

Part 13 God Chooses a King

1 Samuel 16-17

Anyone who has ever been deeply disappointed by a friend or family member can understand why aged Samuel mourned so long over King Saul. Israel had rejected Samuel's leadership over them because he was too old, and they didn't want his sons to succeed him because they accepted bribes and perverted justice (8:3). But King Saul was guilty of disobeying God's clear commandments and also of lying about what he had done, and because of these sins, he had forfeited his throne. He was still in office and yet was unfit to lead the nation, and Samuel had broken fellowship with him (15:34-35). In his grief, Samuel must have felt like a dismal failure as a father, a spiritual leader, and a mentor to the new king. The word translated "mourn" means "to mourn for the dead" and reveals the depths of Samuel's sorrow.

There is a time to mourn (Ecc. 3:4), but there is also a time to act (Josh. 7:10), and for Samuel, that time had arrived. In spite of how he felt about himself, Samuel's work wasn't over yet, for God wanted him to anoint the new king, David, the son of Jesse. If Saul was "the people's king," then David was God's king, and the events recorded in these two chapters indicate clearly that God's hand was unquestionably on David, the leader of His choice.

1. God chose David. (1 Sam. 16:1-13)

Had an election been held in Israel to choose a replacement for King Saul, it's not likely that the people would have chosen David, but he was God's first choice. "He also chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes that had young he brought him, to shepherd Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance" (Ps. 78:70-71, NKJV). Let's consider some facts about this unusual young man.

David's city—Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:1-5). In spite of the fact that it was a small town in Judah, Bethlehem was a well-known place to the Jewish people. It was when Jacob and his family were on their way to Bethel that his favorite wife, Rachel, died near Bethlehem while giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. 35:16-20). It was in Bethlehem that Ruth, the widow from Moab, found her husband, Boaz, and gave birth to Obed, David's grandfather (Ruth 4:13-22; Matt. 1:3-6). David himself would make Bethlehem a famous place, and so would Jesus, the Son of David, who would be born there as the Scriptures promised (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:6). Bethlehem means "house of bread," and it was there that the living bread from heaven came to dwell in human flesh.

As Israel's judge and prophet, Samuel had the right to travel where he pleased in serving the Lord and His people. But these were difficult and dangerous times because Saul was a suspicious man and his spies would report anything Samuel did. From Samuel's home in Ramah, the road to Bethlehem passed by Gibeah where Saul had his headquarters, and Saul would want to know where Samuel was going and why he was going there. To avoid problems, God commanded His servant to take a heifer and announce that he would sacrifice a fellowship offering in Bethlehem for a select group of people, including Jesse and his sons. Then God would show Samuel which one to anoint as king.

The elders in Bethlehem knew that Saul and Samuel were estranged, so the arrival of Samuel gave them great alarm. Was Samuel recruiting followers to resist Saul? Would Saul interpret his presence in their little town as a declaration of war? Samuel quickly allayed their fears and told them to sanctify themselves and come to the sacrifice and the feast that would follow. "Sanctifying" meant that each of the guests would take a bath and change clothes (Ex. 19:10-15), because nobody ceremonially unclean could partake of the sacrificial feast (Lev. 7:19-21). For Jesse and his sons to be invited to this feast was a high honor, and, of course, nobody but Samuel knew why they were included.

David's family (1 Sam. 16:6-10). Before the guests sat down to enjoy the fellowship feast, Samuel looked over seven of Jesse's sons, thinking that the whole family was there, but he was operating by sight and not by faith. We don't know what Samuel's two sons looked like, but we do know that their father admired men who were handsome and well-built. Samuel had already forgotten this mistake he made about Saul (9:2; 10:23-24). David was the eighth son and only six of his brothers are named in Scripture: Eliab, the firstborn; Abinadab, the second; Shimea, the third, also called Shammah; Nethanel, or Nathaniel, the fourth; Raddai, the fifth; and Ozem, the sixth (1 Chron. 2:13-15). David is called the seventh in this genealogy, but 1 Samuel 16:10-11 makes it clear that he was the eighth and youngest son. Apparently one brother died without issue and his name dropped out of the genealogy. David also had two sisters: Zeruah was the mother of Abishai, Joab, and Asahel; and Abigail, who was the mother of Amasa (1 Chron. 2:16-17). All of these men played important roles in David's kingdom.

No doubt there was no family in Bethlehem that could boast having seven such brothers, men of strength and stature, *and yet none of them was God's chosen king!* Samuel may have looked at their faces and forms, but the Lord examined their hearts. God alone can search the human heart and know what a person's motives really are (1 Chron. 28:9; Jer. 17:10; Rom. 8:27; Heb. 4:12).

David's occupation—a shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11). So insignificant was David in the family that Jesse didn't even call him from the flock to the feast! Saul was hiding among the baggage when Samuel called for him, but David was busy caring for his father's sheep. In Old Testament times, kings and their officers were looked upon as "shepherds" of the people (see Jer. 23; Ezek. 34), and David was a man with the heart of a shepherd (see 2 Sam. 7:8; 1 Chron. 21:17; Ps. 78:70-72). God's church today is a flock, and each spiritual leader needs to have the heart of a shepherd and lovingly care for God's lambs and sheep (John 10:1-18; 21:15-19; 1 Peter 5).

You can drive cattle but you have to lead sheep or they will scatter. The shepherd must know his sheep individually, love them, and take care of them according to their needs. For the most part, sheep are defenseless and do not see well, so they depend on the shepherd to guide and protect them. Though David was a literal shepherd who was called to be a "national" shepherd, he saw himself as one of the Lord's sheep and wrote about it in Psalm 23. This psalm wasn't the product of a young man but of a seasoned saint who looked back at a long life and confessed that the Lord had been faithful to him all the days of his life (23:6). David was exactly the kind of leader Israel needed to repair all the damage that Saul had done to the nation.

God calls people who are busy, not people looking for ways to avoid responsibility. Moses (Ex. 3), Gideon (Judg. 6), Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21), Nehemiah (Neh. 1), Amos (Amos 7:14-15), Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Mark 1:16-20), and Matthew (Matt. 9:9-13) were all busy when the Lord called them. God's pattern for leadership is stated in Matthew 25:21—"Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord" (NKJV). David had been faithful as a servant over a few things and God promoted him to being a ruler over many things—from a flock to a whole nation! Unlike Saul, David could be trusted with exercising authority because he had been under authority and had proved himself faithful.

David's appearance (1 Sam. 16:12a; see 17:42). While the physical appearance wasn't the most important thing for a king (16:7), David was so striking in his appearance that the Lord calls our attention to it. Saul was different from most Semitic people of that day because he was tall, but David's distinctive was that he was fair rather than swarthy. The word translated "ruddy" is the same as Esau's nickname "Edom—red" (Gen. 25:24-34). Some have interpreted this to mean that David was a redhead, but it may only mean that, unlike the average Semite, he was fair of skin and hair. Like Joseph, he was handsome (39:6) and had a winsome personality (1 Sam. 16:18). He was the kind of person who attracted people and won and held their confidence.

David's anointing (1 Sam. 16:12a-13).

After looking at Jesse's seven sons, Samuel at last found the man of God's choice, a man after God's own heart (13:14). It's interesting that David ("beloved") was number eight, because in Scripture eight is often the number of a new beginning. God did use David to bring a new beginning to Israel, both governmentally and spiritually.

In Scripture, only prophets, priests, and kings were anointed, and the anointing had to be performed by a person authorized by the Lord. In biblical imagery, oil can symbolize the Holy Spirit and the endowment of His power upon His servants (Zech. 4). The Hebrew word "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christ" both mean "anointed." The Spirit of God came upon young David in great power, and ever after that, David was God's man, but at the same time, the Spirit of God departed from Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). Without the power of the Spirit, the servant of God is helpless to do the will of God and glorify Christ. As we abide in Christ, we receive the power we need, for Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NKJV).

How much did David's father and brothers understand about this anointing? In view of David's subsequent association with King Saul, perhaps they interpreted the event as a consecration for David's special service to the king. It's likely that Samuel privately told David that he had been chosen by the Lord to be the next king. If so, his behavior while serving Saul was remarkably mature for a young man who one day would wear the crown. No doubt it was the assurance of this future hope that helped to keep David faithful during the ensuing years of trial and persecution. But his trials and testings during those wilderness years helped to build his faith and develop his godly character and prepare him for the ministry that God had planned for him.

When David and Jonathan became friends (1 Sam. 18:1) and covenanted to be faithful to each other (18:3; 20:16), it's certain that David revealed to Jonathan that he was God's anointed king. When David became king, he would make Jonathan second in command (23:16-18). It's not likely that Jonathan told his paranoid father about David or their covenant, but somehow Saul discovered that David was his successor (20:30-31) and tried all the more to kill him. He expected his men to inform him about David and his whereabouts and Saul let them know that David was chosen to be the next king (22:6-8).

2. God prepared David. (1 Sam. 16:14-23)

David knew that the Lord had been present at his conception and had arranged for his genetic structure (Ps. 139:13-16). He ordained that David would be strong and handsome, that he would possess musical talent, that he would be prudent and brave. Just as Paul was a vessel prepared by God for a specific work (Gal. 1:15; Acts 9:15), so David was God's prepared servant to accomplish His purposes for His people.

Saul's attendants knew that something was seriously wrong with their master, and they rightly attributed it to the attacks of an evil spirit. God had permitted this spirit to trouble Saul (1 Sam. 16:14, 23; 18:10; 19:9) as part of His discipline because of the king's rebellion. By nature, Saul was a suspicious and revengeful man, and this gave the evil spirit a beachhead for his operations (Eph. 4:25-27). The one man in the kingdom who was prepared to minister to Saul was David!

David was a poet and musician, skilled at playing the harp and composing songs. By the end of his life, he was known as "the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. 23:1). It's unusual to find such artistic talent in a man who was also a rugged soldier and fearless general. He wrote psalms, he organized the music ministry for the temple (1 Chron. 25), and provided instruments for the musicians (23:5). From the spoils of his many battles, he provided the materials for the temple, and he longed to have the privilege of building a house for the Lord. No matter how you examine his life and abilities, you find David to be a unique individual—and he was that way because God made him that way!

It was David's musical ability that introduced him into the royal court and then he was promoted to military service. The opportunities of life matched his giftedness, and David was wise to obey the will of the Lord. Just as he refused to wear Saul's armor when facing Goliath, so he rejected that which wasn't prepared and planned for him by the Lord. "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. 23:3; Eph. 2:10).

The key to David's success in life is stated in 1 Sam. 16:18—"the Lord was with him." (See 18:12, 14, 28.) This was also the secret of the success of Joseph (Gen. 39:2-3, 21, 23), Joshua (Josh. 6:27), and Samuel (1 Sam. 3:19), and it is the basis for success in the Christian life today. David knew his gifts (Rom. 12:3), he experienced the power of God in using these gifts in his daily life. He loved the Lord and worshiped Him, and he surrendered himself to do the work God had called him to do. As long as he followed the Lord, God blessed and used him for his glory.

In their original meeting, Saul loved David (1 Sam. 16:21), so he obviously didn't know that his new attendant was to be the next king of Israel. However, that love was gradually replaced by envy and then fear (18:8-9, 12, 15), until Saul was determined to kill David. Saul became David's enemy (v. 19), but David never treated Saul like an enemy. David behaved wisely and tried to help Saul get over his fits of depression, but they only became worse. Without God, Saul was a total failure.

3. God guided David. (1 Sam. 17:1-27)

David didn't remain in Saul's camp permanently but went back and forth between the camp and home as he was needed (v. 15, NIV). Whenever he was called to help Saul, he left his flock with a dependable man (v. 20) and hurried to the camp where now he even had his own tent (v. 54). It wasn't until after David killed Goliath that Saul took him permanently to be one of his armor-bearers (18:1-2). David was a Spirit-led man and his every decision had to be in the will of God and for the glory of God. Others might come and go as they pleased, but David was guided by the providential hand of God. We can see the guidance of God in the events reported in chapter 17.

Goliath is described as standing nine feet, nine inches tall, wearing a coat of mail that weighed 125 pounds and carrying a spear that weighed 15 pounds. He was a formidable opponent indeed. He had presented himself to the army of Israel each morning and evening for forty days, and apparently David arrived on the final day (17:16). Jesse chose just the right day to send David to the battlefield to carry food supplies to his three brothers and their commanding officer (vv. 17-18). Unlike modern armies, soldiers in ancient armies had to provide their own rations and help provide for others.

David was up very early that day and heard the morning challenge that Goliath gave to Saul and his army. If the Israelites could provide a champion who was able to defeat Goliath, the Philistines would submit to the Jews and be their servants, but if not, the Israelites must consider themselves defeated and become the servants of the Philistines (vv. 8-9). Unfortunately, nobody in the Jewish army volunteered, including King Saul, who stood head and shoulders above his men. Since Israel had come to a crisis in this confrontation, Saul made a generous offer to the man who would silence Goliath: he would marry one of the king's daughters, receive great riches from the king, and take his father's house off the tax rolls. Saul hoped that somebody would be tempted by the offer and try to defeat Goliath.

David's response to Goliath's arrogant speech was that of total disgust. Who was this uncircumcised Philistine to blaspheme the name of the God of Israel? Keep in mind that David was too young to serve in the army, but he was acting as though anybody in the camp who had faith in Jehovah could challenge Goliath and defeat him! But all he saw were men fleeing from the field at the very sight of the giant, and even King Saul was terrified (vv. 11, 24). God had brought David to the camp for such a time as this, and he was ready to accept the challenge.

4. God encouraged David. (1 Sam. 17:28-39)

Whenever you step out by faith to fight the enemy, there's always somebody around to discourage you, and often it begins in your own home. David's eldest brother, Eliab, became angry when he heard that David was inquiring about Saul's offer and he ridiculed him (vv. 28-30). "We're soldiers and all you are is a shepherd boy! You came to see the battle! Go home and take care of your little flock and leave the fighting to us!" Of course, the fact that there had been no battle didn't embarrass Eliab, and he also forgot that David had originally come in order to deliver food for him, Abinadab, and Shammah. These three men had seen David anointed by Samuel but they didn't understand what it meant.

"[A] man's foes shall be they of his own household," promised Jesus (Matt. 10:36; see Micah 7:6), and that promise was true in David's life. It was also true in the life of Joseph, whose brothers hated him, lied about him, and sold him for a slave. Moses was criticized by his own brother and sister (Num. 12), and our Lord's earthly family at one time misunderstood Him and opposed His ministry (Mark 3:31-35; John 7:1-10). But David didn't allow Eliab's harsh words to discourage him, for he knew that God could help him defeat the giant.

But King Saul wasn't any more help, either in what he said or what he advised. "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he is a man of war from his youth" (1 Sam. 17:33, NKJV). Saul was echoing the report of the ten unbelieving spies who saw the giants in Canaan and decided that it was impossible to enter the land (Num. 13:28-29). When we walk by sight, we calculate everything from the human perspective, and this always leads to discouragement; but when we walk by faith, God comes into the equation, and that changes the results.

David had experienced the power of God in his own life and he knew that the Lord could turn weakness into power. While caring for the sheep, David had killed a lion and a bear, and he knew that the Lord could deliver him out of the hand of Goliath. It's as though he sees Goliath as just another animal attacking God's flock! Saul knew nothing personally about this wonderful power of God, so he advised David to wear his armor. Saul didn't have the faith to believe that God could do something new, so he suggested the old-fashioned time-honored method of warfare. King Saul was a grown man and a large one at that, and David was only a teenager, so imagine what the armor looked like on David's body! But men and women of faith obey God no matter what the experts say.

David's encouragement came from God, and this is one of the secrets of his life. "But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God" (1 Sam. 30:6). In spite of criticism and in spite of discouraging counsel and bad advice, David trusted the Lord his God, and God rewarded his faith.

5. God enabled David. (1 Sam. 17:40-58)

"All God's giants have been weak men, who did great things for God because they reckoned on His being with them." James Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission, wrote those words, but even more, he lived them. "I am the very little servant of an illustrious Master," he told a congregation in Australia. David understood what this meant, for he was but a teenager when he faced the giant; yet he knew that the Lord would be with him.

It was the Lord's victory (1 Sam. 17:40-47). It's unfortunate that this dramatic account is considered primarily a children's story or the basis for an allegory about defeating the "giants" in our lives. While there are many applications of a Bible passage, there is only one basic interpretation, and the interpretation here is that David did what he did for the glory of God. David came to the contest in the name of the Lord, the God of the armies of Israel, and he wanted Goliath, the Philistine army, and all the earth to know that the true and living God was Israel's God (v. 46). Goliath had ridiculed Israel's God and blasphemed His name, but David was about to set the record straight. David saw this as a contest between the true God of Israel and the false gods of the Philistines.

God wants to use His people to magnify His name to all the nations of the earth. This purpose was involved in the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and God's choice of the people of Israel (Deut. 28:9-10). One purpose for Israel's sojourn in Egypt and the judgments God sent against Pharaoh was the proclaiming of God's name and glory to all the earth (Ex. 9:16). The parting of the Red Sea to let Israel out, and the opening up of the Jordan River to let them into Canaan, bore witness to all the nations that Israel's God was the true God (Josh. 4:23-24). Even the building of the temple was a witness to the Gentile nations of Israel's God so that they might know Him and fear Him (1 Kings 8:42-43). What the Lord did through David would be recorded and told around the world and bring great honor to the name of the Lord.

The very weapon that David used—a sling—was a shepherd's weapon, almost the toy of a child, and yet God used it to defeat the giant and rout the Philistine army. When Goliath saw a lad coming with a sling in one hand and a staff in the other, he laughed at him. "Am I a dog that you come at me with a stick?" But David announced that his real power was the name of the Lord of Hosts, the name that Goliath and the Philistines had insulted. David wanted the whole assembly—Israel and the Philistines—to know that the Lord doesn't need swords and spears but can deliver His people in His own way through the humblest of means. No wonder David and Jonathan became such fast friends, for they both had faith in a mighty God and wanted to fight His battles to glorify Him (1 Sam. 13:6; Pss. 33:16-22; 44:6-8).

It was David's victory (1 Sam. 17:48-51a). The Lord uses means to accomplish His purposes, and David was the prepared servant for this occasion. As a shepherd alone in the fields, he had learned to trust God, and as a faithful guardian of the flock, he had mastered the use of the sling. David had confident faith in God because he had found Him dependable in the crises of life, and he knew that the Lord would not desert him now. The Spirit of God lived in David's body and would enable him to win the battle. God guided the stone and it sank into the giant's forehead and he fell on his face before the two armies. David stood over the fallen giant, took out the giant's sword, and cut off his head, an act that not only guaranteed the victim's death but also humiliated him and his army and announced total victory. Years later, David would write, "It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect.... He teaches my hands to make war so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze" (Ps. 18:32, 34, NKJV).

It became Israel's victory (1 Sam. 17:51b-54). Even as a youth, David displayed one of the marks of a great leader: he took the risk and opened the way so that others could share in the victory. The Philistines didn't keep their part of the bargain and submit to Israel (v. 9); instead, they fled in fear, so the Jews chased them at least ten miles to the cities of Gath (Goliath's hometown, v. 4) and Ekron, slaying the enemy soldiers all the way. It turned out to be a tremendous victory for Saul's army. When the Israelites returned to the Philistine camp, they claimed the spoils of the victory that the Lord and David had won. David apparently accompanied the men in chasing the enemy (v. 57) and began to get the reputation of being a brave soldier (18:7). He stripped the giant and took his armor and put it in his tent. Later Goliath's sword will show up with the Jewish priests in Nob (21:1-9), so David must have dedicated it to the Lord by giving it to the priests.

When did David take Goliath's head to Jerusalem? Probably later when he conquered the city and made it his capital (2 Sam. 5:1-10). The city was known as Jebus in that day and was inhabited by the Jebusites (Judg. 19:10), so this verse was written into the text later when the name had been changed. When David moved into the city as king, he no doubt brought with him many precious trophies from his battles. The head of Goliath, as grisly as it was, would remind David that the Lord could be trusted to give the victory if we seek only to glorify Him.

It was not Saul's victory (1 Sam. 17:55-58). When Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost (14:1-23), Saul was a spectator, and his bad decisions almost cost them a victory; and once again, Saul

merely watched as David defeated the enemy single-handed. This would be Saul's pattern of leadership to the tragic end of his life.

Saul knew who David was, but he asked Abner who the lad's father was, for in that day, that was how people were identified. Jesse had been mentioned earlier in Saul's circle (16:18) but perhaps Abner wasn't present and Saul may easily have forgotten. (Do we know the names of our acquaintances' fathers?) As Saul's minstrel, David went back and forth between home and the camp, and he was present only when Saul was oppressed by the evil spirit; so we can excuse Saul for not knowing who Jesse was. The fact that the victor's family was relieved of paying taxes, and he would marry Saul's daughter was part of the bargain (17:25), so Saul would have to inquire about the father. Finally, Saul may have wanted to know if there were any more men like David back home. He probably didn't know that three of David's brothers were in his army, but he could have used a few more men like David! (See 14:52.) The result of the day's victory was that David was added permanently to Saul's staff.

It has well been said that there are people who make things happen, people who watch things happen and people who don't know that anything is happening. David had insight into Israel's plight and knew what was happening. He realized that it wasn't a physical conflict between two armies, but a spiritual battle between truth and error, faith and superstition, the true and living God and dead idols. David's faith lifted the war to a much higher plane, just as Paul did in Ephesians 6:10ff. Our battle is against the devil and his army, and human weapons are useless in that conflict.

Faith in God makes us participants with the Lord in the battle for truth. "And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4).