

1 Samuel 9:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not.

Analysis

And he passed through mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not: then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not: and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not.

The repetitive structure of this verse, with its threefold 'they found them not,' creates a deliberate sense of futility and divine orchestration. Saul traverses vast territory: the hill country of Ephraim, the land of Shalishah (possibly near Gilgal), the land of Shaalim, and back through Benjamin. This circuitous journey was not random wandering but providential guidance. Each negative result pushed Saul closer to his divine appointment with Samuel. The geographical breadth of the search, spanning multiple tribal regions, ironically foreshadows the scope of Saul's future kingdom. The Hebrew emphasizes the thoroughness of the search (abar, 'passed through'), suggesting Saul's diligence while simultaneously highlighting that no human effort could accomplish what only God had predetermined. The lost donkeys remained lost because God had a larger purpose in motion.

Historical Context

The regions mentioned span approximately 30-40 miles of hill country. Mount Ephraim was densely forested terrain central to Israel. The land of Shalishah may relate to Baal-shalishah mentioned in 2 Kings 4:42. This journey would have taken several days on foot, traversing varied terrain from fertile valleys to rocky highlands.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. When your plans repeatedly fail, how might God be redirecting you toward something greater?
2. What does Saul's persistence in searching teach about diligence even when results seem elusive?

Interlinear Text

רֹאשׁוֹת	בְּאֶרֶץ	נִשְׁׁבַּע									
וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר									
וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר									
וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר	וְיַעֲבֹר									

Additional Cross-References

2 Kings 4:42 (Parallel theme): And there came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the husk thereof. And he said, Give unto the people, that they may eat.

Joshua 24:33 (Parallel theme): And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in mount Ephraim.

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