

God Gives Israel a King

SCOTT HOEZEE

Most of us can admit there have been times in our lives when the one thing we most wanted would probably have also been the one thing that would have been bad for us to receive. Sometimes we have even prayed to God for a certain outcome, and then maybe years later, as we look back, we end up being thankful we did not get what we asked for. But does God ever allow us to receive what we want, even though we will regret it one day? That is a hard question to answer, but today on *Groundwork*, as we continue digging into the book of 1 Samuel, we will see God giving to Israel what they wanted, even though it just maybe would lead to a less than ideal situation. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the fourth episode of a planned seven-part series on the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. So far, we have seen God answer the prayers of a woman named Hannah to have a son, whom she would then dedicate to God's service. She does have a son, whom she names Samuel; and after he is weaned, he is brought to the temple at Shiloh, under the care of an old priest named Eli. We also saw how Eli's sons were making a spiritual ruin in Israel, but in the midst of that, God calls Samuel and he clearly is the harbinger or the sign of a better day to come in Israel. In the third episode, we saw some terrible events involving God's ark of the covenant, some battles, the final downfall of the house of Eli. That is where we have been so far, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, in this episode, we are going to move into 1 Samuel Chapters 8-10, and the rise of Israel's first king in the person of a man named Saul.

So, we want to start by reading 1 Samuel 8: When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. ²The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. ⁴So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." ⁶But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. ⁷And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, what is it about the sons of Israel's leaders, Darrell? I mean, earlier in this series, we saw the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, behave as precisely the scoundrels that the text labels them. They were corrupt, greedy, immoral. They turned the temple at Shiloh into a spiritual disaster zone. Eli, their father, had been cast in a bad light as well. Samuel, of course, has been cast in a singularly good light ever since his birth in 1 Samuel; but now, what do you know? His two sons, Joel and A-b?-jah or A-b?-jah, are almost carbon copies

of the sons of Eli; maybe not quite that bad, but for sure, Samuel's sons are setting up this same bad spiritual momentum in Israel as it happened before decades earlier.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; what is it with the sons of Israel's leaders? It doesn't seem that the transfer of the faithfulness in the father is passing to these sons; and I am not sure what is going on there, but you had mentioned in earlier episodes that there is darkness and light happening in the whole series of this scripture, and in 1 Samuel it is happening again. Unfortunately, with Samuel's light happening, the sons are not carrying that light. Unfortunately, that has implications for not only Israel, but actually the story itself.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And by the way, we have done quite a time jump here between Chapter 7 and Chapter 8. We are told now that Samuel is now old...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, time has passed, right? We have kind of leapt closer to the end of Samuel's life. So, people come to him and say: Look, Samuel; this current system just is not working. The sons of our leaders keep turning out to be really bad apples. So, let's fix this once and for all, and give us a proper king to follow; you know, like all the other nations of the earth. Samuel hears that and he is horrified. He is horrified by this request, and so he immediately brings it to God, who, rather surprisingly, Darrell, he says: Go along with it. I mean, warn them, you know, a human king is gonna claim some rights. You might not like it. But God surprisingly says: Go along with it; give them a king.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and so, I think Samuel, as a prophet, he can see down the road the implications of what this means; and at least in the immediate, because kings want things. Kings take tribute; kings have taxes; kings have things that they—eminently domain—they take over and say: This is mine. If the king wants it, there is nothing the people can do about it. And he also realizes that they actually had a theocracy, which is God ruled. God is their king, but they are saying: We don't want God as a king. We want our own king; one that we can see and talk to, and this and that. Samuel is deeply offended by that, but God says: They are not rejecting you; they are rejecting me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; it is an insult to God, not Samuel; so, go ahead. Now, why does God say this? Or did God sense that in the long run he could maybe make some redemptive lemonade out of this spiritual lemon of a request? Did God know already then that a line of kings in Israel would one day be prelude to the advent of the ultimate King of Kings? Theologically, I think we have to assume that God did know this, and that, although the kings of Israel would be, frankly, mostly disasters in the future, God would ultimately bring about a line of kings that would lead to the one we now know as King Jesus.

In any event, Samuel goes back to the people, and listen to this now, starting there at verse 10 here in 1 Samuel 8: Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹²Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.

So, are you sure you want this, Samuel was saying.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, Samuel was trying to give them the fine print. You know how you listen to those commercials that have this special drug, and then all these side effects come afterwards, and you still have to decide if you want it? He is trying to give them the side effects, if you will, of having a king, and they...they say: Yeah, we don't wanna hear all that...yeah, yeah, where do we sign? We want the king. So, they are not even paying attention to the details. They are like: Yes, we just want to be like the other nations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is right. I like the analogy to the pharmaceutical commercials. All these bad things that could happen, and people said: Sounds good; let's do it! So, okey-dokey then; a king it is. You are going to get what you want and you may have buyer's remorse someday, but this is what they want.

So, Samuel heard all that the people said...I am in verse 21 now of Samuel 8:

He repeated it before the Lord. ²²The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town."

Now again, Darrell, given what we now know about the history of Israel that will unfold, make no mistake; this is a key turning point in the biblical narrative; and soon enough we are going to be introduced in 1 Samuel to someone named David; and he will also turn out to be less than perfect, David will set up a longer term covenantal relationship between God and Israel that will one day lead to that Son of David; but first, we need to encounter a different man, a man named Saul; and we are going to meet him next. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And let's dig right into 1 Samuel again, Darrell. Now, we are going to move to Chapter 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. ²Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else. ³Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." ⁴So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them. ⁵When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us." ⁶But the servant replied, "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, this is overall a rather curious way to introduce us to someone who will become a major figure in Israel. Such a mundane, ordinary event: Some donkeys go missing, so Saul's father tells him to go find them and bring them back. Hardly an earthshattering event, and yet, soon enough, as the story unfolds, we see that through this ordinary happening, Saul is going to end up meeting no less than Samuel in a way he might not otherwise have done. Darrell, maybe that is just a reminder to us that you never know exactly what events God is active in.

DARRELL DELANEY

Well, you know, in this book God is pretty much up in the forefront, but we see there are other books in the Bible where God is not in the forefront. He is...in the book of Esther, God is moving in the background. In the book of Ruth, God is moving in the background. It is a lot of places and a lot of times, not only in

scripture, but in our lives, that we don't know, and we are not aware, that God is moving; but he definitely is moving behind the scenes and using these moments. So, we cannot count any of these small things out. We consider them small, and we consider them not important, but God was setting up the actual encounter for Samuel to be the one who anoints Saul to be king.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Picking it up in 1 Samuel 9:15: Now the day before Saul came, the Lord had revealed this to Samuel. (See, God is way ahead of this)

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹⁶“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the land of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me.” ¹⁷When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the Lord said to him, “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”

And you know, Darrell, so often in our lives we go about our daily routines, or maybe we encounter something unexpected, maybe something that feels like a detour from the path we would rather be on; and yet, maybe that is exactly the way God is leading us, as is true here of Saul.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting how we can see it as a setback or...you know, we are riding in traffic; the traffic stops; it is getting us there late; and it actually avoids a car accident that happened in the same place we would have been if we had been on time. It is just... You never know how God will protect you or set you up because he is the one who is thinking about past, present, and future, and how events are connected. In this event, in hindsight, we look back and see God was moving, but at the time, nobody knew except Samuel, because God was informing him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Providence is...sometimes something happens, you know, in the moment you say: That's a God thing; thank you! But most of the time, we look back. I remember when I started Calvin College in 1982, I took some placement tests, including for the German language; and when I got to the registration line to register for my first class as a Freshman, I was handed a note that said: You did well on your German placement test. You are encouraged to take German 218. Well, you know, Darrell, naïve Freshman that I was, I assumed I *had* to take German 218! But it turned out, I actually tested out of my German requirement; and had I known that, I probably would never have taken another German course again. But what would have happened if I had done that? Well, I would have missed meeting a professor, who would go on to become my dearest mentor and friend for decades to come. I would have missed pursuing what turned out to be my major in German at Calvin, and the multiple ways God used that to shape me for ministry in the church, to which he would soon call me. I had not been called to the ministry yet. So, I had a misunderstanding, and guess what? God was behind the misunderstanding, and got me to a place he wanted me to be.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is interesting how from our end it looks like, oh, we could go this way; we could go that way; but it is God's plan that we end up following. Even when I came to Grand Rapids, I chose to go to Grand Rapids Community College; and because of that, I met a mentor in a varsity Christian fellowship who changed my life for the next twenty years and continues to be my mentor to this day. So, it is interesting how God can work in those details; but back to 1 Samuel 9. We want to see here...we want to look at this because we can see that Saul ends up being reluctant rather than recipient of God's favor when we pick up in verse 18. It says:

Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, “Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?” ¹⁹ “I am the seer,” Samuel replied. “Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and

in the morning, I will send you on your way and will tell all you that is in your heart. ²⁰As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?" ²¹Saul answered, "But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?"

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, Saul is not exactly champing at the bit here for the leadership role Samuel is dangling in front of him. Hey, he is from the smallest tribe...he is from the smallest family in the smallest tribe. He is a nobody; his family is unimportant. Surely God can do better than this? That is basically what Saul says to Samuel. Of course, Darrell, what Saul cannot know is that God always operates that way. He is always choosing the least likely. If you think you are the least likely candidate, you probably are actually the *most* likely candidate. That was that way, you know; God wants to start a mighty nation, where does he start? Abram, Sarai, a pair of childless senior citizens who had never been able to have children when they were young. When he wants to deliver his people from Egyptian slavery, who does he choose? Moses, who has a stutter...he stutters and he is God's mouthpiece. God is always doing this kind of thing. So, Saul, being the least likely in his eyes, makes him the most likely in God's eyes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and Paul makes that clear when he talks in 1 Corinthians about how ^(1:27)God uses the foolish things to shame the wise and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one can boast. So, God gets the glory when he does that; and eventually he is going to send his Son into this world as a helpless baby...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And the parents, who were so poor, he ended up being born in a barn, is going to happen as well, but Saul cannot know that. You know, it is interesting to see that, even though Saul feels like he is a really unlikely candidate, it makes him *the* candidate that God wants to use; and in a moment, we are going to see the actual anointing of Saul, and the rather humorous scene, where Saul tries to duck this call of God on his life. So, we are going to stay tuned for that.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Let's get right back to our story and now move...we have seen 1 Samuel 8 and 9...now let's move to Chapter 10: Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?" ²When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, "The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"

So, the lost donkeys that kicked off this story, leading to Saul's encounter with Samuel...they have also been taken care of by God...all set; and now, Samuel does actually, Darrell, in his heart of hearts he does not really want to do: He anoints a man king over Israel.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, he is actually obeying the Lord's command to do that. So, what was interesting is that you said: The donkeys had been found. Samuel mentioned that. Then, before that, in the last segment, Saul knew that his father was going to start worrying about them...

SCOTT HOEZEE

He was right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And that is exactly what happened here as well. So, you know, even though it is not Samuel's idea to anoint this guy as the king...this is the guy who is going to replace God? Like we had somebody who had a wonderful tenure, undefeated, living and doing things perfectly; and we are going to replace him with a man who is far from perfect and making excuses. But okay, because God said so, I will anoint this person. He is going to be the king, and we are going to do what God says to do.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, this has all happened. Samuel has anointed him, so Saul is going to make his way home. So, we are still in 1 Samuel 10, here, and we will pick it up at verse 9.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. ¹¹When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?" ¹²A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" ¹³After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place. ¹⁴Now Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?" "Looking for the donkeys," he said. "But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel." ¹⁵Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you." ¹⁶Saul replied, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just a tiny, little detail that Saul leaves out of the retelling here: Oh, and by the way, I got anointed with olive oil. He doesn't quite give his uncle the full scoop of what actually had happened; and the donkeys, they were just a pretext for all this. So, he talks about the donkeys: Oh, yeah; Samuel said they were found, so we figured we would come home.

Again, Darrell, despite the Spirit of God having fallen on Saul, such that he was prophesying with the other prophets, much to the astonishment of everyone who had ever known Saul. We will read this again in a future episode in this series: Is Saul among the prophets? Right; it does kind of become a slogan that accompanies him; but it is pretty clear, Darrell, he is not sure about this whole king thing; and if you read this and you think: Hey, Saul doesn't seem real sure about this king thing, you are right; because listen to what is next in 1 Samuel 10 at verse 20.

When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. ²²So they inquired further of the Lord, "Has the man come here yet?" And the Lord said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies." ²³They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. ²⁴Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the Lord has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

DARRELL DELANEY

This is hilarious to me. Like, they cannot find him. He is hiding among the supplies, like okay, so, he has not fully subscribed to being king, even though, and this is one of the verses we didn't read, where Samuel says to Saul: ^(10:6)Hey listen; the Spirit of the Lord is going to come upon you and overpower you and you are going to be changed into a different person. And that happened and he began prophesying. Even that is not enough to turn Saul's heart to say: Okay, I think I am qualified to do this because the Lord has anointed me. He is ending up hiding in the supplies. It is really crazy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

When I read this, I was thinking: Well, let's just imagine that some January 20th, the presidential inauguration in Washington D. C.; there are former presidents, there are world leaders, dignitaries of all kinds gathered in front of the U.S. Capitol, and then at one point, the loudspeaker announces: Ladies and gentlemen, the President Elect of the United States. Grand music begins to play; a door opens at the top of the steps and...there is no one there. "Where is the President Elect?" people would, of course, ask. Then imagine some staffer appearing at the top of the steps and saying: "We found the President Elect! He is hiding in the closet." Uh, that would not be inspiring on Inauguration Day. And that is kind of what happens here. Saul is hiding from the people; hiding from being king.

Well, many of us know that in the long run, actually, that things are not going to work out well for Saul, and some of these things in Chapters 9 and 10 here of 1 Samuel already hinted that. So, Darrell, the question is: Why would God choose someone like that? Yes, we noted, God has his pattern of picking the least likely people for grand tasks, but this least likely candidate is also going to turn out to be the wrong candidate. Why did God allow this?

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know, I think that, even though God in his divine providence knows, he has a long game plan. I think he's trying...in one sense...he is trying to help people understand: You don't always want what you ask for. I mean, when you ask for a situation...you ask for a king...he is a regular human, finite king. He is going to make mistakes; and you mentioned earlier in the series that there is a great deal of foreshadowing that happens. The fact that Saul is acting this way should be signaling to the readers that this is not the guy...this is not the ideal person...and it is really interesting to see, even though God allows this stuff, his providence and his power can still work in spite of it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Even if it can be baffling, right? So, I think, just here, Darrell, we need to acknowledge that life, including the life of faith before God...it contains its fair share of mysteries. I mean, yes, we believe that in the long run, God is going to take up all the threads of our lives and he will weave them into a beautiful tapestry after all; but for now, as in this story, we live with certain tensions, and that can be frankly kind of painful. So, let's not paper over the pain we experience when we ask hard questions, to which there seems to be no good answers.

So, I think, Darrell, here is maybe where we can lean into some familiar words from Isaiah 55, and words like these are reflected elsewhere in scripture, but in Isaiah 55:8, God says: My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it doesn't mean that we don't ask God the hard questions. It doesn't mean that we don't hold to these truths that the world is broken, and that God is sovereign and good. It doesn't mean that we don't lament; like the Lord actually gave us a biblical pattern for lamenting, if you look at the Psalms; but it is a reminder that the life of faith, even though it is difficult, we still, with the Holy Spirit's help, can keep our faith in a God who loves us fiercely, who loves us through Jesus Christ our Lord, who loves us and continually holds out his unchanging hand to us and faithfully keeps us in his power, in his sovereignty; thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. Join us again next time as we continue our study of 1 Samuel in Chapters 13-17, which show the downfall and failure of Saul, the anointing of David, and that famous story of David and Goliath.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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