

1 Samuel 9:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

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

Scripture introduces Saul with striking emphasis on his physical appearance, using the Hebrew *bachur* ('choice young man') and *tov* ('goodly' or 'good'). His exceptional height becomes a defining characteristic, standing head and shoulders above all Israel. This description carries both immediate appeal and prophetic irony: Israel wanted a king 'like all the nations' (8:5), and Saul looked the part perfectly. Yet this same emphasis on outward appearance foreshadows God's later rebuke when selecting David: 'the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart' (16:7). The narrative thus presents Saul as exactly what Israel requested, a king whose impressive physique matched pagan expectations of royalty, while simultaneously hinting that such criteria prove spiritually insufficient.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern kings were often depicted as physically imposing figures in royal art and literature. The Amarna letters and Egyptian records portray ideal rulers as tall and strong. Israel's desire for such a king reflected their cultural assimilation to surrounding nations' values rather than trust in divine provision.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do our culture's standards of leadership based on appearance differ from God's criteria?
2. What warning does Saul's impressive appearance, contrasted with his later failures, offer about judging by externals?

Interlinear Text

בְּחִזְקַת	וְרָא	שָׁאוֹל	וְשֵׁם	וְמִבְנֵי	הָיָה	אֵלָיו
H0	H1961	And he had a son	whose name	was Saul	a choice young man	
		H1121	H8034	H7586		H970
מִמְּנָה	טָבֵב	וְשָׁבְאָה	לְמִבְנֵי	אֲשֶׁר	אֵלָיו	טָבֵב
a goodlier	H369	person	And he had a son	of Israel	a goodlier	H4480
H2896		H376	H1121	H3478	H2896	
מִשְׁאָכָם	בְּפָנָיו	עַלְהָה	וְמִלְּבָד	בְּפָנָיו	בְּפָנָיו	מִשְׁאָכָם
than he from his shoulders	H7926	and upward	H4605	he was higher	H3605	than any of the people
				H1364		H5971

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 6:2 (Parallel theme): That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

Numbers 13:33 (Parallel theme): And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

1 Samuel 16:7 (Parallel theme): But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Jeremiah 9:23 (Parallel theme): Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

1 Samuel 17:4 (Parallel theme): And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height was six cubits and a span.