

The Search for Significance:

Where Do I Fit Into the Great Scheme of Things?

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It is possible at times to think ourselves forgotten by God. At the same time, the rapid pace of

the day can give the appearance of randomness and disorder. In the vast sea of humanity, people question their importance and value. Do we find significance in our health, our mental faculties, our ability to work and to be productive, our ability to learn and to understand, our ability to relate, socialize and to network, our financial stability or skill where earning is concerned, our family, marriage, and the union and unity represented therein, or perhaps our spiritual life complete with the daily disciplines of prayer, time in the Word, and in consciously being a witness to others?

The obvious answer is that in none of the above will we find significance. Significance is not produced by the creature, but is an endowment given by the Creator. The search for significance lies in the creature-Creator relationship. We must look to God for the true meaning of significance. We are significant in this world because we are made to occupy a place in time by One who has a master plan for the whole of human history (re: a beginning and an end, including the One who transcends the whole, Rev. 1:17-18; Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12-13; works in time to guide the affairs of men, Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:11; Phil. 2:13).

There are a couple of “givens” when considering personal value and significance. They are based upon the creature-Creator relationship. That is, “to whom do we possess value?” Or, we might ask, “for whom are our lives significant and possess meaning?” In other words, we do not answer the “significance” question in terms of external circumstances or human relationships. None of these created things can give us value or provide us with significance. Such things have value and possess significance in so far as God determines. We must look beyond such things to the mooring place of the soul, to God (see Solomon at Eccl. 11:7-12:14 and the Psalmist at 104:27-30).

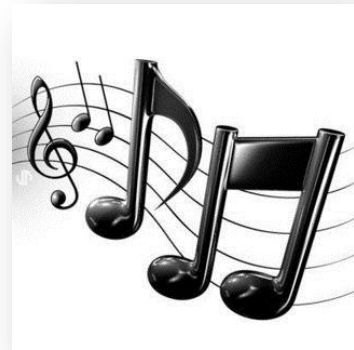
Here are the “givens” that are foundational to the search for significance:

1. We are made by God with inestimable worth (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 139:14-16; Jer. 1:4-5; Gal. 1:15). The human soul is unique in that it is made in the image and likeness of God and capable of mirroring its Creator (mentally [intellect-thought, emotion-feeling, and volition-will], socially [created for relationship-fellowship], morally [conscience is a moral compass], and spiritually [immaterial as well as material, John 4:24]). With regard to the “old” man: Gen. 1:26-27 [the image of God is marred, Rom. 5:12 and not destroyed, Jam. 3:9] and the “new” man: Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). So, the taking of human life is a condemnable act, because it bears the image and likeness of God (Gen. 9:6). The cost of the soul’s redemption (the Son of God) is indicative of its worth (Matt. 16:26).

2. God is the Master Architect of human history and is guiding it along to completion (Job 38:1-42:6 [notes God's regard for the [see 38:37-39:30 where God is mindful of the minute details of His creation, see also Luke 12:4-7 and Matt. 6:25-34]; Acts 15:18; Jer. 29:11; Rom. 8:28; Heb. 1:3; see also of Ezra, Ezra 7:6, 9 and Nehemiah, Neh. 2:8, 18; and Acts 5:19; 18:9; 23:11; 27:23; 2 Tim. 4:17).

There is nothing coincidental or accidental with God, including our arrival at this stage of human history (e.g. David's testimony in Psalm 139:14-16 and God's declaration to Jeremiah in 1:4-5). Instead, a sequence of events occurs beneath the watchful eye of His sovereign plan (e.g. God's rebuke of Job in Job 38:1-42:6). There is much that can be known of God's plan for this is detailed on the pages of Scripture (e.g. Luke 16:31). So much remains unknown, however, especially where the individual events of human history relate to one another and intersect our lives (Deut. 29:29; Ps. 139:6; Rom. 11:33).

As phenomena (things that we encounter daily and interpret by drawing rational conclusions for appearance and experience), these events often appear chaotic and without sense. As rational beings we long to "connect the dots" in some logical fashion in order to draw conclusions that make sense out of life. We want closure. We want to reconcile the discordant into something harmonious. It pains us to think that our lives are mere discordant ("off") notes that do not count in the symphony composed by the Master Composer.



Do we have significance? Why are we (as individual parts) significant to the present time or to the outcome of the whole? This implies that a "story line" or a "narrative" exists to human history, a narrative where each person arrives for a given scene, fulfills his or her role, and exits on the stage.

Imagine the elaborate production of a major motion picture. How many individual shots and scenes are required prior to the editing process before the final version is complete? When filming the individual scenes with all the takes and retakes, the actors cannot connect the purpose of the scene to the entire film. Filming is not done in strict scene sequence or according to the chronological development of the plot. All the actors have for assurance of meaning is the original script. Even then, there is a bit of "doctoring" along the way. Upon completing much of the footage will not survive the final editing. Only when it is time to view the finished film do the actors discover the importance of each scene to the whole and the value of their respective roles.

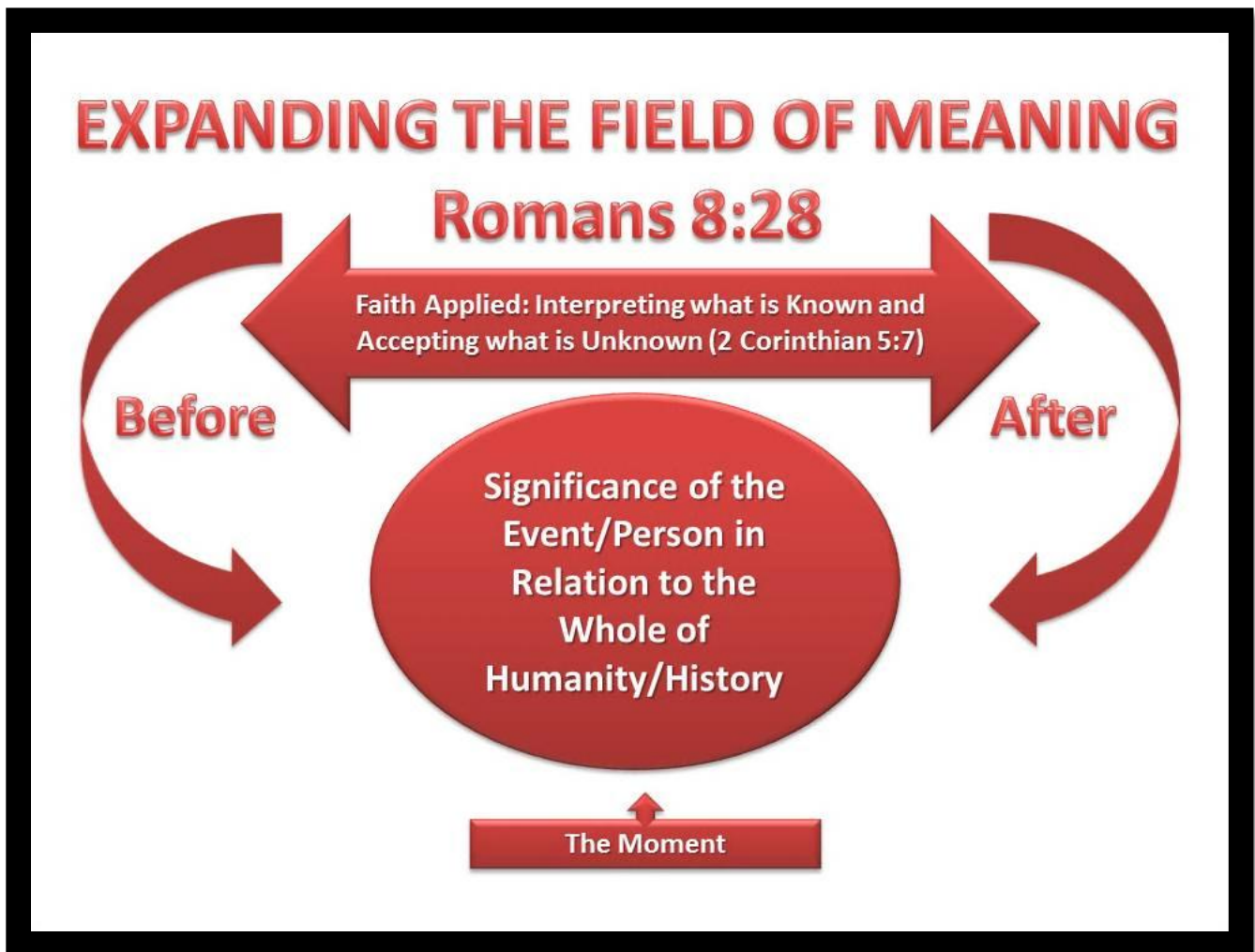


From our limited perspective, we have a script, the Bible. Through the various scenes of our lives we defer all trust to the Bible and to its Author who

knows all, even what is not included in the script. Be assured, however, that God is not self-editing along the way. His knowledge of the whole is unique in that He is aware of the entirety of human history, though He permits human choice as a necessary component for the working of His plan (see Acts 15:16-18 where God’s knowledge of all is described in the context of man’s seeking in time). Someone has said of God’s knowledge that it renders events “certain” but not “necessary.”

Somewhere in that distinction is a description of human free will. We are “free” to choose, but this freedom is exercised within the bounds of conditions set by God so as to make the outcome “certain.”

Our faith, therefore, must be linked to the question of “how” God knows and not to the question of “what God knows. The “how” question regarding the knowledge of God sets our faith on the person of God. That is, “I may never understand fully how specific events relate to the grand scheme of God’s purpose, but I rest in the fact that it is God who holds the plan firmly in His capable hands.” The focus here is on the One who has a plan and not on the plan itself. The question of what God knows sets faith on the response of God to specific events. That is, “if God knows this is happening to me, why doesn’t He do anything about it?” This is the



“knothole” effect derived from living circumstantially. That is, like the little boy peering at the parade procession through a knothole in the fence, so we attempt to discern the whole from the sum of its parts...as we experience them in time. We attempt to connect the dots retrospectively. By this we make judgments on God, rather than allowing our knowledge of the character of God to make judgments on the circumstances (e.g. 2 Cor. 5:7).

Here is a list of passages that indicate the timeless knowledge of God as it affects the daily affairs of human history. **We find significance, value, and meaning when we recognize that as creatures God has included us, individuals, within the comprehensive ocean of His eternal purpose.**

Isaiah 45:21; 64:4	Matthew 13:34-35	Matthew 25:31-36	Luke 1:68-75
Acts 2:22-24	Acts 3:19-21	Acts 13:44-48	Acts 15:14-18
Acts 17:24-28	Romans 8:28-30	Romans 9:18-24	Romans 11:1-11
Romans 11:32-33	Romans 16:25-27	1 Corinthians 2:7-9	Ephesians 1:-14
Ephesians 2:8-10	Ephesians 3:1-12	Colossians 1:24-2:3	2 Thessalonians 2:13-14
2 Timothy 1:8-11	Titus 1:1-4	Hebrews 4:1-3	1 Peter 1:1-2
1 Peter 1:17-21	1 Peter 2:5-8	Jude 1:4	Revelation 13:1, 8
Revelation 17:8			

The Case of David

The books of I-II Samuel contain events occurring within the context of religious and moral deterioration in Israel. The book of Judges suggests a link between Israel’s desire for a king and the religious and moral deterioration of the nation (see Jud. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25).

Anarchy without a King: Bookends of Judges 17–21¹

Micah and the Danite Migration (chs. 17–18)		Gibeah's Deed and Their Punishment (chs. 19–21)	
Religious Deterioration		Moral Deterioration	
Beginning	“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6).	“In those days, when there was no king in Israel . . .” (19:1).	Beginning
Ending	“In those days there was no king in Israel” (18:1).	“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (21:25).	Ending

¹ ESV Study Bible (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 467.

Micah represents the prevailing religious ignorance of Israel. He fashioned idols out of silver and created a priesthood to observe rituals in association with the idols. The tribe of Dan coveted this system of worship and established a center near Mount Hermon in the north. The phrase “all the time the house of God was in Shiloh” (Jud. 18:31) signifies the spiritual blindness of a people who had forgotten God (not entirely, see 20:27-28). The people of Gibeah represent the moral degeneration of the people. Their profound immoral behavior resulted in the death of a murdered woman (Jud. 20:4). The retaliation by the other tribes against Benjamin nearly caused the tribe to perish entirely. Provision was made to give wives to the remaining men of the tribe so they could replenish the tribe.

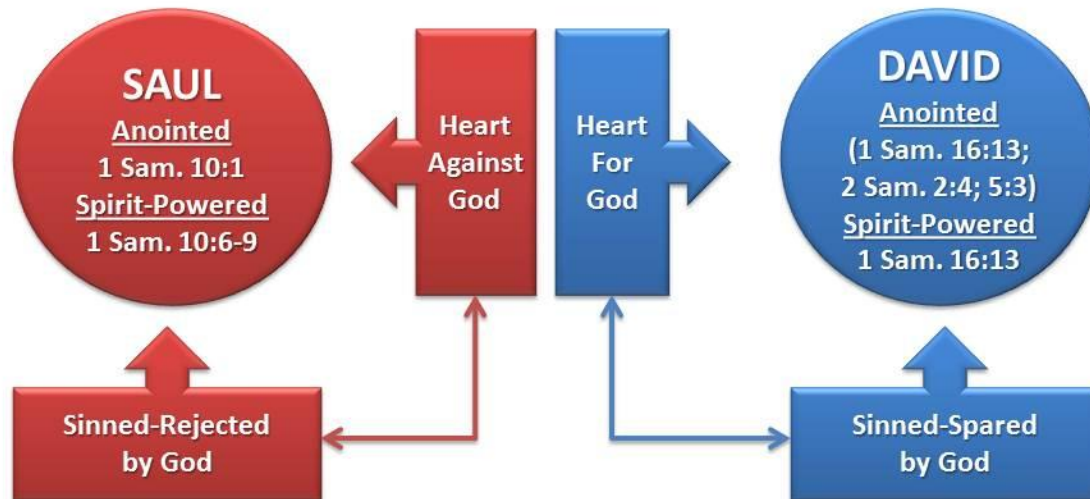
The repeated phrase “there was no king” ties the nation’s religious and moral decline to a specific period. The deterioration is primarily due, not to the absence of a human king (Israel had never had a king), but due to the fact that Israel had rejected God as King. God reigned from between the cherubim above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant (e.g. 1 Sam. 4:4). Israel demanded a king to be like the other nations. God relented and gave them their request (see Hos. 13:11). However, the human king must possess God’s heart for the religious and moral deterioration to be reversed. The nation was first given Saul, a king after their own heart. Saul projected the stature of a warrior. Israel desired a king that would lead them into battle and be successful against their oppressive enemies. Upon rejecting Saul, God gave the nation a king after His own heart. He desired a king who would look to Him while performing the task of leading the nation.

What happened in Israel such that they would desire a human king? It seems that an already spiritually degenerate Israel has lost confidence in God. God as “king” was looked to as the source of deliverance against the Philistines. The Lord who was “enthroned” between the cherubim would defeat the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:4). Israel, however, was soundly defeated and fled in fear before their enemy, losing 30,000 men, the priests Hophni and Phineas, and the Ark (1 Sam. 4:10-11). The capture of the Ark was a defining moment in the nation’s history, but after its return, the people were restored to a momentary trust in God through the intervention of Samuel (see 1 Sam. 7:1-17).

Samuel acted as the “priest-judge” in Israel (later “prophet,” having received and delivered revelation from God). He became the de-facto leader of Israel after the death of Eli (4:18; 7:6, 16). In his old age he appointed his sons as Israel’s leaders (8:1), but there (as Eli’s) were corrupt. It was at this time that Israel demanded a king (8:5).

1. The request for a king was ultimately a rejection of God, having rejected the man of God’s appointed leaders (8:6).
2. The character and demands of a human king are different from that of God (8:9).
3. Israel is warned that the day will come when they will regret their decision and cry out in vain to God (8:18).
4. Israel’s demand for a king seems to be linked to military effectiveness in battle and not to one who would spiritually revive the nation (8:20). See Psalm 106:15.

A Tale of Two Kings



Saul rejected the Word of the Lord in favor of his own desires (1 Sam. 15:23, 26, 28). David possessed numerous characteristics that demonstrated his desire to follow after God, though imperfectly : (1) **Humility**, Ps. 62:9; (2) **Reverent**, Ps. 18:3; (3) **Respectful**, Ps. 31:9; (4) **Trusting**, Ps. 27:1; (5) **Loving**, Ps. 18:1; (6) **Devoted**, Ps. 4:7; (7) **Recognition**, Ps. 9:1; (8) **Faithful**, Ps. 23:6; (9) **Obedient**, Ps. 119:34; (10) **Repentant**, Ps. 25:11.

5. Therefore, they received such a leader in Saul, handsome and a head above all in Israel (9:2). He had the head, but not the heart (feared before Goliath, while David desired to trust God, 1 Sam. 17:11, 26).

In I Samuel we discover a succession of events that are not independent from God's plan, but integral to God's plan. This begs the question as to what God is doing during this time and how are His acts significant to a broader succession of events?

1. The dark period of Israel's religious and moral decline is evident from the books of Judges and Ruth.
2. In I Samuel 1:1-3:18 we see the birth and rise to prominence of Samuel. Yet, how does the rise of Samuel link to the plan of God. God intends to raise up a man through whom He may thwart the descending spiritual condition of His people. There are more far reaching implications to the entry of Samuel on the stage of human history.
3. Samuel becomes a prophet as well as a priest in Israel (3:19-21).
4. Israel requests a king (8:6).
5. David is later anointed after Saul is rejected (1 Same. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3).

6. Ruth 4:17 indicates that the central focus of the narrative is David.
7. David is central to the unfolding of redemptive history in that God established His covenant with him and through his line would come the Messiah (2 Sam. 7:13; Rom. 1:3).

Through the dark period of Israel's history came a yearning for a man through whom God would pour out His blessing upon the nation (see 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 7:46; Acts 13:16-25; and Ps. 89:20).

- What is happening in our “moment” that should give us cause to reflect upon the path thus far and the way forward?
- What is so significant about this “moment” in terms of realizing what God is doing?
- Is this a time of preparation that is linked to future blessing?
- Are there areas that we need to address in order for God to pour out His blessing?
- Are we looking to human means and resources and not to God alone?