

1 SAMUEL 9–10

9:1–2

After the Lord told Samuel that he should listen to the people and appoint a king, the narrative immediately describes the genealogy of Saul, who would become the first king over Israel. The most remarkable thing about Saul is his unremarkable heritage: he was a “Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel . . . and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin” (verse 21).

Saul is described as being impressive and tall, and according to verse 2, there was no better person among the Israelites. It is clear from this context that in preparing and calling Saul to be king, the Lord chose someone who could lead the people in righteousness.

This choice follows the pattern for selecting kings also found in the Book of Mormon—especially prominent when Mosiah gave his farewell letter to the people in the land of Nephi: “If it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people according to his commandments, . . . if this could always be the case then it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you” (Mosiah 29:13).

9:3–6

Saul’s father sent Saul and his servant to look for lost donkeys. After the two had traveled considerably far with no results, the servant suggested visiting a “man of God” who was able to help others through his gift. This turned out to be Samuel. The Lord used this journey to guide Saul to the prophet in order to give His people the king they wanted.

9:7–9

Samuel was known as a seer. In verse 9, the narrator explains that in Samuel’s time, the prophet was also called a seer. Latter-day Saints understand seers as people who have the power given by God to “know of things which are past, and also of things which are to come, and by them shall all things be revealed, or, rather, shall secret things be made manifest, and hidden things shall come to light” (Mosiah 8:17).

In the Book of Mormon, seers are also associated with the Urim and Thummim (see Mosiah 8:13; 28:13–16). While there is no evidence that Samuel had the Urim and Thummim, it is a possibility.

9:15–17

The Lord advised Samuel that He had chosen a man from the tribe of Benjamin to be a captain. The Hebrew word translated as “captain” (*nagid*) in verse 16 means “prince” or “ruler.” The primary government of the people up to that time consisted of judges and priests, but Saul would be the chief ruler to whom everyone else would look for leadership.

Like others before him, Saul would be called on to be a military leader to unite the people to defeat their longtime foes, the Philistines. Anointing priests and other leaders with oil to consecrate them to their duty would, with Saul, take on the added meaning of calling and consecrating kings.

9:19–20

Samuel informed Saul of his calling to be the king and indicated the two should go to “the high place” to eat. The text alludes to the high place as a place of importance, a central meeting place that would have had both religious and political significance. As a sign of the divine origin of the call, Samuel told Saul where the lost donkeys could be found.

9:21

Saul protested the calling because, as he pointed out, he had no family or political connections that would warrant his becoming king. In the commentary for verses 1–2, note that the Lord called Saul because he was a good man, not because of his family connections. If the people demanded to have a king rule over them, at least they could have one who would rule in righteousness.

Unfortunately, Samuel’s warning that kings would harm the people was eventually proven true in Saul—and in David and Solomon after him. (See 1 Samuel 8:9–21.)

9:22–26

Through his actions, Samuel demonstrated to the people of the city that the Lord had called Saul to be their ruler. By placing the lowly Benjaminite in a place of honor, Samuel was showing that Saul was to be shown the honor and respect of a king.

9:27

The public announcement of Saul’s kingship was made, but the Lord through Samuel had more signs to demonstrate that Saul was indeed the one who was to lead Israel.

10:1

Oil has been used since antiquity to designate the consecration of an object to the service of the Lord. In Moses’s time, priests were anointed with oil to serve in the tabernacle,¹ and the tabernacle and everything in it were anointed as well.² Anointing with oil in the Bible also indicated a blessing for the sick (see Mark 6:13, for example).

In this verse, Saul is anointed both as a priest and as a king. The Hebrew word translated as “captain” (*nagid*) means “prince” or “ruler.”

10:2–6

As another sign from the Lord to Saul that he was chosen to be king, Samuel prophesied about signs that Saul would encounter on his journey home: Saul would be informed that his father’s donkeys had been found. Saul would also be met by three men traveling to the sanctuary at Bethel. They would offer Saul two loaves of bread from the items they brought to offer as sacrifices and to give to the priests at the sanctuary. Saul would also encounter a “company of prophets,” and while he was with them, “the Spirit of the LORD” would come upon him, and he would be “turned into another man” (verse 6). This indicated that Saul would be changed by the experience and take on the authority that the Lord had in store for him.

¹ See Exodus 29:7: “Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him”; Exodus 30:30: “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office.”

² See Exodus 30:26–29: “And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.”

10:7

The events that Saul encountered on his return trip were to be signs that he could recognize that the Lord had chosen him to rule over the people. Saul would also recognize his divine authority and calling from God.

10:9

The events Samuel prophesied in verses 2–7 happened as Saul traveled on the road to Gilgal on the east side of the hill country. Because of his experiences, Saul understood that his calling came from the Lord and that the Spirit of the Lord entered him.

10:10–12

Saul encountered a “company of prophets” who were playing musical instruments and prophesying.³ The actions of these prophets contrast with those of Samuel. This is the first time that a company (“band” or “cord”) of prophets (Hebrew *nevi'im*) is mentioned in the Bible. Individual prophets (such as Moses or Samuel) were mentioned, and in Numbers 11:25, the narrative indicates that seventy elders prophesied. Even Moses exclaimed about the Israelites, “Would God that all the LORD’s people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!” (Numbers 11:29). But until the time of Samuel, there was no community of prophets.

Samuel was associated with this group, and a later chapter indicates that he was their leader (see 1 Samuel 19:19–20).

The religious use of music up to that time was well known, and many prophecies were written before and after as poems that would have been set to music.⁴ The Spirit of God, as Samuel had indicated, came upon Saul, and he began to prophesy. He had become another man, and the incident helped spread word of his calling and fame.

10:13–16

Saul, after returning, did not tell his family that Samuel had anointed him as a king or about any of the signs that the Lord had shown him, including the prophecies he and the company of prophets had made. Verses 21 and 22 seem to indicate that Saul was afraid to tell his family.

³ 1 Samuel 10:5: “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.”

⁴ See, for example, Exodus 15:20: “And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.” And later in the narrative (1 Chronicles 25:1): “Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals.”

10:17–19

Samuel went to the sanctuary in Mizpeh and called the people to him to announce that their desire for a king had been granted. Samuel again noted that the people had rejected God and His rule in favor of a king. Once again, Samuel wanted to make sure the people knew that they were the ones who were disobeying the Lord in their request. Samuel’s prophecy and the people’s wickedness would be shown in only a few years when Saul, their first king, turned away from the Lord (see 1 Samuel 15:11).

10:20–22

When Samuel was about to announce the new king, Saul was nowhere to be found. The Lord, however, had already called Saul, and Samuel had already anointed him. Saul was found hiding “among the stuff” (“baggage,” from the Hebrew *keli*, “something made or prepared”).

10:23

Once again, the narrator pointed out how tall Saul was—a trait that, among many people historically, was indicative of a leader.

10:24–27

Saul was introduced to the people as their king. Note that from the beginning of the narrative of the kings, the people began to divide themselves politically. The division would eventually lead to two kingdoms, the Northern and the Southern, who over the years would wage war with each other and with their other neighbors. Samuel’s prophecy concerning the nature of kings was already being fulfilled from day one.

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