

# The Donkeys and the King

## Text: 1 Samuel 9

**Introduction:** My kids have a children's book written by R.C. Sproul called *The Donkey Who Carried a King*.

The book starts out with a little boy named Reilly who is upset because he always gets picked last in recess. So, to comfort him and teach him a few lessons along the way, Reilly's grandfather tells him the story of the donkey who carried a king.

The donkey that is the main character in the grandfather's story is named Davey. While all the other donkeys were given jobs to do like carry people or things on their backs, Davey was too young. Davey was bored with his idleness and often unhappy because it seemed to him that no one wanted him to do anything.

But one day, that all changed with the arrival of two strangers. It was a morning when Davey was feeling especially down because he had nothing to do. The strangers spoke intently with Davey's owner, but all Davey could hear them say was "Because the Lord has need of him." Davey didn't know what they were talking about, but he soon discovered that these men wanted him to carry a man named Jesus.

As Davey carried the man Jesus into Jerusalem, people put their coats and palm branches on the ground in front of Davey and Jesus. The people were shouting, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; even the King of Israel!" Davey was amazed and thought, "A king is riding on my back. I can't believe that I have been chosen to carry a king."

After carrying the king, Davey grew proud and began to think that he was too good for menial tasks like carrying other people and sacks of olives. But Davey then learned from one of the other donkeys that the king he had carried on his back humbled himself as a servant and died to save His people.

Reilly's grandfather used the story of Davey, the donkey who carried a king, to teach his grandson the importance of being thankful in all things and that every job is important no matter how small it may seem.

Reilly's grandfather also used the story of Davey to share the message of the gospel with his grandson. That Jesus died to pay for our sin, was raised from the grave three days later, and reigns forever with God in heaven.

I thought about that book this week as I was studying 1 Samuel 9 and preparing for this morning's sermon because 1 Samuel 9 is about donkeys and a king. That may seem strange. But what we'll discover is that God is sovereign over both donkeys and kings.

Turn in your Bible to 1 Samuel 9 if you haven't already. We are making our way through this rather lengthy Old Testament book. And we're almost a third of the way through the book. I hope you are enjoying our study of 1 Samuel as much as I am.

(Read 1 Samuel 9...Pray)

Let's jump right into the story. We'll see, as the narrative of 1 Samuel 9 unfolds, we can follow the story in four phases.

### I. The man is introduced (1 Samuel 9:1-2).

#### A. The chapter begins, "There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish" (vs. 1a).

1. Now, you remember where we left off last week.
  - a. Samuel is old. His sons were evil. And the people demanded a king.
  - b. Samuel sought the Lord about the people's request, and the Lord told him to warn them and give them what they want.
  - c. Samuel did warn them, but warning didn't bother the people one bit. They wanted a king.
  - d. So, God said to Samuel, "Obey their voice and make them a king" (8:22a).
  - e. But chapter 8 doesn't end with Samuel making them a king. It ends with Samuel saying to the men of Israel, "Go every man to his city" (8:22b).

- f. I don't think there's any reason to believe that Samuel's instructions at the end of chapter 8 represent disobedience to God on Samuel's part. We might think that if we didn't have chapter 9. But we do have chapter 9.
2. And here we read, "There was man of Benjamin whose name was Kish" (vs. 1a).
    - a. This reminds us of the way the book started all the way back in verse 1 of chapter 1 where the author writes, "There was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim" (1:1).
    - b. The first section of 1 Samuel that spans from chapter 1 to chapter 8 focuses on the rise and rule of Samuel as Israel's judge.
    - c. But these opening words of chapter 9 indicate the beginning of a new section of the book. We're about to be introduced to the new leader of Israel.
  3. But much like Elkanah was not the man we were looking for in chapter 1, Kish is not the man we are looking for here in chapter 9.
  4. Because we keep reading in verse 2, and we see that "he had a son whose name was Saul" (vs. 2a).
    - a. There are several things that we learn about the man Saul from these first two verses of 1 Samuel 9.
    - b. His lineage in verse 1 tells us that there was nothing special about this family that would have made them stand out as someone we would expect to play a significant role in the history of Israel.
    - c. Not only that, but he was also from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of the tribes of Israel.
    - d. Despite his humble lineage, the text tells us that Saul was handsome. In fact, "There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he" (vs. 2b).
    - e. And "from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (vs. 2c).

- f. The author of 1 Samuel is indicating to us that despite his humble lineage, there is something about this man Saul that ought to cause us to take notice.
- g. It's interesting that his name is Saul. Because the name "Saul" means "asked for." Israel had asked for a king in chapter 8. And now we're introduced to this man Saul whose name means "asked for."

So, in these first two verses of 1 Samuel 9, the man is introduced. But in the next two verses, we see that...

## II. The donkeys are lost (1 Samuel 9:3-4).

- A. I know, you thought Israel wanted a king. What in the world do donkeys have to do with it?
  1. We're going to see in a moment that they had everything to do with it.
  2. And it's interesting that there are multiple times throughout the story of the Bible when donkeys appear on God's stage.
    - a. We see throughout Genesis that donkeys were a significant part of the possessions of the patriarchs. Abraham had donkeys. Isaac had donkeys. Jacob had donkeys.
    - b. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, there are laws about donkeys.
    - c. In Numbers 22, a donkey speaks to Balaam.
    - d. In Joshua, there are donkeys. In Judges, there are donkeys.
  3. And here in 1 Samuel 9, there are donkeys.
- B. The problem is that the donkeys are lost.
  1. Now, don't ask me how you lose a donkey. I don't know. I don't really know anything about donkeys.

2. It's interesting the things you'll read as you're surveying different commentaries on a particular passage of Scripture. One commentator says, "Lost donkeys would not be easy to find in the hills of Ephraim!" (Woodhouse, 156). Another commentator writes, "So great was [Saul's] ineptness that he could not even find a few large animals that had wandered away from his father's house" (Bergen, 121). One says the donkeys would have been hard to find. Another says the donkeys should have been easy to find.
3. Don't ask me. I don't know anything about donkeys. I don't know whether they would have been easy to lose and hard to find or whether they would have been hard to lose and easy to find. I don't know.
4. I just know that the donkeys were lost, and Saul and his companion couldn't find them. Because that's what the text says.
5. I also know that "while Kish was sending Saul to look for donkeys, God was sending Saul to Samuel" (Begg).
6. I mean, just look at the text.
  - a. The donkeys are lost, and Kish says to his son Saul, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys" (vs. 3).
  - b. So, they did. They passed through the hill country of Ephraim. No donkeys. They passed through the land of Shalishah. No donkeys. Then they went through the land of Shaalim. No donkeys. Then the land of Benjamin. No donkeys.
  - c. Here's what I wrote in my Scripture journal this week: "I love the way the Bible recounts details like this that seem like coincidence to those without eyes to see. But those of us with spiritual eyes can see the sovereignty of God in them."
  - d. The author of 1 Samuel wants us to see that there's a reason the donkeys were lost. There's a reason they went to Ephraim, and Shalishah, and Shaalim, and the land of Benjamin looking for the donkeys but could not find them.

7. I'm skipping ahead a little bit, but when Saul gets to Samuel, Samuel is going to say to Saul, "As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found" (vs. 20).
8. Here's my translation of what Samuel says there in verse 20: You've looked all over for those stupid donkeys and couldn't find them anywhere. They've already been found. They've returned home. Because this was never about the donkeys in the first place.

The man Saul has been introduced. The donkeys are lost. And now we see that...

### III. The seer is consulted (1 Samuel 9:5-14).

- A. Saul and his companion have looked all over for the donkeys. They can't find them. So, they have a conversation about their predicament.
  1. Verse 5 says, "When they came to the land of Zuph."
    - a. Now that probably doesn't sound significant to you at first. But the author is giving us a hint of where this story is headed.
    - b. We learned all the way back in chapter 1 verse 1 that Zuph was Samuel's great-great-great grandfather. The land was apparently named after him.
    - c. The point is that Saul's search for the donkeys has now brought him within the vicinity of Samuel's home.
  2. But Saul is done. He wants to go home. He said to his servant, "Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us" (vs. 5).
  3. God is at work. But Saul is oblivious.
  4. Interestingly enough, it seems like maybe the servant understands that there is more going on here than just a search for lost donkeys.

- a. The servant says to Saul, “Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go” (vs. 6).
  - b. The NASB translates that last sentence a little bit differently. It says, “Perhaps he can tell us about our journey on which we have set out.” It’s actually a more literal translation.
  - c. They set out thinking the journey was about donkeys. But it wasn’t about donkeys. It was about much more than that. It was about the purposes of God for His people.
5. Saul still doesn’t get it. He wants to know what they can bring the man of God for him to help them find the donkeys (vs. 7).
  6. The servant reached in his pocket, pulled out a quarter of a shekel of silver, and said, “I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way” (vs. 8b).
  7. Saul agreed. And so, they went (vs. 10).
  8. There’s an explanatory note in verse 9. We’re going to see the word “seer” used in just a moment to refer to Samuel. But at that time in Israel, a seer was a prophet.
  9. Saul and his servant are on their way to find the man of God. The seer. The prophet.
  10. The text still hasn’t given us the name of the man of God. The text seems to hint that maybe it’s Samuel. But the author hasn’t clearly revealed that detail yet.
- B. But we keep reading in verse 11 and we see that Saul and his companion come into contact with two women who were coming out to draw water.**

1. Verse 11 says... (read vs. 11)

- a. This detail is interesting because there are a number of times throughout the story of the Bible where someone encounters a young woman at a well and something significant takes place.

- b. We think immediately of Abraham’s servant and his search for a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24).
- c. It was also at a well that Jacob first met his wife Rachel (Gen. 29).
- d. We also think about our Lord Jesus and His encounter with the woman at the well in John 4.
- e. The point is that the encounter with the two women at the well signals to us as the readers that something significant may be getting ready to happen.

2. Saul and his servant asked the women a simple question: “Is the seer here?”
3. The women then told Saul and his servant where they could find the seer.
4. And there in verse 14, we see the name Samuel mentioned for the first time in chapter 9: “As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.”
5. And now our interest is piqued even more. Because the Lord told Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king” (8:22). But then Samuel told the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city” (8:22). Where’s the king? Are we about to find out? We have to keep reading.

Which brings us to the final phase of the story of 1 Samuel 9 where...

#### **IV. The king is identified (1 Samuel 9:15-27).**

**A. Now, in verses 15-16, the author of 1 Samuel clues us in to what has been going on with Samuel. (Read vs. 15-16)**

1. The Lord spoke to Samuel and told him about a man from the land of Benjamin. That should make our ears perk up. We know that Saul, who is now looking for the man of God, was a man from the land of Benjamin.
2. And God says, “You shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me.”

3. There's a lot we could say about the Lord's words to Samuel here. First, notice that the Lord says, "I will SEND to you a man from the land of Benjamin." As I've already said, 1 Samuel 9 is not about donkeys. It's about the purposes of God. The donkeys are incidental. "While Kish was sending Saul to look for donkeys, God was sending Saul to Samuel" (Begg).
4. And why was God sending Saul to Samuel? So Samuel could "anoint him." It seems that Saul is the one whom Samuel is going to make king.
5. But notice that God doesn't say "king" here. He says, "You shall anoint him to be PRINCE over my people Israel." Some translations say leader. That's probably a better word because of the royal connotations that the word "prince" has in English. We shouldn't read too much into this, but it is an indication that the Lord is handling things according to His purposes not those of the people. God is not giving up His place as the sovereign over Israel. They have asked for a king, and He is going to acquiesce to their request, but He is still the true King.
6. God also told Samuel that this leader would "save my people from the hand of the Philistines." Notice that God refers to Israel as MY PEOPLE. They are getting a king, but they still belong to the Lord. They are His covenant people. And ultimately, it is God who will save His people through the leadership of this one He is raising up.
7. Now look at the end of verse 16. God says, "For I have seen my people, because their cry has come to me." This is fascinating, especially when we think about chapter 8 and how Israel's request for a king is presented as disobedience to God and at some level a rejection of Him. But while God's people are often faithless, God is always faithful. He does not forsake His own. Even in their rebellion, there's mercy and grace from God.

B. We keep reading in verse 17, and we see the first interaction between Samuel and Saul.

1. Samuel saw Saul, and the Lord said, "Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall RESTRAIN my people" (vs. 17).
  - a. Some see negative connotations here in what the Lord says about the relationship between Saul and the people.
  - b. But we might also understand it more positively. Saul would prevent the people of Israel from their determination to become "like all the nations."
2. But verse 18 shows us that Saul is still clueless as to what is going on. (Read vs. 18) Saul didn't even know that Samuel was the one he was looking for. Much less all that God was doing through everything that had happened to that point.
3. But Samuel said... (Read vs. 19-20)
4. Saul still doesn't know what's going on here. But Samuel makes clear that there's a lot more going on than just a search for some donkeys.
5. The desire of Israel to which Samuel refers in verse 20 is the desire for a king. Saul is the object of that desire. He is going to be king in Israel.
6. But that's still the furthest thing from Saul's mind. He says... (Read vs. 21) In some sense, Saul was an obvious choice. He was more handsome and taller than anyone else in Israel. But he was also a nobody from a humble clan in the smallest tribe of Israel.
7. But none of that mattered to God. And because it didn't matter to God, it didn't matter to Samuel either. So, the text says... (Read vs. 22-26)
8. Can you imagine being in Saul's shoes? He was just looking for his donkeys! Now he's about to be made the king of Israel! He's given the place of honor at Samuel's table. He's given the choice portion that he's told was set aside for him. And yet, Samuel still hasn't told him what's going on. I'm sure his mind was racing.

- 9. Imagine going up to DC one day to tour the monuments. You're having trouble finding the Lincoln Memorial when suddenly, you're taken to the White House, given the place of honor at the table, and served the choice portion to eat. You'd be thinking, "What in the world is going on here?" That's as close as I can get to what Saul must have been experiencing.**
- 10. We know what's getting ready to happen. But Saul didn't. He's about to find out though. Verse 27 says that Samuel said to Saul... (Read vs. 27)**
- 11. Samuel is going to make known to Saul the word of God. The word of God is going to change everything for Saul and change everything for Israel. But you'll have to wait until next time for that.**

**Conclusion:** I trust you've seen this morning as we've made our way through 1 Samuel 9 that God is sovereign over donkeys and kings.

Nothing in 1 Samuel 9 took place by chance or accident. It was all according to the sovereign plan of God. This is interesting though because it was Kish who sent Saul to look for the donkeys, and it was Saul who obeyed his father and went to look for the donkeys.

Sometimes people like to pit the sovereignty of God against the free will of man as if the two are incompatible. They're not incompatible. The Bible teaches both. God is sovereign, and man makes real choices and takes free actions. In fact, the Bible teaches us that God is so sovereign that He's even in control when it comes to the free choices of the free people He created.

1 Samuel 8 and 9 also introduce us to a distinction between the revealed will of God and the secret will of God. The revealed will of God was that God was Israel's king. They didn't need another king. It was evil in the eyes of the Lord for them to ask for a king. But the secret will of God was that Saul would become the first king of Israel. And that God would accomplish His purposes for His people through Saul.

I said earlier in the sermon that donkeys show up a lot throughout the Bible. I don't think that's an accident. And as I think about these donkeys and this king, I can't help but think about another donkey and another King. We're now being introduced to Saul who became the first king of Israel. You know that the second king of Israel was David. One of the things we will do as we study the reigns of both Saul and David is compare and contrast the two. The Bible intends for us to see the similarities and differences between these two kings.

But more than that, the Bible wants to point us to the true King of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ. Comparing and contrasting Saul and David helps us see the beauty of the one who never sinned, who came to lay down His life as a servant, whose kingdom is forever.

In Matthew 21, which was read for us this morning during our Scripture reading, we see the instructions that Jesus gave to His disciples: "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once."

Matthew tells us that "this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

It's interesting that Jesus didn't need to look for a donkey to ride like Saul had to search for his father's donkeys. Jesus didn't need to consult with a seer or a prophet to help him find the donkey. He knew exactly where it was and told His disciples to go and get it for Him.

The disciples did as Jesus said. They brought the donkey to Jesus. And as Jesus rode the donkey into Jerusalem, the people spread their cloaks on the road and cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

The people of Israel wanted a king. But I want to tell you this morning, Goshen family, that we have a King. His name is Jesus.

1 Samuel 9 tells us that the Lord raised up Saul because He heard the cry of His people. I want you to know this morning that God has heard our cry. And He has sent our King to save us. Not from the hand of the Philistines. No, He has come to save us from a much greater enemy, the enemy of sin and death.

That's good news. We were far from God because of our sin. But King Jesus came, and through His death on the cross to pay for our sin, He made a way for us to be brought into right relationship with God. All we have to do is trust our King. Turn from our sin and cling to Him in faith.