

## 1 Samuel 9:1-27 – “God Chooses Saul”

(Pew Bible Page: 901)

**Intro:** We must be gripped by this understanding: God is at work all around us every day to finish His redemptive plan for His people. In His everyday work, God never departs from His established redemptive pattern as He works through circumstances and (perhaps surprisingly) through The Natural Man to accomplish His final purpose. The account we have before us tonight is a perfect example of this principle. God’s people demanded a king, “*like all the other nations,*” and God commanded His servant, Samuel, to fulfill their demand – Samuel was to give them a king like all the other nations: A Natural Man. A man still “*in Adam*” as New Testament language would express it. That is what we see happening in the passage. God chose Saul because Saul fit to a “T” God’s redemptive pattern of beginning with the Natural before finishing with the Spiritual.

**Proposition:** There is a place for The Natural Man in the outworking of God’s plan. The story of redemption begins in The Natural Man but doesn’t finish there.

Billboard:           (vv.1-2)           The Man Desired by Israel – Superficially  
                          (vv.3-14)          The Man Sent to Samuel – Circumstantially  
                          (vv.15-27)       The Natural Man’s Encounter with the Spiritual Man – Bafflingly

(vv.1-2) The Man Desired by Israel – Superficially – Israel had demanded “*a king like all the other nations*” and God had commanded Samuel to describe to the people exactly what that would mean (cf.8:10-18). Now God sent to Samuel the perfect man to fulfill their condition. Like all the other nations, Israel would have as their first king, “A Natural Man.” **1 Samuel 9:1–2 - 1** *There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. 2 And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.* It was obvious from the very beginning that God did not intend Saul’s kingship to continue indefinitely since the first thing we are told about him is that he came from the tribe of Benjamin. In Genesis 49:10 Jacob had prophesied: **Genesis 49:10 - 10** *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.* The line of Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah, not from Benjamin. Nevertheless, God’s first choice was taken from the tribe of Benjamin, so we know immediately that something less than ultimate was afoot. God never intended Saul’s dynasty to continue. Why then did He choose him? Look at the details we are given in the text: *There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.* Saul was chosen because he fit the people’s expectations – He looked every bit a king. Humanly speaking, Saul had much to commend him to the people. He was taller than anyone else. He was handsome. As we read the story of Saul, we also see that he was obedient to his father; that he was diligent in carrying out the task he’d been given; that he was capable of courage and bursts of generosity. He was everything you’d want in a king, humanly speaking. But all these gifts were merely superficial. Inside, Saul was a hollow man who did not know God. This emerges as the story of Saul continues over the forty years of his kingship. Saul was “A Natural Man.” A good one, at least in the beginning! But “A Natural Man” at best. That is what the people had demanded, and that is what God gave them.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] God will use “Natural Men” to further His redemptive plan for His people.

[ILLUSTRATION] God’s redemptive plan includes two kinds of men: Natural and Spiritual. We see this over and over in the Bible, in the natural world of men around us, and in the Church.

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[APPLICATION] Not everyone whom God weaves into His plan to accomplish His purposes belongs to God in truth, and we err when we expect anything else to be true. Jesus warned us to be on our guard about this in Matthew 7:22-23. It is only the naïve believer who assumes that everyone using Jesus’ name these days belongs to Jesus. Not a few people around us are shamelessly using the name of Jesus to further their political ambitions, sensual lusts, or dream of accumulating wealth. Christian, be on your guard! Don’t assume that everybody talking about heaven is going there! Some people are just using the name of Jesus to promote their own agendas and God for a while permits this as part of His greater plan. God will use “The Natural Man” to further His redemptive plan for His people until His plan comes to complete fulfillment.

(vv.3-14) The Man Sent to Samuel – Circumstantially – God sent Saul to Samuel because He had included Saul in His redemptive plan, but Saul himself was totally clueless about God’s plans for him. **1 Samuel 9:3–4** - **3** *Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, “Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys.”* **4** *And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them.* Saul’s journey to royalty began in a most unexpected way: Saul was sent in search of a band of lost donkeys. This paragraph demonstrates to us God’s work through natural circumstances to further His supernatural plan. Saul’s father, Kish, sent Saul and a servant in search of some lost donkeys. The “*young man*” accompanying Saul may not have been young at all. The Hebrew word translated “*young man*” can also simply mean one of the principal servants. The man seems to be more mature than Saul in several ways and was not sent with Saul by accident. His contribution will be crucial to the success of God’s purpose as we’ll see. Saul and this servant did diligently what they were asked to do. For three days they search in likely places without finding the lost donkeys.

Finally, they ended up in the place God was sending them. They came at last to Samuel’s home city, Ramah: **1 Samuel 9:5–10** - **5** *When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, “Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.”* **6** *But he said to him, “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.”* **7** *Then Saul said to his servant, “But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?”* **8** *The servant answered Saul again, “Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way.”* **9** *(Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, “Come, let us go to the seer,” for today’s “prophet” was formerly called a seer.)* **10** *And Saul said to his servant, “Well said; come, let us go.”* So they went to the city where the man of God was. We know that they have come to Ramah because we are told “*they came to the land of Zuph.*” Comparing this verse to verse 1 Samuel 1:1, we see that Zuph is not a place, but rather a person. Zuph was Samuel’s great-great-grandfather. Saul and the servant have been guided circumstantially to Samuel’s home city of Ramah. We observe another curious note in these verses: Saul doesn’t seem to have any idea who lives in Ramah or what his occupation is. If not for Saul’s servant, Saul would have given up and gone home. The servant knows that Samuel lives in Ramah and proposes that they consult him. What is noteworthy about this is that Ramah is only five miles as the crow flies from Saul’s hometown of Gibeah in Benjamin. Saul has been living all his life five miles away from Samuel yet is clueless to who Samuel is and where he lives. As Wiersbe observed, Saul gives no indication of having any interest in things spiritual. He is “A Natural Man,” living next door to God’s servant but going about his business while taking no interest in who that strange fellow is or why he acts so peculiarly! Saul is religiously aware enough to realize that one didn’t

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call on a prophet (or “seer,” or “man of God”) without bringing a gift. But he is unprepared for this. Again, the servant came to his rescue, and they decided to look for the “seer.”

If Saul had been spiritually aware of Israel’s history the hair on the back of his neck should have stood up when he encountered a group of young women coming out to draw water as he approached the city: **1 Samuel 9:11–14** - **11** *As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, “Is the seer here?”* **12** *They answered, “He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place.* **13** *As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately.”* **14** *So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.* This same scenario occurs several times in Scripture, and it always signals that something significant is about to be advanced by God (cf. Gen. 24:15; Gen. 29:9-10; Exodus 2:16). Saul took all of this in stride, not seeming to sense that anything important was about to happen.

All of this demonstrates the principle that God providentially moves through the normal circumstances of life to include “The Natural Man” in His plans. Saul was clueless and had no idea that he was being directed to anything more significant than some lost donkeys. And that’s the way it works with “Natural Men.” They are used by God; included in His plans without having any special desire or even consciousness of what they are doing.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] God through normal circumstances of life uses Natural Men to forward His plan.

[ILLUSTRATION] The Book of Esther is the textbook on this point. In that book, the name of God is never mentioned and the principal characters in the book never reference God in any overt way. Nevertheless, it is impossible to read Esther and not realize that God is providentially at work in His world down to the last detail. Perhaps we think that God’s work is done through unusual occurrences, inexplicable happenings, striking coincidences, or even signs and wonders. Granted, God sometimes will work in these ways, but the vast majority of what God is accomplishing in the world is done through normal processes of everyday life. Truly, as the popular wisdom affirms, “God is in the details.”

[APPLICATION] Don’t despise the providential work of God through the normal processes of everyday life. To do so is to miss a great deal of the benefit we can derive from observing God personally at work in our lives. Sometimes God is up to something wonderful when we are just looking for lost donkeys! God is at work through the normal circumstances of life all around us every day and we can benefit greatly by taking notice of what He is doing, sometimes when we’re not even paying attention.

(vv.15-27) The Natural Man’s Encounter with the Spiritual Man – Bafflingly – When God finally got Saul into Samuel’s presence, Saul must have felt like a man caught unexpectedly in an episode of “The Twilight Zone.” Nothing about what happens next is “natural.” **1 Samuel 9:15–17** - **15** *Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: **16** “Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and 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.”* **17** *When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people.”* In contrast to Saul, Samuel was not clueless at all about this encounter. God had told him the day before that Saul was coming, and Samuel had made full arrangements for his

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arrival. Think of it from Saul’s point of view! Samuel obviously knew all about Saul’s coming, the lost donkeys, and Saul’s background: **1 Samuel 9:18–21** - **18** *Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, “Tell me where is the house of the seer?”* **19** *Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind.* **20** *As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father’s house?”* **21** *Saul answered, “Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?”* Without answering Saul’s question, Samuel took Saul and his servant to a banquet prepared in Saul’s honor: **1 Samuel 9:22–24** - **22** *Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons.* **23** *And Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, ‘Put it aside.’”* **24** *So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, “See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests.”* So Saul ate with Samuel that day. Saul and his servant must have been cutting looks at each other as the event unfolded, thinking, “What’s going on here?!” Two seats at the head of the table. The cook serving Saul with the sacred portion usually reserved for the priest, and this by previous arrangement of the seer. And if this were not enough, Saul and his servant find that lodging has been reserved for them as well and that they’ll be spending the night rather than hiking the five miles home to Gibeah: **1 Samuel 9:25–26** - **25** *And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep.* **26** *Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Up, that I may send you on your way.”* So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street. It’s like something straight out of “Hotel California”! Saul was clueless until the morning came and Samuel took him aside to let him in on God’s plans for him: **1 Samuel 9:27** - **27** *As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God.”* Surely we should picture Saul and his servant standing with open mouths as each new development occurred!

[DOCTRINAL POINT] The Natural Man is baffled by God’s use of him in His plans.

[ILLUSTRATION] The question that baffles us of course is why God goes to all this trouble to include Saul in His plan. Saul’s dynasty was never destined to endure so why not just wait for David? Why include Saul at all? The answer is that the parallelism that points us to Jesus wouldn’t be complete without Saul, The Natural Man, playing his part in God’s drama.

[APPLICATION] Have you noticed in Scripture that salvation never advances through the first man, but always through the second? Think about it! It’s not Cain, but Able (or more correctly, Seth) that the line of Messiah comes through. It’s not Ishmael but Isaac that moves the line forward. It’s not Esau but Jacob that carries the messianic line to the next generation. It’s not Saul but David who carries forward God’s plan. It’s not Adam but Jesus through whom salvation comes. That’s what all of this points to. Salvation can never come through The Natural Man, but only through The Spiritual Man – only through Jesus. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. There must be a whole new kind of humanity to inherit eternal life, and that plan of God is being pictured and advanced through the Old Testament characters of Saul and David as we find them in 1 & 2 Samuel. Saul was The Natural Man – all that mankind wanted in a king. But The Natural Man can never bring deliverance from our enemies any more than Saul brings Israel final deliverance from the Philistines. Only David could bring Israel that

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deliverance. And only God’s Spiritual Man, Jesus, can bring you and me deliverance from our spiritual enemies, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil.

**Conclusion:** So, we must be gripped by this understanding: God is at work all around us every day bringing His redemptive plan for His people to fulfillment. Right now, God’s work in our world may seem chaotic, puzzling, and frightening. Who among us can really tell what’s going to happen next? And yet we can rest in the certainty that life is never out the of control of our Master. He even causes The Natural Man to serve His greater purpose in the end. Rest in His Sovereign grip. He’s got it all under control.