

## Samuel to King David 1 Samuel Ch.9 – Lost Asses

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

### Introduction

In our present series we are going through the first book of Samuel. Our talk today is on chapter 9 and is titled, “lost asses” (or lost donkeys). I suppose it is a very obvious thing to say that chapter 9 comes after chapter 8, but it is essential that we know the events leading up to where we begin today, chapter 9 and the story of Saul.

We don't have the time available to read the whole chapter together, so I will just quote from it as we go along. If I say a verse number, then you know I will be referencing 1 Samuel ch. 9. Even if you are familiar with the story, it would be good if you could read the whole chapter at your leisure.

The verses I quote will be read from the Authorised Version of the Bible, sometimes called the King James Version, and these will be referenced and listed in the transcript which can be found on our website, [www.truthfortoday.org.uk](http://www.truthfortoday.org.uk) Please feel free to download any of our talks to listen to, or print them off to read. If you have been blessed by our ministry, then please tell your Christian friends about us.

Although there are many other good translations, I do love the King James Version. A little-known fact is that it was on 12 May 1601, as the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in a small church in Fife (to avoid the plague which was raging at the time in Edinburgh), that James VI agreed to commission a new English translation of the Bible. Three years later, after he was crowned James I of England the work began. I understand that the King James Version remains the most widely published text in the English language.

### Summary of chapter 8

In chapter 8 we hear the leaders of the nation of Israel demanding Samuel to give them a king. This displeased the old prophet and he prayed to Jehovah. He knew that God was the King of Israel, but the people had lost sight of this great fact. Samuel was a great man, a prophet who faithfully judged Israel, a true man of God. But he was now old, and for some inexplicable reason had appointed his sons as judges over Israel. Samuel's sons were no more fit to be judges than were Eli's sons fit to be priests. Recently I did a radio talk on, 'Handing on to the next generation', and these two examples are further lessons for any who would confuse the natural with the spiritual.

It serves as a lesson for us that, just being old, or being in the Lord's service for many years, does not mean that we cannot make mistakes. Sadly, some older Christians, who have served the Lord for many years, make poor judgements in their old age. We are well used to hearing the older ones pray for the younger ones, but always remember that those of us who are younger need to pray for the older ones, too! I often reflect on the line of the hymn,

“Dangers abound, and we are not yet home.”  
(W. Easton 1850–1926).

How we all need to be kept close to the Shepherd!

Although the character of Samuel's sons was a concern for Israel, it seems that the main thrust of their demand to have a king was to be like the other nations, who had their kings. The very thing that marked Israel out as special, God's chosen people and His relationship with them, they gave up in favour of a man of their choosing. It's a sad day when the people of God, in any generation, give up what marks them out as different from the people round about. To the Christians at Rome, Paul writes,

“And be [ye] not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (see Romans ch. 12 v. 2).

The LORD heard Samuel's prayers and confirmed that the desires of the leaders amounted to a rejection of Him, Jehovah, by Israel. However, He graciously told Samuel to give them what they wanted. What a lesson for us today, if we persist in asking God for what we want, rather than His will for us, He may just grant us that “second best” whatever that is. Jim Elliot said, “God always gives His best to those who leave the choice with Him.”

Although Samuel reasoned, in some detail, and warned Israel what it would be like for them to be ruled by a human king, they would not listen. In verse 19 of chapter 8 we read,

“Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us.”

### **Chapter 9 - lost asses (or donkeys)**

The title for our talk today, on chapter 9, is “lost asses” (or lost donkeys). I won't be saying very much about these animals, but it is important to see that they were used providentially by God to bring Saul to Samuel. Perhaps one interesting observation is that we first read of Saul searching for his father's lost donkeys, in contrast with David, who, when we first hear of him, was keeping his father's sheep (see 1 Samuel ch. 16 v. 11). Even a casual reader of the Scriptures will see how little is said of Saul in contrast with the much said about David.

Interestingly, they both reigned for forty years over Israel, as did the third king, Solomon. David had his faults, many of them, but he was a man after God's own heart. This is said privately by Samuel to Saul and publicly by Paul to Israelites at Antioch (see 1 Samuel ch. 13 v. 14 & Acts ch. 13 v. 22).

In verse 1 we are told that Saul's father was a Benjamite called Kish, a descendant of Aphiah, who was a mighty man of power (or wealth). Immediately we are introduced to his son, Saul in verse 2,

“And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.”

There was no denying Saul's natural appeal. He was “choice” and “goodly” which I understand could be otherwise translated, “a man in his prime” and “impressive.” He was much taller than the others, I expect he was quite an impressive young man. When we come to the anointing of David, The LORD says to Samuel, concerning Eliab (one of David's older brothers),

“Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD; looketh on the heart” (see 1 Samuel ch. 16 v. 7).

Another valuable lesson for us today, to see beyond that which is naturally appealing, in the things of God. Sometimes we are inclined to forget that the natural is often in conflict with the spiritual.

In his letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul writes of the natural advantages he had and sets them all aside that he might “win Christ.”

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (see Philippians ch. 3 vv. 3-8).

In verse 3 we learn about Kish’s lost donkeys. I expect these animals were free to roam and graze, but when the time came to gather them, they could not be found. Although Kish was probably a wealthy man, he cared for these animals and sent his son, Saul, with a servant to find these lost donkeys. I don’t think we can criticise the efforts of Saul or the servant, I expect that they tried their best, but could not find the donkeys. The time came when Saul wanted to return home. He concluded that his father would now be more concerned about them than the donkeys. I’m sure every parent can understand that situation and maybe every son would not be quite so considerate as Saul was. However, verse 6 opens our eyes to the fact that the servant knew about Samuel, whereas Saul did not. Perhaps we can therefore assume that Saul was not too concerned about the things of God, nor of Samuel, the prophet of the LORD.

The story of Hannah and Samuel will be well-known to the generation who went to Sunday school. Hannah prayed for a son and then honoured her promise to the LORD by giving him as a child servant to Eli the priest. Samuel was brought up in the temple, and one night as he lay down to sleep, the LORD spoke to him. I’m sure many listeners will have heard a sermon preached on the text,

“Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.” But when the LORD called, “Samuel, Samuel”, he answered, “Speak; for thy servant heareth” (see 1 Samuel ch. 3 vv. 1-10).

Samuel is one of the 7 people in the Bible of whom we read that the LORD spoke their name twice. Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Samuel in the Old Testament, and Martha, Simon (Peter) and Saul (or Paul) in the New Testament.

Samuel’s hometown was Ramah, but as the judge of Israel, he had a circuit which meant that he travelled to Beth-el, Gilgal, Mizpeh and back to Ramah each year. Saul was brought up in the same region that Samuel came from so it is strange that he did not know of Samuel, not even by repute.

Perhaps I can take a moment to suggest to you that amongst your neighbours, even here in the UK, there will be those who know little or nothing about Jesus Christ. Let us pray for courage and wisdom to be able to share the good news (or Gospel) of Jesus Christ with those who need to hear it.

Returning to our chapter we find in verse 7 that although Saul agreed to try and find the “seer” or

prophet, he seemed very concerned that they would have to bring a present to the man of God. Perhaps this was customary, but had he known Samuel, he would have known that no gift or present was necessary. Perhaps this is another little lesson for us today. The Lord's servants need to be supported, but care needs to be taken how this is done. In his day, the apostle Paul was very careful that he was not seen to be chargeable to the brethren (see 1 Thessalonians ch. 2 v. 9).

The servant had a quarter shekel of silver, which I don't expect was of much value, but importantly it meant that they went to the city where Samuel was. In verse 11 we read that they met young women going to draw water and asked them, "Is the seer here?" They knew where he was, Samuel was engaged in the sacrifice to the LORD in the high place, presumably on a hill within the city. Up to this point in the story, we find Saul searching, both for the donkeys and for the prophet. Now we learn that the LORD was looking down, seeing everything, and had already spoken into Samuel's ear. Samuel, the man of God, had again heard the voice of the LORD speaking to him. He knew who Saul was and what he was going to be, king of Israel. He knew what he was to do concerning the anointing of Saul, of which we read in the next chapter. And he knew the whereabouts of the lost donkeys which belonged to Kish, Saul's father. Samuel knew all this because the LORD had spoken to him. I think there is something very special about the way God's word was spoken into the ear of Samuel. Israel nationally was in a low spiritual condition. God did not announce the anointing of king Saul in a public way to the masses, no, He spoke into the old prophet's ear. Remember the words of Samuel as a young boy in the temple, "Speak; for thy servant heareth."

Later we read the words of the prophet Isaiah, words which we often consider in light of the Lord Jesus Christ and His perfect life lived in this world,

"He wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned. The LORD GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back" (see Isaiah ch. 50 vv. 4-5).

What a challenge for us, in our busy lives with all the hustle and bustle, to hear the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ speaking into our ear. Horatius Bonar, born in Edinburgh, in 1808, and who was a minister in the border town of Kelso, wrote the hymn, "I heard the voice of Jesus say...". Good if like him, we can hear the Lord's voice, in our day, saying to us, "Come unto me and rest", "Behold I freely give", and "I am this dark world's light."

I have no doubt that God had providentially brought Saul to Samuel. Yes, Saul was looking for his father's donkeys, and had failed to find them, but there was a higher hand at work. I'm sure Saul would have rather that he had found these animals and returned home to his father with a sense of having achieved his mission. But that was not to be! I'm sure that Joseph would have rather not been abused and sold by his brothers into slavery, but that was in the ways of God, for him. In many biblical examples, we could think about how God moves behind the scenes to work out His plan in the lives of His people. Although it is not easy, I'm not pretending that it is, especially if the way becomes difficult, sometimes we just need to remember God's providence in our lives, too. It was John Nelson Darby (1800-1882) who said, "God doesn't only move behind the scenes, He moves the scenes He is behind."

Let's remember the words of Isaiah when he said,

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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" (see Isaiah ch. 55 vv. 8-9).

Returning to our chapter, in verse 18 we read of the moment when Saul met Samuel. I suppose one of the benefits about going through these chapters, verse by verse as it were, is that you get to really think about the story and to visualise what took place. Here was Saul, a young man, and by his own admission in verse 21, an insignificant man at that, meeting Samuel, the great prophet, the man of God. There was no bowing down, or worship of, or anything like that, in fact Samuel made Saul the chief guest at the feast. Of the thirty or so invited guests who were there, Saul was made guest of honour and got the very best part of the feast. Saul must have wondered what this was all about? He had somewhat timidly sought for 'the seer' (remember he didn't know who Samuel was) to ask his help to find his father's lost donkeys, and now he finds himself guest of honour sitting beside the prophet in the 'high place.' It must have been all very puzzling to Saul!

I remember being asked to attend a function a couple of years ago. It was a last-minute sort of thing, but I accepted the invitation and went along to this lovely Scottish castle. On arrival, I was introduced to Members of Parliament (both of Holyrood and Westminster), to highfliers in commerce and industry, to elite bankers and financiers. I felt right out of place! When it came time for the meal, my name wasn't at a place setting. I had to speak to the hosts, and they hurriedly found me a seat at the table. I sat quietly, and enjoyed the lovely food which was served, and the very beautiful, setting of the castle's banqueting room. Now, just imagine if someone had taken me to the seat at the head of the table and made me the guest of honour! Thankfully, that didn't happen to me, but it did to Saul.

At any rate, at least Saul now knew that his father's donkeys were found, even if he was puzzled by what Samuel had said to him, "And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?." Saul actually showed a great deal of humility in how he answered the man of God. We read earlier in the chapter that Saul was quite an outstanding young man, physically, and stood out as such. His physique and his good looks may well have caused him to think highly of himself, but he didn't speak that way. James the apostle writes,

"God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (see James ch. 4 v. 6).

This is an often-stated biblical principle.

And so, we see the day drawing to a close with Saul eating as guest of honour with Samuel and his invited guests. There is just another little phrase which proves that God was at work. Samuel says in verse 24, concerning the best piece of meat, "For unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people." Note that he said, "kept for thee", for Saul.

We are almost at the end of our chapter, but before we get there, and venture into verse 1 of chapter 10, where we read of Samuel anointing Saul, I want to pause for a moment and consider where we have reached in the story of the nation of Israel. This is the evening before a mere man is anointed king over God's people. This was not God's ideal, far from it, He wanted to dwell amongst His people, to be their God in a very real and living way. But the people had rejected the LORD as we read in chapter 8. Samuel, the old prophet of the LORD was against the idea, too. He warned the people of the consequences of rejecting the LORD in favour of a king. Samuel could well have resented Saul or treated him poorly, given what he was about to become, but he did not. I think we see the features of a true servant of God in the way Samuel acted. He showed tremendous faith, proving that he believed the word the LORD had spoken to him, and he then showed tremendous grace to follow this course of action, anointing Saul. Faith in the word of God and obedience to it, and grace are features that true servants of God have consistently shown throughout the years.

In verse 25 we read they came down from the high place, the place of the feasting, and into the

city, where Samuel and Saul spoke late into the evening on the roof top of what I presume was Samuel's house. What did Samuel say to Saul? What did Saul ask of Samuel? We don't know. God has not recorded in the Scriptures what was said that night. I find it interesting that so much detail was given earlier in the chapter about where the search was being conducted for the lost asses, and what Saul and his servant were thinking, but nothing is recorded of this conversation between Samuel and Saul.

I like the word used in the Authorized Version; it says that Samuel "communed" with Saul. I know other translations say 'spoke' or 'talked', but for me, to commune is deeper. One dictionary gives the definition of commune as, to share one's intimate thoughts or feelings with someone, especially on a spiritual level.

So while we cannot speculate on all that was said in this heart-to-heart between the man of God and the soon-to-be anointed king of Israel, we perhaps can conclude, from the years which follow, that Saul disregarded much of Samuel's instruction.

They rose up early on the following day, and we read that Samuel called Saul to the roof top, so that he might send him away. It's not clear at this point whether or not Samuel had told Saul that he was going to be king, I expect that from what we read in verse 27, he had not. The third king of Israel, Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, said that,

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven."

He goes on to say that there is,

"a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (see Ecclesiastes ch. 3 vv. 1-8).

And then the moment came for Saul's servant to go on ahead as Samuel made known the word of God to Saul and anointed him with oil. There are some interesting contrasts between the anointing of Saul and that of David and I expect these will be spoken about in the next series on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, in the Lord's will.

May God bless you all.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on our Samuel to king David studies on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel ch. 9. Talk No. T1296

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