

1 Samuel 9:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

Analysis

And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?

Saul's response reveals either genuine humility or strategic self-deprecation, possibly both. His rhetorical questions emphasize dual lowliness: Benjamin was the smallest tribe, and his family was the least within Benjamin. The language echoes Gideon's similar protest (Judges 6:15), establishing a pattern of God choosing the unlikely. Saul's reasoning, if sincere, shows appropriate awareness of his inadequacy for such a calling. Yet the mention of Benjamin's smallness requires nuance: the tribe had been nearly exterminated in the civil war of Judges 19-21, making their later provision of Israel's first king a remarkable restoration. Saul's question 'wherefore then speakest thou so?' (lamah dabbarta elai kadavar hazeh) expresses bewilderment at Samuel's suggestion. This moment of self-effacement stands in stark contrast to the pride that would later characterize Saul's reign.

Historical Context

Benjamin's decimation in the tribal war (Judges 20-21) had reduced them to a remnant. Their gradual recovery made Saul's emergence as king a testimony to

tribal restoration. The pattern of God choosing smaller tribes and lesser families (Gideon from Manasseh, David from Judah's lesser line) reinforced the theological principle that 'God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble' (James 4:6).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How should we respond when God's calling seems to exceed our qualifications or background?
2. What does Saul's initial humility teach about the danger of forgetting our origins once we achieve success?

Interlinear Text

אָ נָכִי יְמִינִי בֶּן הֶלְוָא וַיֹּאמֶר שָׂא וַיֵּן

answered And Saul and said H3808 H0 Am not I a Benjamite H595

H6030 H7586 H559 H1145

מִקְטָנִי	שְׁבִטִי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	מִשְׁפַּח וְ	הַצָּעֵר הַ	מִכָּל
of the smallest	of the tribe	of Israel	and my family	the least	H3605
H6996	H7626	H3478	H4940	H6810	

מִשְׁפַּח וְ
and my family
H4940

שְׁבֵט י
of the tribe
H7626

בִּנְיָמִן |
of Benjamin
H1144

וְלָמָּה
H4100

דַּבַּרְתָּ
wherefore then speakest
H1696

אֲלֵי
H413

תָּוִיָּהּ : כְּדָבָר ר
 thou so H2088
 H1697

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 15:17 (References Israel): And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

Psalms 68:27 (Parallel theme): There is little Benjamin with their ruler, the princes of Judah and their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

Ephesians 3:8 (Parallel theme): Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

Luke 14:11 (Parallel theme): For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.