

“Saul is Led to Samuel”

One of the most amazing facts about God’s acts or help is that He generally mobilises people and arranges events well in advance of us asking Him for something. In my own life I have been dumb-struck by the way God brings together resources to bring me help, even before I know I need it! For example, a sudden need might come upon me on, say, a Friday, so I pray for God’s intervention and help. The help comes that day or the next... but the activity began well before I knew I would need help! This fact is mind-blowing.

Let me give a simple but telling example. I needed to get to my work very fast, for if I arrived late I would be disciplined. It was my own fault, but, even so, I prayed for God to get me there on time. Frankly, I did not expect an answer, though I was fervent in my prayer. (We are all like this!).

I had just ten minutes to cover a journey of 30 minutes, so even if I ran I would be late. I began to run! I turned the corner of my street and ran up the hill to another major road. As I slowed to a walk, out of breath, and crossed the road, about to run again up a side street, a taxi came to a halt at my side and a female voice called “*Get in!*” The voice belonged to a female nurse who worked with me! As we sped toward work she said that she had also got up late, so called for a taxi. We got to work on time and I was not disciplined.

Now, the girl told me that she called for the taxi half an hour before I had a lift. Thus, God had mobilised the means of my ‘salvation’ well before I knew I needed it myself! This filled me with amazement and I was awe-struck. But, sadly, as the day wore on, I began to think it was just coincidence.

The real awe came the next day and the day after that... next day I again woke up late and had another ten minutes to cover the 30 minute journey. Again, I prayed to God to deliver me. As I did so, I felt a deep twinge of anxiety and as I started to run, I felt guilty that I awoke late yet again and had the temerity to call for God’s help. Thus, I did not expect a result. But, when I reached the exact same spot as the day before, a taxi again stopped and I was given a lift to work in time, by the same person!

The girl said she had also got up late, again, and told the taxi driver to follow the same route just

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in case I was late, too! The amazing thing was that she normally went a completely different route. On the first occasion, she felt compelled to tell the driver to travel along the road I was on, though she did not know why. The taxi driver, too, would not have normally travelled that route. On this second occasion the girl 'had a feeling' that maybe someone might need a lift! So, when it happened a second time, the awe I felt was deep seated. It was only a lift, but it showed me something of God that was wonderful.

I was almost content with this revelation, but God had other ideas! Next day, for the third time, I again got up late, and again had only ten minutes to get to work. This time, things had changed – I automatically called to God for help... but suddenly felt a cold shiver as I realised my position. As I ran up my road I was filled with fear. I had got up late three times and each time expected God to help me. Surely I was now tempting God? As I ran I repented of my foolishness. Yet, when I reached the same spot as before, I expectantly looked for a taxi! None came and so I continued to run. Perhaps, after all, it was imagination...

Then, as I was about to turn up the side street, a vehicle stopped and a voice called me. It was another nurse, but in his own car. He, too, never used that route, but felt he had to travel that way. I had not seen a taxi because God used someone else instead! I got into that car in a state of shock. All day I ruminated over what had happened and as I remembered the exact details of each of those three days my awe was complete. In a simple way God had shown me His power and elective grace. The timings and conditions were so exact as to cast out any doubt or other explanation.

I realised that, on each occasion, God had mobilised other people well before I had prayed for help. Those people travelled a route they never used before and never used again. And each time it was in direct response to my specific prayed-for need. And it happened three times, in exactly the same way, at the very same spot! The awe I felt was so dramatic and real I could think of nothing else for months. I had been shown God's power and authority over every part of His creation. I had been shown how He acts even before we know our own needs. And I had been shown the reality of prayer.

Knowing what I know now, over forty years later, I am convinced God gave me those three days as a test. The result was complete trust in God and true prayer, and those three days, insignificant in themselves as events, were used to display a power so awesome, I quaked in holy fear. But, the ensuing trust (faith) affected my whole life from the third day onward. The three episodes were very necessary, because one act would have left me thinking it was coincidence (as I indeed thought). A second time would have made me totter on the brink of belief. It took a third episode to convince me. I thank God for His gracious intervention and now

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know He is alive and active in our lives today!

I wanted to share this amazing time in my life before talking about Saul, because what happened to him was what happened to me. Here we have two men who did not know each other. Yet, God mobilised everything in such a manner as to bring them together, starting the events even before either man knew what was going to happen. I wanted the reader to know that such events are not just in the past. They occur today, bringing immense fear of Almighty God, yet a trust that cannot be shaken. God is alive! So, read in awe, my friends, for you are looking at God's mighty power, not just a dusty piece of history.

Verses 1&2

1.

“Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power.

2.

And he had a son, whose name was Saul, a choice young man, and a 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.”

We are now introduced to a man who was to change Israel altogether. A man who had no idea he was to live for ever in scripture as an example of one who had great gains and then lost them. Here we meet Saul, a man of great valour and honour, whose inner self took over from God's will, thus bringing him down to the dust.

First we are given Saul's family background. Many Christians say they are bored by the long lists of names given in scripture. What a mistake! These names are signs of authenticity. They show we can, to some degree, trace people in scripture, proving they were real people taking part in real history.

Saul's father was Kish ('bent') whose family name was Matri ('rain of Jehovah'), a tribe of Benjamin. Kish was the son of Abiel ('God is my father'). He was the son of Zeror whose father

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was Bechorath ('first born'). And he was the son of Aphiah ('?breeze'), a 'mighty man of power'. We know from this that Saul's great-great-great grandfather was a very brave, strong and wealthy man. This probably explains the obvious wealth and status of Saul's father, Kish.

We read that Saul ('desired'), to become first king of Israel, was a 'choice young man, and goodly'. He was 'goodlier' than any other man in all of Israel and about 18 inches taller than anyone else, with a physique to match. The words used mean Saul was pleasant and agreeable, to look at as well as by nature. He was 'excellent' and highly esteemed by others, a happy man with a good intellect, kind and usually well disposed toward his fellows, whose ethical and moral character was known.

Overall, then, Saul was a man of superb character with the highest of intentions. On top of that he was handsome, big and strong! Therefore, the first king of Israel would be imposing to look at with an impeccable character. Sadly, we see this great and good man degenerate throughout his reign, as a small hint of human effort grew into a hatred for David, the next king of Israel, and a defiance of God's will. To look at, and to listen to, Saul was a magnificent man, with everything going for him. He genuinely loved God and wanted to please Him. Yet, a small bit at a time, he started to spiral downward in sin.

Modern Christians do not really understand why Saul warranted God's complete and utter wrath, to the point of allowing Saul to kill himself. This is proof of our weak understanding of God's holiness and demands. In this account we see how God views sin, even those sins we think are 'small'. Every sin could bring death from God, even to His people, and we need to recapture this sense of urgency as we live out our imperfect lives, so that we again live in holiness. By comparison, what Saul did (and we will see all this in the First Book of Samuel) might seem to be insignificant. But, we can only think this because of our own lack of understanding of how serious sin is to God. We should be thankful that God does not leave us as He left Saul!

Why did God so punish Saul? Possibly as a warning to those who wanted an earthly king; possibly to show God's wrath against all disobedience; but probably because, as king, Saul was in the eye of everyone, and so had great influence over the character of Israel as a whole. He was God's delegated person on this earth, the one who judged and controlled Israel as a shepherd. By allowing himself to depart from God's will, then, he was taking the people along a willful and sinful path. Hence, God had to act against him.

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I find it truly sad that such a great and good man should fall so badly as to lose his life. Along the way he lost the Presence of God, as well as the respect of many who knew him – except for David, who remained loyal to his king though his king wanted to see him dead. Therefore, as we read the details of Saul's life, let us remember that he began honourably. His sin was not 'big' in our own eyes, but to God they were worthy of death. Let us always be wary of committing sin and losing His favour!

Verses 3-6

1.

"And the asses of Kish Saul's father were lost. And Kish said to Saul his son, Take now one of the servants with thee, and arise, go seek the asses.

2.

And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not.

3.

And when they were come to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant that was with him, Come, and let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses, and take thought for us.

4.

And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass; now let us go thither; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go."

The scene is now set as God arranges two lives to meet, well before either of them knew about it. Just like the example from my own life at the beginning of this study. Kish had animals and some of his asses were somehow lost. God was to use this as a basis for His quite complex plan. Kish asked his son, Saul, to go out and find the animals. A dutiful son, Saul gladly went out into the wilderness with a servant, to search for the asses.

The two young men travelled through mount Ephraim in the north of Israel (named after the

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second son of Joseph) and then through Shalisha nearby. After that, not finding the beasts, they went through Shalim ('foxes'), and then through Benjamite country. Finally, when they got to Zuph ('honeycomb'), northwest of Jerusalem, Saul was about to give up. He was worried that his father would start to grieve, thinking both of them were killed.

Before they started back Saul had an idea (from God, though he did not realise it)... let us go into 'this city' (Ramah, Samuel's home) and find the 'honourable' 'man of God' (an understatement, seeing as Samuel was the ruler of Israel at that time!). Saul knew Samuel was a true prophet because everything Samuel prophesied came to pass - a salutary lesson to modern charismatic self-appointed 'prophets' whose words are lies, for they do not come to pass.

Saul thought that Samuel might be able to tell him, prophetically, where to find the asses. Superficially, we might argue we ought not use God or His men in this trite way. Normally, I would agree, but this was the way chosen by God to teach Saul something. A similarly 'insignificant' way was chosen to prove to me, once and for all, the might and power of God. Indeed, it is often in the 'small things' that God's power is made manifest in the most magnificent of ways. The mite can often be of greater value than the shekel!

Verses 7-10

1.

"Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? For the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?

2.

And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I Have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way.

3.

(Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime a Seer.)

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Then said Saul to his servant, Well said, come let us go. So they went unto the city where the man of God was.”

It must have been customary to give a gift to the prophets as a mark of respect, for Saul suddenly thought about it and wondered what he could give to Samuel. He turned to his servant and asked for ideas, for all their food had gone – the servant said he had a quarter of a silver shekel. Excellent idea, said Saul, let us go! So the two made their way up the hill to Ramah city to find the great Samuel.

The meaning of this verse could, possibly, be a little unclear; does it mean that ‘prophet’ is an updated name for a ‘seer’? Or, does it mean that the office of ‘seer’ was something separate from that of a ‘prophet’. No, ‘seer’ was just another, but older, name for ‘prophet’ in those days, for he was, ra’ah, one who had extraordinary perception and discernment. He also had visions. In the New Testament a prophet has visions of the future and was also able to teach the things of God, having the perception to do so.

The ‘prophet’ of the Old Testament acted as a spokesman for God, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, so the meaning of the word is the same as that for a ‘seer’. Interestingly, the word for ‘prophet’, nabiyy, can also refer to false, or heathen, prophets.

Verses 11-14

1.

“And as they went up the hill to the city, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and said unto them, Is the seer here?”

2.

And they answered them, and said, He is; behold, he is before you: make haste now, for he came to day to the city; for there is a sacrifice of the people to day in the high place:

3.

As soon as ye become into the city, ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat: for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice; and

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afterwards they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up; for about this time ye shall find him.

4.

And they went up into the city: and when they were come into the city, behold, Samuel came out against them, for to go up to the high place.”

Read with open eyes and heart, the books of Samuel are magnificent! Here we see in minute detail an act of God unfolding. He put into motion something Samuel had a small inkling about, but Saul knew nothing of. God was moving Saul through the loss of some animals, so that he could meet up with the prophet Samuel. In this section we see how God’s plan involved some very tight time schedules! Yet, Saul arrived at exactly the right time.

I never cease to be amazed by these mighty passages of scripture! It is an amazement I have today, when I see God’s hand in so many ways. He works like a master, arranging and detailing until the whole masterpiece is finished and ready for view! Then, when it is viewed, the onlooker is made breathless by the beauty and finish of the piece.

As the two young men climbed the road towards the city they saw some young servant girls, drawing water from a well outside the walls. They asked if Samuel was at home. ‘Yes’, they replied, ‘but you will have to hurry! Samuel has only just arrived at Ramah from his circuit travels and he is about to walk up to the temple to make a sacrifice. Go immediately and you will find him walking up the hill to the temple. Catch him there, because the people are waiting for him to enjoy the feast – they will not start until he arrives. Get there straight away because only those who are invited can eat with him’. The men hurried through the gate and, at that exact time, Samuel was found in the street.

Though it is not a ‘type’, this describes the urgency of the Gospel. We must approach the Messiah before He sits down to the feast in Heaven. When He is seated His work is fully finished, and only those whom He invites may sit with Him. We may not be seated because we wish to, but only because He invites us. Even so, we must approach Him. In salvation we do not do this of our own volition. As with Saul, God has to prompt and call us (through regeneration). He must lead us to the very gates and must then show us the way, before we can meet the Prophet. Only after God has thus prepared the way and the means, can we approach the

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Prophet (that is, Christ) and be invited to the feast!

How much more magnificent is this godly way of salvation than the man-made, Arminian, idea of choosing God ourselves! See in this historic account how God worked behind the scenes for a long while to effect the meeting of Saul and Samuel! How splendid compared to the earth-bound notion that we can somehow stumble upon a vague wish to approach God ourselves, without His guiding hand and elective grace!

Note the urgency in the voice of the young girls - go now! Likewise, though we are elected and cannot come to God without His prior election of our souls, we must nevertheless respond to Him by pleading with Him for pardon and salvation, as soon as we hear the Gospel. Our pleading will not give us salvation, but the obedience in pleading is needed before He will act. This is because the obedience in pleading has been initiated in our soul by the Holy Spirit and is a part of the whole act of salvation. It does not give us salvation, but is part of it. Thus, when we respond to, or approach, God, it is all part of His plan for our souls and is not of our own 'free will'. It only becomes an act of our volition after He has regenerated us, and not before. This is vital to understand, for it separates true salvation from false.

Verses 15-17

1.

"Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying,

2.

To morrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shall anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto me.

3.

And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over my people."

God told Samuel the day before, that he would meet a young man on this day. Note that God

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sent Saul, though Saul did not know it! Many times, what Christians do – and sometimes even unbelievers – is determined completely by God, by an arrangement of circumstances. In this case, God told Samuel that the young man would be the future king of Israel. He would bring victory against the Philistines, so that, too, was under God's command. Why should God do this when the people had followed after other gods and then, after their forgiveness, turned against God's rule by choosing to have an earthly king? We do not know. We only know that God said He had heard the cries of His people, oppressed by the heathen enemy.

As Samuel walked up the hill and Saul came into view, God told him: 'There he is. That is the man I told you about. He is the king of Israel!' From start to finish, God controlled and led everything.

Verses 18-22

1.

"Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is.

2.

And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to day, and to morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart.

3.

And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?

4.

And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou to me?

5.

And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons."

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Saul walked up to Samuel, not knowing who he was (much as a British subject might not recognise the Queen, if she was alone in the street, for few have actually met her). 'Can you tell me where the seer lives?' Samuel's response was both stark and electrifying, driving to the heart of the matter. (When a man is given something by God, it will always be direct and to the point). Samuel replied, 'I am the seer. Go up the hill to the temple, and place yourself at the table. Tomorrow I will send you away again after telling you what is on your mind and in your heart. As for the asses you have been looking for over the past three days, do not worry, for they are safe and well, in good hands. All of Israel looks to you and to your family as their most treasured wish!'

Saul expected that the seer would tell him where his animals were, but this last statement must have rocked him to the core! Was he hearing correctly? Saul, curious and perplexed, said, 'Pardon? I am of the smallest tribe in Israel – why should Israel so treasure me? What makes you say all that?'

It seems Samuel did not reply immediately, but guided the two men in to the 'parlour' or hall, where the feast was to be eaten. There were about thirty people sitting around the table, all specially chosen guests of Samuel, and Samuel put both Saul and his servant next to himself, in the most honoured seats.

Verses 23&24

1.

"And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee.

2.

And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! Set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day."

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Samuel called the cook to the table and said, 'Bring me that plate of meat I gave you to keep'. The cook dutifully complied and brought a plate of 'shoulder' joint, or leg/thigh/upper leg. This was one of the best parts of the animal and represented an honour to Saul. 'Look at the piece you have – I deliberately kept it for you when I invited the others'. And so Saul ate as the chief guest, unaware of how God had set in motion one of the biggest changes in Israel's existence to that time.

Verses 25-27

1.

"And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house.

2.

And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they were both of them, he and Samuel, abroad.

3.

And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God."

After the feast, Samuel took Saul back to his own home and went up to the flat roof for a talk. Saul stayed with him that night and they all got up early. Whilst it was still morning, Samuel again called Saul to the rooftop before he could leave. After that they and the servant left the house and made their way to the main gate of the city. As they walked down the hilly street, Samuel instructed Saul to send his servant ahead to wait at the gate. Samuel then stood with Saul saying, 'Let me repeat what the Lord has given me to tell you'. So there, in the street, a rich man's son, from one of the smallest tribes in Israel, was told by Israel's spiritual and civil leader, of his destiny – one that would shape Israel as a nation.

God usually speaks to us in ordinary ways about truly astounding things. His word can come through anyone or anything at any time, or through events and thoughts. He can speak to us at night as we sleep, or by reading scripture, and, at all times, what He says will be consistent with

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His declared word. Do you anticipate God communicating with you, every day?

There are Reformed men (called 'cessationists') who insist God no longer does this, but they are very wrong. If God did not thus speak, then no preacher or pastor called of God could possibly speak with authority. Our faith is breathing and vibrant because it is alive! The Holy Spirit speaks directly to us in many ways. As always the proof is that it is consistent with scripture and it comes to pass. So, let the men of God speak... "*stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God*"!

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