

# "God Save the King!"

Just before Saul was sent home again by Samuel, the prophet deepened the mystery for him. He told him he would become the king ('captain') of Israel. A young man, he had no idea what it meant, for to that juncture in history the Israelites had never experienced the rule of an earthly king. They knew what it was like to be subjected to a forced allegiance to foreign kings and princes, and they even knew what it was like to be dealt with harshly by those kings. But, they did not know what to expect of their own king.

It is true that Samuel spelled it out to them when they first demanded a king, but they simply could not properly comprehend the reality of having a king over them. So, Saul probably heard the message but did not really perceive how it would actually affect him. Nor did he feel exactly confident about it all, as his silence before his uncle proves (see later section in this chapter).

### Verses 1-4

1.

"Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance?"

2.

When thou art departed from me to day, then thou shalt find two men by Rachel's sepulchre in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah; and they will say unto you, the asses which thou wentest to seek are found: and, lo, thy father hath left the care of the asses, and sorroweth for you, saying, What shall I do for my son?"

3.

Then shalt thou go on forward from thence, and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine:

4.

And they will salute thee, and give thee two loaves of bread; which thou shalt receive of their hands."

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There in the street, Samuel poured olive oil on Saul's head and kissed him. This can either mean he touched him gently or that he kissed him on the cheek. The most likely meaning is an actual kiss. It was a common activity and it was repeated in the New Testament, e.g. greet each other with an holy kiss. (Christians in the UK are not very good at this, feeling either awkward or linking it with sexuality! But, in the Middle East and Mediterranean it is a common custom).

Saul was probably further perplexed by this anointing, for Samuel had to say *"Surely you understand that I am doing this because God will crown you king to lead Israel?"*

Then comes a remarkably detailed prophecy. This is how a true prophecy would be given – with much detail. It is the detail, that cannot possibly be overlooked, that proves whether or not something has been prophesied, or if there has been a 'coincidence'.

Just look at what Samuel said to Saul... a short while after you leave Ramah, you will come across two men. They will be by the tomb of Rachel ('ewe'), Jacob's wife and mother of Joseph, at the border of Benjamite country, at Zelzah (5 miles south-west of Jerusalem). See how exact all this is? Two men; at a precise location.

So as not to confuse this with mere coincidence, Samuel said the two men would tell Saul his asses had been found (just as Samuel said). They would tell him his father was very worried about Saul. So, the detail is added to, with very exact repetition of Samuel's earlier prophecy. But, it did not end there, for the prophecy continues...

Saul would leave these two men and carry on his journey. On the plain of Tabor ('mound'), at the foot of the mountain adjoining the hills of Nazareth, he would come across three men who were travelling 'up to God' to Bethel ('house of God'), formerly known as Luz, a very ancient site of worship in Ephraim. One man would be carrying three young male goats, one would carry three loaves and the third man would have a bottle of wine. Can you imagine a modern charismatic (false) prophet being that precise? Never! Remember – every single item contained in a 'prophecy' must come true! There is no room for error. The prophecy carries on with even more detail...

The three men would greet Saul and the man carrying the loaves would give him two of them.

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Note – not all of them, or one, but two... again, very exact. And he would not be given wine or a goat – just two loaves. This kind of prophetic detail is, to put it in modern idiom, ‘mind-blowing’! In the beginning of this paper I described a three-fold sign that God answered prayer. That was ‘mind-blowing’ enough - can you imagine what I would have felt, if God told me in advance the exact details of what was to come? The prophecy continues...

### Verses 5-9

1.

“After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines: and it shall come to pass, when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp, before them; and they shall prophesy:

2.

And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man.

3.

And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, that thou do as occasion serve thee; for God is with thee.

4.

And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal; and, behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings: and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings: seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and shew thee what thou shalt do.

5.

And it was so, that when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day.”

When Saul left those three men, he would come to the ‘hill of God’, near Geba, so called because it was devoted to God’s service and used by a school of prophets. It was also a

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garrison town of the Philistines. When he reached this city, he would see a 'company of prophets', or a band of seers. They would be returning from worshipping God in the 'high place' or place of worship, accompanied by the playing of musical instruments; psaltery (harp or guitar); tabret (tambourine); pipe (flute) and harp (as this instrument is mentioned separately from the psaltery, the meaning of 'psaltery' in this text must be 'guitar').

Such instruments were played both freely as a sign of spontaneous joy and in a more formal way. It is not clear whether or not the prophets played these instruments, or if musicians did so, for the prophets, Saul was told, would be prophesying.

When Saul saw the prophets the Holy Spirit would fall on him and he, too, would prophesy! At that moment he would be 'turned into another man', transformed into a different person. Is this the equivalent of becoming a Believer, saved by grace? It is very likely. Was he 'saved'? I think so.

After Saul saw and heard all these signs, and came under the influence of Almighty God, he had to do whatever he saw fit under the divine prompting of God, Who would instruct him. Then he must travel to Gilgal to wait seven days for Samuel, who would arrive to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings as a sacrifice to God. When all was finished Samuel would give him more instructions.

Saul must have listened with rapt attention, in an attitude of utter awe. Then, when Samuel dismissed him, God 'gave him another heart'. That is, He gave Saul a brand new moral character and soul. This, too, suggests strongly that Saul knew a 'conversion experience', regardless of what happened later in his life, which demonstrates that even those known to God can get things badly wrong, even to the bringing of God's wrath upon their heads.

*"And all those signs came to pass that day"*. This underlines the fact that Samuel's prophecy was so detailed because it was a sign of God's intervention. There was no way any part of the prophecy could have been wrong, or amended by a minor difference in detail. The proof that Samuel was telling Saul the truth direct from God, was that every jot and tittle would come to pass – and so it did, that very day.

### Verses 10-13

1.

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“And when they came thither to the hill, behold, a company of prophets met him; and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

2.

And it came to pass, when all that knew him beforetime saw that, behold, he prophesied among the prophets, then the people said one to another, What is this that is come unto the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?

3.

And one of the same place answered and said, But who is their father? Therefore it became a proverb, Is Saul also among the prophets?

4.

And when he had made an end of prophesying, he came to the high place.”

As prophesied, Saul came across everyone he was meant to meet. When he met the band of prophets, the Holy Spirit ‘came upon him’, or ‘became profitable’ to him by causing him to utter prophecy in their midst, to their amazement. The prophets and onlookers knew Saul as the son of Kish – a personable and likeable young man, but not a prophet. Now, suddenly, he joined them prophesying!

Wait, someone said, isn’t his father Kish? Is Saul now one of the prophets? From that day, in those parts, the occurrence made Saul’s name a byword, such was the marvel. After prophesying, Saul climbed the hill of the city and went to the ‘high place’ to worship God.

### Verses 14-16

1.

“And Saul’s uncle said unto him and his servant. Whither went ye? And he said, To seek the asses: and when we saw that they were no where, we came to Samuel.

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And Saul's uncle said, Tell me, I pray thee, what Samuel said unto you.

3.

And Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found. But of the matter of the kingdom, whereof Samuel spake, he told him not."

Saul's uncle asked what had happened and where they had gone. This might mean his uncle lived in the city, or that Saul had gone home after being in the city. Saul repeated what had occurred, but did not tell his uncle of the prophecy concerning himself.

### Verses 17-19

1.

"And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh;

2.

And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you:

3.

And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands."

Meanwhile, Samuel sent messages to the elders of every tribe to meet him at Mizpeh, where he told them in no uncertain terms that by demanding an earthly king they were rejecting God. He reminded the elders it was God Who delivered them from Egyptian bondage and from the oppression of many kings, yet they rejected Him. God saved them many times, by His own divine hand, yet they lamely demanded a lesser god, a human king.

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When we substitute anything for God, we are placing our faith in something less, a supposed force that has no spiritual life of its own. Today, charismatics have rejected God in favour of a man-made invention and man-devised 'spiritual manifestations'. Anyone who does not rely on God alone is putting Man and Satan in God's stead. This is the foundational heresy of Roman Catholicism, too.

With heavy heart, Samuel commanded the elders to gather all their tribes and people at a place stated, where they must face God and listen to what He said through Samuel.

### Verses 20-24

1.

"And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken.

2.

When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken, and when they sought him, he could not be found.

3.

Therefore they inquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, behold, he had hid himself among the stuff.

4.

And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward.

5.

And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the King."

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The elders of each tribe, with their families and tribes, stood in one mass, in their millions, and waited for Samuel to speak. Obviously, the elders would have been near Samuel, and they would have sent runners to every tribe to pass-on what Samuel was saying.

The atmosphere must have been buzzing with expectation as Samuel called on the tribe of Benjamin to come forward. When they were gathered before him, he then commanded the family of Matri to separate and come forward, as the rest of the tribe fell back.

Then, to the amazement of all, Saul, son of Kish, was called to step forward. There was silence, for Saul could not be found! Samuel asked God where Saul was – and God answered – look behind the ‘stuff’, for he has hidden himself there! The ‘stuff’ has a similar meaning to another term, ‘the baggage’. It means the vessels and goods tribes carried with them when they travelled, all piled together.

Why did Saul do this? One possible reason (an opinion) could be because, at that time in his life, he was a simple (but rich) youngster, outside the mainstream of government and power. The sudden imposition of kingship must have daunted him immensely, for he could not go to anyone for advice – Israel had never had an earthly king before! He also seemed to be shy (though this is reading between the lines, another opinion). Of course, to run and hide when everyone was expecting to see him was a little silly – but it was a good idea at the time! We can all do this kind of thing when feeling overwhelmed, especially when we are young.

When the searchers found him and led him to the front of the massive assembly, a handsome, well-proportioned and very tall young man stood before them. He was head and shoulders taller than everyone else – by about 18 inches or 37.5 centimetres. An impressive future king! One might protest that Saul was chosen just for his looks and size. It is certainly true that one of his physical stature would command instant respect, but God is not taken in by outward appearance. We are told that Saul was a good and honourable man. At that time his mental and spiritual state was pleasing to the Lord. (Even so, God chose someone who would fail, probably as a lesson to the people).

Samuel said, See who the Lord has chosen to be your king! You can all see how impressive he is! The people did not question the choice, but all shouted “*God save the king!*” This is the first instance of the phrase being used. The same plea was made on behalf of David, and occurs

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four times in total in the Old Testament. What does it mean? It was a request to God to keep Saul alive, and to have a prosperous, healthy, strong reign, accompanied by encouragement, refreshing and personal growth.

Unfortunately, Christians may not always be so gracious to those who are chosen by God to provide spiritual pastorship or teaching. Often, the men supported and prayed for are those with easy to accept features – not just looks, but social standing and ‘suitable’ background. So long as he complied with their expectations and demands! Such are many modern pastors.

### Verses 25-27

1.

“Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house.

2.

And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with Him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.

3.

But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.”

Once this milestone had been reached, Samuel told all before him ‘the manner of the kingdom’. It is not clear if he wrote it in a book before he said it verbally, or afterward, but it does not really matter. The book was then ‘laid... up before the Lord’ in the temple. (the most likely meaning, as the word for ‘before’ can mean to place before the face, or in the presence of, the cherubim/seraphim). Thus Samuel told the people what the rights and privileges of the king were, and what would be fitting. This formed the basic plan for kingship.

When this legal formality was done, the people and Saul knew the boundaries of their expectations. The duties and rights of kings were now enshrined in writing and placed in God’s presence. Saul’s future was now fixed and he had no option but to obey the Lord (and Samuel,

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as His still-delegated spiritual leader).

The people were dismissed to their own homes and Saul returned, maybe with excitement mingled with anxiety, to his house in Gibeah. With him went a band of men who felt it their duty to attend to his needs, possibly as his first royal bodyguard, prompted by God to do so. As is the case with every man chosen by God, there are others who oppose such a choice. These are called the 'children of Belial' or 'sons of unrighteousness', or 'worthless, good for nothing, wicked, men' who were of no use to anyone, least of all to the people of Israel.

As one called to ministry by God, though in a small and insignificant way, I know just how the 'children of Belial' operate against ministers. They oppose verbally and in writing, and try to stir up trouble and hatred, or doubt, against the men God has ordained. Some ministers have to conduct a very tough ministry and these attract the most ardent enemies, even in the churches, whose aim is to destroy and ruin what God has set up. Do not put it down to 'different opinions', for Christ said that when such men oppose true ministers, they attack God, not the minister! Who wants to do this, apart from Satan, through his minions, the 'children of Belial'?

These grumblers spread dissension, saying, "*How can this man deliver us from our enemies?*" They ignored the fact that Saul had been chosen by God Himself and the decision was upheld by the state's chief spiritual leader. Now they spoke against God, by speaking against His ordained king. Thus, they were against God, not just against Saul. They hated Saul and did not bring him the presents normally given to men of rank as a courtesy and a sign of allegiance. But, Saul stayed silent and did not do anything against them.

Sometimes, not to react is the 'better part of valour', even if your enemy thereby thinks he has won. The controlling factor must always be how God causes you to respond. Our emotions are labile things, often pulled this way and that by all kinds of factors. God, however, does not react – His responses are measured and tempered by His own character and eternal will. Nothing is outside this, so He can never be surprised or shocked by what we say and do. Christians have to emulate this, even though we can never hope to be like God. In this chapter we see a Saul who is humble and wary, yet willing to allow those who opposed him to carry on untouched. At first, he made an excellent king... then came the slow decline.

Note: It is well for modern believers not to look unkindly upon Saul. Even David, the prime target for Saul's wrath, did not loathe Saul! When a pastor, preacher or teacher speaks in the right spirit He is speaking from the Lord. Thus, when anyone hates or speaks against him, or brews

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trouble for him, he is acting against God on behalf of Satan. In our day these enemies of God and truth are commonplace, even in the local churches.

ANY man can make mistakes. ANY man can sin. ANY man can do what God does not like. But, if that man is saved by grace through God's divine mercy, he must be prayed for and assisted in his ministry. Any error he performs or speaks must be taken to God and the error brought back before the one making the error, so he may repent and think again, and put the matter right. But, sadly, many Christians speak ill of the man forgetting they are probably even worse off spiritually, committing many sins others know nothing of!

If a man is saved, then that is it. He is saved by the Lord and will enter Heaven. His sin, if not repented of, will result in loss of crowns, but not loss of his place in Heaven. To denigrate such a saved man is itself sinful. We may warn and condemn a particular sin, but not the man. There might come a time when the errors are multiplied so we must not have public discourse with a saved man, but even this must follow the biblical rules of warning.

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