubborn donkeys...

Here you begin to see how the king is to function in God’s purposes.

Israel has failed.

Israel was supposed to be the son of God, ruling over the nations,  
but Israel itself—as a wayward son—now needs to be restrained and ruled  
(like a stubborn donkey).

And Saul will be the king who will do this.  
Or at least, he will start it.

*<sup>18</sup> Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, “Tell me where is the house of the seer?”*

*<sup>19</sup> Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. <sup>20</sup> As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s house?”*

So when Saul asks Samuel, “Tell me, where is the house of the seer?”  
Samuel replies, “I am the seer,”  
and invites him to a feast.

And he tells him in verse 20 that the donkeys have been found.  
And he begins to hint that there is something more in Saul’s arrival than donkeys!

*<sup>21</sup> Saul answered, “Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the*

*humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?"*

Saul is not just being polite here.

The tribe of Benjamin had catastrophically failed at the end of the book of Judges.  
Over the last few generations, they seem to have recovered somewhat –  
but the memory of their failure still clouded their sense of identity as a tribe.

But God has a long habit of taking the weak and humblest of people  
and bringing about his glory!

Saul is a good example of how God's covenant has a conditional aspect.

If Saul had been faithful,  
then it would have been the house of Saul that would have produced the Messiah.

God said to Abraham,  
"Walk before me and be blameless."

And Abraham did.

(After all, God says to Isaac that it was "because Abraham obeyed my voice,  
and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my law"  
that all nations would be blessed through Isaac's seed.-- Gen 26:4-5)

If Saul had been faithful and been a king after God's heart,  
then we would have spoken of the son of Saul as the Christ.

*<sup>22</sup> Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons. <sup>23</sup> And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Put it aside.'" <sup>24</sup> So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, "See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests." [f]*

Verses 22-24 then describe the feast.

And at the feast he gives him a place at the head of the table,  
indicating that Saul is the guest of honor.  
Not only that, but he gives Saul the leg—the bone with the most meat!

When I was in Eritrea, they gave me the bone with the most meat—

and then laughed when I started eating it in the middle of the meal.  
(They told me that since the bone was mine, I should wait until the end of the meal to eat it,  
because there was no guarantee that there would be enough food for everyone,  
so you'd better save the "guaranteed" food to the end of the meal!)

*So Saul ate with Samuel that day. <sup>25</sup> And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep. [g] <sup>26</sup> Then at the break of dawn [h] Samuel called to Saul on the roof, "Up, that I may send you on your way." So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street.*

Samuel then provided a place for Saul to sleep that night,  
and in the morning, he took Saul aside privately,  
and anointed him as king over Israel (9:25-10:1)

<sup>27</sup> *As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God.”*

### **C’. The Spirit of the LORD Turns Saul into Another Man (10:1-13)**

*10 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said, “Has not the LORD anointed you to be prince<sup>[i]</sup> over his people Israel? And you shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies. And this shall be the sign to you that the LORD has anointed you to be prince<sup>[i]</sup> over his heritage.<sup>2</sup> When you depart from me today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb in the territory of Benjamin at Zelzah, and they will say to you, ‘The donkeys that you went to seek are found, and now your father has ceased to care about the donkeys and is anxious about you, saying, “What shall I do about my son?”’<sup>3</sup> Then you shall go on from there farther and come to the oak of Tabor. Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there, one carrying three young goats, another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a skin of wine.<sup>4</sup> And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept from their hand.<sup>5</sup> After that you shall come to Gibeath-elohim,<sup>[k]</sup> where there is a garrison of the Philistines. And there, as soon as you come to the city, you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying.<sup>6</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD will rush upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.<sup>7</sup> Now when these signs meet you, do what your hand finds to do, for God is with you.<sup>8</sup> Then go down before me to Gilgal. And behold, I am coming down to you to offer burnt offerings and to sacrifice peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.”*

*And this shall be the sign to you that the LORD has anointed you to be prince over his heritage.*

And Samuel explained a series of signs.

Like usual,

the text first explains what the sign is,  
and then details the fulfillment of the sign.

This is a good example of how God first tells his people what he is going to do for their salvation,  
and then he does it.

It is not enough to have the promise,  
there must also be the fulfillment.

And so Samuel says what will happen,  
and then it happens, just as Samuel had said,

fulfilling the word of Saul's young man, “all that he says comes true.”

(And the editorial comment of 3:19, “the LORD...let none of his words fall to the ground”)

*When you depart from me today, you will meet two men by Rachel's tomb*

(Rachel was the mother of Benjamin—who died giving birth to Benjamin,  
so this is an important landmark)

*and they will say to you, “the donkeys that you went to seek are found,  
and now your father has ceased to care about the donkeys  
and is anxious about you, saying, ‘What shall I do about my son?’”*

The first sign is the answer to Saul's request,

which also demonstrates that God had orchestrated the wandering donkeys in order to bring Saul to Samuel.

*Then you shall go on from there further and come to the oak of Tabor.  
Three men going up to God at Bethel will meet you there,  
one carrying three young goats,  
another carrying three loaves of bread,  
and another carrying a skin of wine.  
And they will greet you and give you two loaves of bread,  
which you shall accept from their hand.*

The second sign is of three men going up to sacrifice,  
who will give bread to Saul.  
The oak of Tabor is reminiscent of the oak of Moreh at Shechem,  
where Abram built his first altar to the LORD (Gen 12:6),  
and the oaks of Mamre, at Hebron,  
where Abram also built an altar to the LORD (Gen 13:18),  
and where Abraham offered hospitality to the three men.

*After that you shall come to Gibeath-Elohim (the hill of God)  
where there is a garrison of the Philistines.  
And there, as soon as you come to the city,  
you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place  
with harp, tambourine, flute, and lyre before them, prophesying.  
Then the Spirit of Yahweh will rush upon you,  
and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man.*

The third, and chief, sign is that the Spirit of God will rush upon Saul  
and he will prophesy.  
He is then to wait for seven days until Samuel comes.

<sup>9</sup> When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart. And all these signs came to pass that day. <sup>10</sup> When they came to Gibeah, <sup>11</sup> behold, a group of prophets met him, and the Spirit of God rushed upon him, and he prophesied among them. <sup>12</sup> And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" <sup>13</sup> And a man of the place answered, "And who is their father?" Therefore it became a proverb, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" <sup>13</sup> When he had finished prophesying, he came to the high place.

And indeed,  
*When he turned his back to leave Samuel,  
God gave him another heart.  
And all these signs came to pass that day.  
When they came to Gibeah (Saul's hometown), behold,  
a group of prophets met him,  
and the Spirit of God rushed upon him,*

*and he prophesied among them.  
And when all who knew him previously saw how he prophesied with the prophets,  
the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish?  
Is Saul also among the prophets?"  
And a man of the place answered,  
"And who is their father?"*

Our passage ends with high hopes!

God has given Saul "another heart" and the Spirit of God has rushed upon him.  
Unlike the judges, this does not result in immediate action,  
because Saul is not supposed to be a one-shot wonder.  
The Spirit has come upon him (hopefully) for good!

With the coming of the Spirit, Saul has become a new man.  
God gave him another heart.

But you will notice that the Spirit and the word are closely linked together.  
The coming of the Spirit upon Saul does not mean that he can ignore the prophet!  
"Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do." (v8)

The Spirit gives power –  
but that power is only to be used in obedience to the Word of the LORD.

We'll look next time at the proclamation of Saul as King.  
I pointed it out in the bulletin – because it is part of the chiasmic structure –  
but it will be sufficient for us to close with the donkeys:

### **B'. The Lost Donkeys of Kish (10:14-16)**

*<sup>14</sup> Saul's uncle said to him and to his servant, "Where did you go?" And he said, "To seek the donkeys. And when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel." <sup>15</sup> And Saul's uncle said, "Please tell me what Samuel said to you." <sup>16</sup> And Saul said to his uncle, "He told us plainly that the donkeys had been found." But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, he did not tell him anything.*

Saul says nothing to his uncle about the kingdom.  
Undoubtedly his uncle had heard about Saul prophesying with the prophets.  
So he wondered what Samuel had said to his nephew!

Something has changed in Saul.

Saul had gone in search of donkeys.  
What did he find?

The verb "to find" is used 12 times in our passage.  
Saul and servant did not "find" the donkeys (9:4 – twice)  
The servant "found" the prophet's fee (9:8)  
Saul and servant "found" girls going to draw water (9:11)

who urge them to “find” the seer (9:13 – twice)  
Samuel assures Saul that the donkeys have been “found” (9:20)  
as do the two men Saul “finds” near Rachel’s tomb (10:2 – twice)  
Three men then “find” Saul near the oak of Tabor (10:3) –  
and then, with God’s powerful Spirit upon him –  
Saul will “find” opportunity against Israel’s enemies (10:7).  
And then Saul tells his uncle that Samuel told him that the donkeys were found (10:16)

That’s a lot of usage of the word “find.”  
But what is the point?

Saul has found a kingdom –  
but everything is so secret, that no one but Samuel and Saul know about it!

What is God really doing?  
Very often, you won’t see it in the obvious stuff of life.  
We see lost donkeys.  
God sees how all these things fit together into his glorious plan  
to bring salvation to all the earth!

**A’. Handsome and Tall – the Proclamation of Saul as King (10:17-26)**