

From Lost Donkeys to the Place of Honor: God's Providence (1 Samuel 9:15-24)

1. The Purpose of the "Prince" (v.15-20)

"Prince" (v.16):

- The Hebrew word for "king" is not used here. We would expect the text to read "...you shall anoint him as 'king' over my people Israel." Instead, the Hebrew word is "prince."
- This word can be translated as "govern." Technically, Saul is going to function as a formalized judge, instead of a king.
- Kings do not govern over people; they rule them. A prince, leader, or judge at this time would govern; all of these would carry out the purposes and commands of the king.

Saul's "Purpose" (v.16-17):

- Saul will save his people from the hand of the Philistines (function as a judge).
 - God in the past has provided judges who saved them from their enemies (Judges 2:16, 18; 3:9, 31; 6:14; 10:11-14)
- "Restrain" the LORD's people:
 - Instead of ruling, Saul is going to restrain them. The LORD will use Saul to prevent His people from free-falling into chaos. Saul will also be used by the LORD to discipline His people and allow them, in some degree, to eat the bitter fruit of their ways. Saul's policies will not cause the nation to flourish.
 - Even though the LORD is going to place Saul in a position of leadership, He will not relinquish His kingship over the nation.

Israel has requested to be like the nations (8:5). None of the pagan nations recognized Samuel as the prophet and a man of God who is held in honor (3:19-20; 9:6). Nor did Saul (9:17). Saul in many ways is like "the other nations."

2. The Pre-Coronation Meal (v.21-25)

An offering has been made by Samuel, and he is waiting for his guest of honor. Saul is completely oblivious; he still has donkeys on his mind (v.20).

Once Samuel meets Saul and his servant, they are invited to a banquet hall which was a room that would have been adjacent to the "high place." There were 30 guests who were waiting for a man to sit in the place of honor; the head of the table. Samuel also gave directions to the cook to have the best meat (thigh) reserved for Saul.

This is a pre-coronation ceremony. Saul is going to be the people's king and has no clue. Interestingly, he is not anointed as king at this meal, but instead afterwards. While Saul will be the people's king, he will not be the LORD's king. He is the LORD's man who was chosen to be a prince/govern the people. In God's eyes, Saul will function more as a judge than a king. In the people's eyes, he will be their king.

3. The Providence of God and Human Freedom

Providence: God, in his goodness and power, preserves, accompanies, and directs the entire universe according to his own purposes. Four categories of divine providence:

- Government: English word that means "to steer a ship." This is not limited in reference to politics, but to control over all things (Heb. 1:3).
- Preservation: the LORD's redemptive and historical provisions (Gen. 8:2; Matt. 5:45; John 10:27-30). His knowledge and control not only began before creation (Jer. 1:5) but continue from conception onwards (Psalm 139:1-16).
- Revelation: The LORD's authority over all things.
- Concurrence: "the cooperation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act precisely how they do." (Frame). While God uses secondary causes to further his plan, secondary causes never work independently of Him (Prov. 16:9; 19:21; 21:30; Job 42:2; Is. 14:24-27; 46:10; 55:11; Dan. 4:35; Jer. 23:20; Zech 1:6). His providence is efficacious; He always accomplishes what He has determined to do.

There were millions, perhaps more, of necessary details that brought Saul from seeking out lost donkeys to now sitting at the place of honor.

Human Freedom: Saul was not coerced into doing anything; Saul did what he wanted. While Saul did everything he wanted to do, the LORD still directed all of the affairs.

4. The Pity of God (v.16-18)

The LORD sends Saul because he has pity on his people (v.16). The LORD uses "my people" three times in verse 16 (four times in v.16-17). Even though the LORD, in the people's eyes, is not their king, they are still "His people."

While God is never passive or indifferent to our sorrow, He will often times wait until the cry, or the appeal is made, before He opens heaven's storehouses of mercy.

If you are in Christ, all things are working together for your good (Romans 8:28). God is for you, and not against you (Romans 8:31). He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7), and His kindness is meant to lead you to repentance (Romans 2:4).