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## Lesson 6: The Kingdom is Born

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### **Text: First Samuel Chap. 9-10**

The opening sentence of chapter 9 seems familiar to us (9,1):

Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah, the son of a Benjaminite, a mighty man of valour.

וַיְהִי־אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי־מִינַיִן  
וְשֵׁמוֹ קִישׁ בֶּן־אַבְיָאל  
בֶּן־זֶרֶר בֶּן־בְּכוֹרַת  
בֶּן־אַפְיָה בֶן־אִישׁ יְמִינִי  
גִבּוֹר חַיִל:

Where did we meet a similar opening of a story? In the first sentence of the book (1,1):

Now there was a certain man of Ramathaim-zophim of the hill country of Ephraim, and his name was Elkanah the son of Jeroham the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite

וַיְהִי אִישׁ אֶחָד מִן־  
הַרְמַתַיִם צוֹפִים מְהַר אֶפְרַיִם,  
וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶלְקָנָה בֶן־יֵרוּחַם  
בֶּן־אֵלִיהוּא בֶן־תּוֹחֻ  
בֶּן־צוּפִי אֶפְרַתִּי:

The similarity is not a coincidence. Both sentences serve as beginnings of the two sections of the book, the story of Samuel and the story of Saul. In the first eight chapters, Samuel is the center of the narrative. There are the events in which he takes part, and there are the stories of his family and the priests of Shiloh where he grew up. From chapter 9 Saul becomes the focus of the story.

This is an important story, and it is fittingly opened with a solemn declaration (9, 1-2):

Now there was a man of Benjamin, whose name was Kish

וַיְהִי־אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי־מִינַיִן וְשֵׁמוֹ קִישׁ

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

וְלֹד־הָיָה בּוֹ וְשֵׁמוֹ  
שָׁאוּל בְּהוֹר וְטוֹב  
וְאֵין אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ  
מִשְׁכָּמוֹ נִמְעָלָה גְבוּהַ  
מִכָּל־הָעָם:

Events follow each other swiftly (9,17):  
Saul meets the prophet Samuel:

And when Samuel saw Saul,  
the Lord spoke unto him:  
“Behold the man of whom I said unto thee  
this one shall have authority over my people”

וּשְׂמוּאֵל רָאָה אֶת־שָׁאוּל  
יְהוָה עָנָהוּ:  
הִנֵּה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֵלַיךְ  
זֶה יַעֲזָר בְּעַמִּי:

Samuel anoints Saul and tells him that he is destined to become “prince over the inheritance of God”, the people and land of Israel (10,1). Immediately Saul becomes a new person, “God gave him another heart” (10,9), and he is filled with the “spirit of God” (10,10). Samuel convenes an assembly for the purpose of choosing a king (10, 17-25). The choice is made by casting lots, and the lot falls to Saul. But the new king-elect is nowhere to be found (10, 21-24):

But when they sought him, he could not be found.  
Therefore they asked of the Lord further:  
Is there yet a man come hither?  
And the Lord answered:  
Behold, he hath hid himself among the baggage.  
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.  
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:  
Long live the King!

וַיִּבְקְשׁוּהוּ וְלֹא נִמְצָא:  
וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ־עוֹד בַּיהוָה  
הֲבֵי עוֹד אִישׁ אֵישׁ  
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה  
הִנֵּה־הוּא נִתְּבָא אֶל־הַכְּלִים:  
וַיִּרְצוּ וַיִּקְחֵהוּ מִשָּׁם  
וַיִּתְיַצֵּב בְּתוֹךְ הָעָם  
וַיִּגְבֶּה מִכָּל־הָעָם  
מִשְׁכְּמוֹ וּמֵעֵלָה:  
וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם  
הֲרֵאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַר־בּוֹ יְהוָה  
כִּי אֵין כָּמוֹהוּ  
בְּכָל־הָעָם  
וַיִּרְעוּ כָל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
יְתִי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

At this stage in the story, the reader is in for a surprise. He expects that the following chapter will tell of the new king’s activities in establishing the royal government, the building of a palace and the appointment of counselors and generals. But this is where the story takes a surprising turn. The Bible informs us that the people went back to their homes, and Saul too went home - as if nothing had happened (10, 25-26):

And Samuel sent all the people away,  
every man to his house.  
And Saul also went to his house to Gibeah.

וַיִּשְׁלַח שְׂמוּאֵל אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם  
אִישׁ לְבֵיתוֹ:  
וְגַם־שָׁאוּל הֵלֵךְ לְבֵיתוֹ גִּבְעָתָה

Even more surprising is the description of King Saul’s occupation (11, 5):

And, behold, Saul following  
the oxen out of the field

וַהֲגִה שָׁאוּל בָּא אַחֲרָי  
הַבָּקָר מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה

Why should the king, who has been anointed by the prophet be engaged in “following the oxen”? What happened to Saul after he was crowned as king of Israel?

This surprising turn in Saul’s history has baffled Bible students and historians of ancient Israelite history. Yet, it is this passage which provides the clue to the solution to many questions that arise in connection with Saul’s coronation.

Saul’s election to the newly created kingship marked a profound change in Israelite society. But did all agree to the change? Was there no dissenting voice? Were all the children of Israel such faithful and unquestioning followers of the prophet that they accepted Saul without a doubt? And, finally, what about the proud Ephraimites? Would they accept a Benjaminite king?

The Ephraimites could not bear that military glory went to anybody outside their tribe. They were angry with Gideon when he returned with glory from the war with the Midianites (Judges 8,1). They threatened to burn down Jephthah’s house because he waged a successful war against Ammon without the help of Ephraim. Their jealousy of Jephthah provoked a civil war within the Israelite tribes.

Were, then, the proud Ephraimites prepared to accept the sovereignty of a king who was not a member of their tribe? And was it likely that the other tribes had peacefully shelved all their rivalries and enthusiastically accepted the new king?

Another question that arises here is whether the Israelites were free to establish their own independent government and elect a king of their own. Samuel mentions “the hill of God where is the governor of the Philistines” (10,5) God tells Samuel that the new king’s task will be to save the people from the Philistines (9,16). Obviously the Philistines were ruling the country. How, then, could the Israelites crown a king under the very noses of their rulers? According to the Bible, Saul’s election took place at Mizpah (10,17), but a Philistine governor was residing in Geba (13,3) which was an hour and a half’s distance from Mizpah. What did this Philistine governor do about the Israelite proclamation of an independent kingdom?

Let us now study again the passage describing the assembly at Mizpah (10,17):

And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpah.

וַיִּצְעַק שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־הָעָם  
אֶל ה' הַמִּצְפָּה

In the book of Judges we read of gatherings that took place in Mizpah (Judges 20,1 and 21,1). From these passages we see that Mizpah was a holy place, where the people gathered on solemn occasions for fasting, prayer and sacrifices. It appears therefore, that the Philistines did not know the revolutionary import of the latest assembly at Mizpah. They thought it was just another assembly for the purpose of prayers and sacrifices. It is reasonable to assume that not many people attended the gathering. Saul was secretly crowned king in the presence of a small number of leaders. But even those few did not unanimously agree with the choice (10,27):

But certain base fellows said:  
“How shall this man save us?”  
And they despised him,  
and brought him no present.  
But he was one that held his peace.

וּבְגֵי בְלִיעֵל אָמְרוּ  
מַה-יִּשְׁעֵנוּ יְהוָה  
בְּיָמָיו  
וְלֹא-הִבְיֵאוּ לוֹ מִנְחָה  
וַיְהִי כְמִתְרִישׁ:

If there was no real opposition to King Saul, and if no real struggle ensued about the kingship, it was because Saul was not yet a real king. His election had no practical implications. The Philistines ruled the country, and Saul was only the “promised” king and savior. It was now up to Saul to fulfill the promise.

The assembly at Mizpah did not present Saul with a royal throne and scepter. The prophet proclaimed the will of God, and the people accepted Saul’s election. But meanwhile it was only a declaration. In our own times we have learned only too well that a kingdom is not established by declaration.

The Mizpah coronation remained a secret. Saul went home and continued to follow the oxen in the field- until there came his finest hour when he fulfilled the “promise” of kingship. Inspired with the spirit of God, he led the people to victory over their enemies, and thus Saul became the real king of Israel.