

KING SAUL - “The Need To Be Noticed”



1. **(Q1)** The mention of five generations of Saul’s family is significant. The narrator wants his listeners to have an immediate mental picture of someone important. His *family* was important. So important, that names were inserted to tell us exactly *which* “Kish” he was talking about. And, the listeners must have been familiar with the names, otherwise their inclusion is meaningless.

The ESV “a man of wealth” and the NIV “man of standing” both translate a Hebrew word for a warrior or a chief. By implication, Kish was wealthy. We need to think of this word as a reference to him being a “from a long line of...” sort of guy. The ESV “handsome” and NIV “impressive” are attempting to render a Hebrew word that has a very wide range of meanings. From references to appearance, to favorable character qualities, to successful, and even cheerful. *This* is the type of guy you’d want for a son-in-law, in other words! (And sadly, we are just as misguided as Israel sometimes when it comes to how we judge people and what we value.)

Interestingly, the word translated “taller” appears 37x in our OT, but its most frequent use is to describe walls and mountains. In every occurrence of the word in reference to a person, it is translated “haughty” or “proud,” except here. One has to wonder if this might be a covert reference by the author to Saul’s arrogance. (Remember, Saul was long dead by the time 1 Samuel was written.)

2. **(Q1-10:6)** The Hebrew word translated “another” means “different.” It’s the same adjective that is used throughout the OT in references to idolatry (i.e. “other” gods). It is also the same word that is used to describe Saul’s changed “heart” in verse 9. This must be understood as an act of God, not a choice by Saul. Based on the outcome of his life, we may also surmise that it was God’s initial verification of Samuel’s words, a sort of “proof” of divine approval on Samuel as a prophet of God.

The outpouring of the Spirit as predicted by Samuel was reserved in the OT for specific people for specific tasks (cf. Num 11:17-25; Judges 3:10; 1 Sam 16:13). One of the important clarifying points in this story is in the next verse. Samuel refers to the long list of predicted events as “signs.” This Hebrew word means a “signal,” “flag,” “beacon,” or sometimes a “movement.” The point is that was about to happen to Saul was *supernatural*, and he should see all of it as confirmation of what Samuel had said about him.

3. **(Q2-10:1-13)** Samuel, the most significant Jew living at the time, announces to Saul Yahweh’s plans for him, and gives him a “laundry list” of things that will happen to Saul *that same day* as “signs” of the truth of his kingship—the final one of which is supernatural *and* public. His “ordination” to ministry couldn’t have been more personal or powerful. He is off to an amazing “start”—from Samuel’s point of view, at least.
4. **(Q2-13:1-12)** Saul’s inability to sustain his men’s courage in the face of the Philistine army is an indicator of his weakness as a leader. Also, his disregard of the Law’s prohibition of him sacrificing a burnt offering (Num 18:7) indicates either a misunderstanding or disregard of Yahweh’s requirements of a king (cf. 1 Sam 12; Deut 17).

In the ANE, priests sought the “favor” of the gods on behalf of the nation before a battle. Saul *may* have been seeking to buy some time and perhaps loyalty from his dwindling army by this step. In any case, based on his response to Samuel challenge (making excuses for his behavior), it is clear that he knew better.

5. **(Q4)** Saul was in effect, robbing from Yahweh to “give” to Yahweh! He was taking what Yahweh said was His, and “offering” it back to Him. This by definition was *not* a “sacrifice.” There was no cost to Saul or any of his men, but it allowed them to appear sacrificial and spiritual. Our own use of wealth and possessions sometimes parallels this behavior. One one hand, we “praise God for His blessings” in our lives, and then offer back to Him a small percentage of what we affirm belongs to Him in the first place.
6. **(Q6-Phil)** Paul was willing to let others take the “lime light” even if it meant making him appear less important, as long as Jesus was exalted. This is the living out of a statement he had made years earlier: *“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”* **Acts 20:24**
He was willing to let others do what he couldn’t do (i.e. freely preach), even if their motives were wrong. He was willing to trust God with the outcome of their arrogance.
7. **(Q6)** In 1850, Anna Waring wrote the hymn, “Father, I Know That All My Life.” It’s closing stanza contains an excellent summary of the main point of this question: *“Content to fill a little space, if thou be glorified.”*



“Stumbling Stones”

1. **(Background)** It is easy to mistakenly assume that the Israelites sin was their clamoring for a king. It appears at first glance that the “king thing” was *their* idea. Nothing could be further from the truth. A thousand years earlier, Yahweh introduces the idea of a king for His then non-existent “chosen people” in his encounter with Abraham. In fact, he tells him that he *and* Sara will be the ancestors of kings:
“I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you...I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” **Genesis 17:6, 16**
The, about 500 years before Saul, God spoke clearly and quite thoroughly to his people about their king. Not only *that* there would be one, but also how he *should* conduct himself as well as warnings of the evil he would do (Deut 17). This was all given to them before they were even in Canaan.
The issue here is that they wanted a king that would lead them “like the non-Jews” around them. In Yahweh’s economy, the king was to lead the people in covenant faithfulness. The Israelites wanted a king that would lead them in war. *This* is what displeased Yahweh. The “king thing” was His idea, not theirs. A *secular* king was their idea, not His.
2. **(Q1-9:21)** This statement by Saul is in direct contradiction with what the narrator said earlier about him and his family. One would be tempted to see in Saul some sense of humility. But, later references in his life reveal *not* humility, but a deep insecurity (even inferiority) that manifested itself as a fear of the opinions of others (cf. 15:24).
3. **(Q1-10:6-7)** It is a colossal error to try to distill any firm theology about the gift of prophecy (NT) or the Holy Spirit from this account. It is clear from the context, that *everyone* was surprised by Saul’s behavior. We must also be careful to not assume *what* Saul’s “prophesying” looked like, or what its content was. 1 Samuel is a *historical* book. In other words, we have a record of *what* happened (although not even all of what happened), but no description or explanation of *why*. We mustn’t add our own, as tempting as it might be.
4. **(Q2-13:1-12)** Determining the exact time of this event, especially its relation to Samuel’s statement in 10:8 is extremely difficult. It appears that a couple of *years* elapse between them. This means that the reference to “seven days’ (10:8; 13:8) may be referring to two different conversations between the two

men. A significant amount of time has certainly elapsed between 9:1 and this passage, because Saul is described as a “young man” in 9:1, but in 13:2 he has a son old enough to be in the military.

5. **(Q2-15:1-9)** This is a disturbing passage. “Devote to destruction” is the rendering of the Hebrew word, *charam* which is called the “ban” in the book of Joshua. It was used for anything Yahweh claimed to be “devoted to him” for *His* determination of what should become of it. The people and spoil of Jericho were *charam*, and Achan’s theft of some of the plunder placed *him and his entire family* under the *charam*.

Be careful to avoid two extremes in regard to passages like these: minimizing them, or claiming to understand them. Christians *should* be troubled and disturbed by accounts like this in our Bible. Our indifference to them exposes a callousness towards humanity, *and* a very shallow theology of judgment and hell. However, being disturbed does not justify condemning God. My confusion over stories like this, by faith must be understood as the result of my own incomplete understanding, not capriciousness or tyranny on Yahweh’s part. There is in fact, copious evidence in the Bible that Yahweh is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Book of Judges, Jonah, etc.). We simply do not have all the information or the perspective that Yahweh has.

Saul’s demise is clarified here. He pleaded “ignorant innocence” in chapter 13, but admitted clear and deliberate disregard for Yahweh and Samuel here (15:24). However, in both cases, his motivation was his “standing” with his troops.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Q1)** Do you tend to judge people by external and social standards, or character and virtue? Be honest!
1. **(Q1-Profile)** Have a few group members share the “profile” of King Saul that they constructed from their study in Question 1.
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3. **(Q3)** What do you think is the difference between humility and feelings of inferiority?
4. **(Q7)** What does Galatians 1:10 have to say in regard to Saul’s approach to serving God?