

Context:

A massive transition is happening in Israel's history here, where Israel is moving from a theocracy (God ruling as King) to a monarchy (humans ruling as king).

- In CH 8, Israel asked for a king "like all the nations" (*the wrong kind of king*), thereby rejecting God as their King. Thus, God gave them up to their desire, and grants them a king, not as a blessing, but as judgment.
- CH 9 now introduces us to Saul, who is this king that Israel "asked for" (Saul= "asked for")

The Story:

I. AN ORDINARY SEARCH FOR DONKEYS(vv1-13)

¹ 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. ² 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. ³ 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." ⁴ 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. ⁵ When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us." ⁶ 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." ⁷ 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?" ⁸ The servant answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way." ⁹ (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.) ¹⁰ And Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was. ¹¹ 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?" ¹² 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. ¹³ 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."

- Donkeys were very expensive animals (symbol of wealth and status), so to lose them was a big deal.

- The detailed description of Saul in **v2** (handsome, tall) is to indicate to us that this is the kind of king whom Israel asked for. He is, in the eyes of the world, what a king should be like.

- In **v6**, the servant becomes the focus of the story, suggesting Saul to seek out the "man of God" who lives in the city of Zuph. The fact that Saul seems unaware of what is obvious to the reader (that the "man of God" is Samuel) highlights yet again that this is the kind of king that Israel was asking for: perfect on outside, but lacking much spiritually on the inside.

- In **vv. 11-13** we begin to get the sense that what began as an ordinary search for donkeys, wasn't so ordinary after all. God was up to something

II. AN EXTRAORDINARY APPOINTMENT WITH SAMUEL (vv14-27)

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed to Samuel: ¹⁶ "Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me." ¹⁷ 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." ¹⁸ Then Saul

approached Samuel in the gate and said, "Tell me where is the house of the seer?"¹⁹ 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."²⁰ 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?"²¹ 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?"²² 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.²³ And Samuel said to the cook, "Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, 'Put it aside.'"²⁴ 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." So Saul ate with Samuel that day.²⁵ 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.²⁶ Then at the break of dawn 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.²⁷ 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."

- vv15-17 are the key verses that tell us what is going on in this story. God's sovereign hand was behind this entire story, from the ordinary search for lost donkeys, to the extraordinary appointment with Samuel.

- Given the context of when this story takes place (right after Israel had rejected the Lord as king), the clear message being revealed is that the Lord is STILL the King. Even when His people reject Him, He is still the King over every circumstance of life.

Implications

1. Our entire lives are in the hands of the Sovereign King.

- God ordains every part of our lives, and is at work in all the ordinary things of life. Even when we cannot see Him working, He is.

Ephesians 1:11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

Proverbs 16:9- The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.

2. Even when we reject the Lord, He still cares and is concerned for us.

- Israel is still at the center of God's attention ("my people"= 4xs). His steadfast love never ceases.

- Even in God's judgement (giving them a king), there is mercy. The cross is the greatest demonstration of this.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. In this story, we see that God's sovereign hand was at work in the ordinary circumstances of life. For Saul, God used an ordinary search for lost donkeys to lead him to an extraordinary appointment with Samuel. Share about an experience you have had in the past, where you were able to see God's sovereign hand at work in the ordinary circumstances of life. What are some things you learned from this? What was God teaching you?

2. The fact that God still calls Israel "my people" given the context of this story (where Israel has just rejected Him as King) demonstrates His steadfast love and mercy towards sinners. Why is this important for us to remember? How do you respond to people when they sin or fail against you?

3. Saul's name means "asked for" indicating that this is the king that Israel asked for (a king like all the nations). Externally he is what society prizes as valuable (tall, handsome, wealthy) but internally he does not seem to be a spiritual man (he does not seem to know much about Samuel). Are there ways in which you place more value on what the world says is important, as opposed to what God says?

4. How do you understand God's sovereignty and man's free will? What insight does this passage give into how these both play out?