

1 Samuel Chapter 16

“Verses 16:1 – 31:13”: The third major division of Samuel recounts the steady demise of Saul and the selection and preparation of David for the kingship. Chapter 16 begins with Samuel mourning for Saul as one would mourn for the dead. The death of Saul (31:1-13), concludes this last division of the book.

Verses 1-3: David grew up at a time when leadership was in great demand. The judges had come to power and presided over a weak and wicked country for a time, but then the people pleaded with “Samuel” to appoint for them a king. As the leadership of King “Saul” began to fail, the nation worsened. Yet God was at work, preparing David to be “king” of Israel.

1 Samuel 16:1 "And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons."

“Jesse the Beth-lehemite”: God’s new king of Israel (and ultimately the Messiah; Gen. 3:15; Num. 24:17; 1 Sam. 2:10; Psalm 2), would come from the tribe of Judah (Jesse; Ruth 4:12, 22; Gen. 49:10), and from Bethlehem of Judah (Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:2-6).

“I have provided ... me”: The king was chosen and provided by God (Deut. 17:15), who orders all things according to the counsel of His own will (Isa. 40:14), not according to human desires (8:5-6; 2 Sam. 8-9).

We are not certain how long Samuel mourned for Saul. This is not Samuel mourning the death of Saul, but the rejection of Saul by the LORD. The mourning of Saul's rejection by God is understandable, from the fact of all the things Saul had done as a physical king of Israel He had defeated Israel's enemies. He had gotten the entire tribes to send their help for the last battle. He had helped Israel against their enemies. It appears to me however, that Samuel's mourning for Saul was a grief for him being rejected of God. Samuel feels somewhat responsible.

We see, in the verse above, that the LORD says his mourning is enough. The LORD will be angry with Samuel, if he does not drop that issue and do the will of the LORD himself. It is time for Samuel to go back to work. The LORD has a job for Samuel to do. He is to fill his horn with the anointing oil. The LORD is sending him to Jesse the Beth-lehemite. The LORD has chosen a new king of Jesse's sons.

Verses 2-5: Despite fears for his own safety, “Samuel” carried out the will of the “Lord.” In turn, the Lord provided the proper circumstances that would facilitate the execution of His command.

1 Samuel 16:2 "And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear [it], he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD."

“Saul ... will kill me”: Saul’s unbalanced emotional state was already known in Israel. It is ironic that Samuel’s initial reaction to the word of the Lord was fear of Saul instead of rejoicing at God’s provision to Israel (and ultimately to all the nations; e.g., 1 Kings 8:41-43). The route from Ramah to Bethlehem would take Samuel through Gibeah of Saul (10:26; 11:14).

“I am come to sacrifice”: The place of sacrifice could be in any town until the establishment of the house of God in Jerusalem (Deut. 12:11).

Saul was still king, as far as he was concerned. He had never relinquished the throne. He still had many followers and would be dangerous to anyone who might try to dethrone him. Instead of telling Saul where he is going and what he intends to do, he is to tell him he is there to sacrifice. He will sacrifice the heifer.

1 Samuel 16:3 "And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto me [him] whom I name unto thee."

“Anoint”: David’s first anointing was performed by Samuel, symbolizing God’s recognition/ordination (compare 2:10). The following two anointings (2 Sam. 2:7; 5:3), were to establish David as king publicly for the benefit of Judah and Israel respectively.

The selection of Saul was initiated by the people, but the selection of David was a divine initiative. The people’s choice was a terrible king whose life ended in disaster. God’s choice was the ideal king whose life and kingdom reflected a heart for Him. It is more important that leaders be anointed by God than appointed by humans.

The sacrifice would be a sacrifice with a feast attached to it. It would be Samuel's privilege to invite anyone he wanted to come to the feast. Jesse is the father of David. The Ark was not established at a given place during the time of its captivity, and they had held sacrificial feasts at places named by the spiritual leader at the time. It would not have been unusual for Samuel to call such a sacrificial feast here. Saul would not be suspicious of the presence of Jesse at the feast. The oil of anointing was special oil used for purposes such as this. Remember, the anointing with oil had been the beginning of the call of Saul himself.

1 Samuel 16:4 "And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?"

“The elders of the town trembled at his coming”: The elders, and no doubt all Israel, had heard of Samuel’s execution of Agag (15:33). Israel still closely associated the “seer,” or prophet, with the not-so-distant past office of “judge.”

Samuel was a highly respected spiritual leader. The people knew that Samuel spoke for the LORD. They were fearful that the LORD had sent a warning to them by Samuel. The elders immediately ask if they should fear the message Samuel brings?

Samuel 16:5 "And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the LORD: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice."

“Sanctify yourselves”: Worship of Yahweh was always preceded by cleansing or washing, both of the outward garments and the inner man (Exodus 19:10, 14; 1 John 1:9).

We see from this, that Samuel made sure that Jesse and his sons were ceremonially clean to come to this feast. He truly has come in peace; to anoint the person the LORD shows him is to be the next king. He is going to sacrifice as well. During the feast, he will have the opportunity to talk to Jesse about his sons.

1 Samuel 16:6 "And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the LORD'S anointed [is] before him."

“Eliab”: Literally “My God is Father.” Since Eliab was the first of Jesse’s sons to catch Samuel’s eye, he must have been an impressive young man by outward appearance.

Eliab was the oldest son of Jesse. Samuel, looking at this tall handsome young man, thought surely this would be the LORD's choice for king. "Eliab" means God is father.

Verses 7-23: When the Lord describes David (in Psalm 89:20), He calls him “David my servant.” God looks for leaders who put others’ needs above their own, no matter their station in life (Mark 9:35). Leaders in the secular world want to know how many people are serving them, but leaders in the kingdom of God want to know how many people they are serving.

In verses 7-11 God reminded Samuel that He bases His decisions on inward character and the caliber of a person’s “heart” alone. Saul was taller and more handsome than anyone in Israel (9:2), he looked like a king. David was less impressive by human standards, and even less so than his brothers, but he possessed the heart of a king. He also had a heart for the true King of Israel, the Lord.

1 Samuel 16:7 "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."

“His countenance ... height of his stature”: Samuel needed to be reminded that God’s anointed was not chosen because of physical attributes. This was initially a difficult concept for Samuel as he was accustomed to a king whose only positive attributes were physical.

“The Lord looketh on the heart”: The Hebrew concept of “heart” embodies emotions, will, intellect, and desires. The life of the man will reflect his heart (Matt. 12:34-35).

Saul had been a head taller than all of his fellows and was a handsome man, but he had greatly disappointed the LORD. The LORD tells Samuel not to look at the outward man. Sometimes, those who look strong are the weakest ones, when it comes to sin. The LORD refused Eliab, because the LORD was looking on the heart. He was looking for someone who would love him with all his heart.

1 Samuel 16:8 Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this.

“Abinadab”: Literally “My Father is noble”. Samuel, now more sensitive to the leading of God’s Spirit, quickly discerned that Abinadab was not God’s anointed.

Again, this fine young man was not the choice of the LORD.

1 Samuel 16:9 "Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the LORD chosen this."

“Shammah”: Literally “Yahweh hears or heard” (see 16:8).

Jesse’s third son, “Shammah,” is called Shimma (in 1 Chronicles 2:13), and Shimea (in 2 Samuel 21:21). The variant spellings may reflect regional pronunciation differences or copyist problems.

This again, is not the son the LORD has chosen.

Verses 10-11: Although “seven” brothers of David are mentioned here, only six are named (in 1 Chron. 2:14-15). Perhaps one had died either in infancy or without leaving any descendants; hence, his name was not recorded there.

1 Samuel 16:10 "Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these."

“Seven of his sons”: With David, Jesse had 8 sons. The fact that (1 Chron. 2:13), indicates 7 sons must mean that one of the 8 died afterward and this is not considered in the Chronicles account.

These were fine young sons of Jesse. The only problem with them was that the LORD had not called them. God chooses those He knows will truly love and obey Him.

1 Samuel 16:11 "And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all [thy] children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither."

“The youngest ... keepeth the sheep”: God’s favor/choice often fell on the younger and the least (Jacob, Joseph, Gideon). David, although the youngest, was the firstborn over Israel (Psalm

89:27), whose humble beginnings as a shepherd, and later rule as king, typify Jesus: the ultimate Shepherd and King of Israel.

At this time, it was probably concerning Samuel that the LORD had not chosen one of the sons. Generally, the LORD chooses the one that is the least likely (by human judgment) to be the one. Jesse has no idea what is going on at this time. This is so important; Samuel will not serve the feast until the other son is here. Someone must go and get him, because he is keeping the sheep. The anointing of the chosen one of the LORD would take place just before the feast.

1 Samuel 16:12 "And he sent, and brought him in. Now he [was] ruddy, [and] withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this [is] he."

“Ruddy ... beautiful countenance ... goodly to look to”: God’s chosen king was handsome to look at, although that was not the reason for his selection by God. His appearance was perhaps enhanced by a genuine faith and joy in Yahweh (see also 17:42).

The word "ruddy" indicates that he had red hair. He was a very handsome young man. He is the youngest of Jesse's sons. This is the one the LORD has chosen. He reveals His will to Samuel and tells him to anoint the young lad with the anointing oil.

Verses 13-14: For the “Spirit of the Lord,” (see the note on Judges 3:10). As Saul’s confirmation as king assumed three stages (compare the note on 10:1), so would that of “David.” David’s private anointing by “Samuel” occurs here. Subsequently he would be “anointed” as king of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4), and then as king of all Israel (2 Sam. 5:3).

1 Samuel 16:13 "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah."

“Anointed him in the midst of his brethren”: David’s first anointing is before his family/house. His second anointing would be before the assembly of his tribe, Judah; and his third anointing would be before the nation Israel (see note on 16:3).

David’s anointing was an external symbol of an inward work of God. The operation of the Holy Spirit in this case was not for regeneration, but for empowerment to perform his (David’s), role in God’s program for Israel (compare Saul, 10:6). After David sinned with Bathsheba (2 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12), he prayed, “Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Psalm 51:11).

The “Spirit of the Lord came upon David” the same way it came upon Saul when he was chosen as King (in 10:10; see note there), privately confirming that David was God’s choice to succeed Saul. David is mentioned in the New Testament more than any other Old Testament figure, 59 times. Sixty-six chapters of Scripture are devoted to telling the story of his life.

When Samuel poured the anointing oil upon the head of David, he was filled with the Spirit of God. The name "David" means beloved of God. Up until this time, the brothers were not aware of what was going on. Samuel anoints David in front of witnesses. The brothers are witnesses. After Samuel anointed David, he went back to Ramah. He had done what the LORD sent him to do.

Verses 14-23: It did not matter that David had no formal training to be king. God took care of that, carving out free instruction on palace protocol and military strategy by way of David's gift of music. While he was serving Saul, he was quietly learning how to be king. This seems to be true of every Christian: God prepares His children to lead and to do His will by teaching them to serve.

1 Samuel 16:14 "But the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD troubled him."

"The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul": When David's ascent to the throne began; Saul's slow and painful descent began also (18:12). Without God's empowering Holy Spirit, Saul was effectively no longer king over Israel (15:28), although his physical removal from the throne, and his death, happened many years later.

Just as the "Spirit of the Lord" anointed and empowered David, it "departed from Saul." Even though he still reigned, he was no longer the chosen one.

"An evil spirit": God, in His sovereignty, allowed an evil spirit to torment Saul (Judges 9:23; 1 Kings 22:19-23; Job 1:6-12), for His purpose of establishing the throne of David. This spirit, a messenger from Satan, is to be distinguished from a troubled emotional state brought on by indwelling sin, or the harmful consequences of the sinful acts of others (e.g., spirit of jealousy, Num. 5:14). This demon spirit attacked Saul from without for there is no evidence that the demon indwelt Saul.

"Troubled him": Saul, whose inward constitution was already prone to questionable judgment and the fear of men, began to experience God's judgment in the form of severe bouts of depression, anger and delusion, initiated and aggravated by the evil spirit assigned to him. There are several New Testament occasions where God turned people over to demons or Satan for judgment (see Acts 5:1-3; 1 Cor. 5:1-7; 1 Tim. 1:18-20). He also used Satan or demons for the strengthening of the saints (see Job 1:1-2:6; Matt. 4:1; Luke 22:31-32; 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

God was through with Saul, so He removed His Spirit from him. Saul was no longer strengthened by the LORD. He would now have to depend upon his own physical strength. The Spirit of the LORD is now on David. The following Scripture describes an illness that comes upon those who rebel against God. I cannot say for sure what the evil spirit was that God sent to Saul to trouble him.

Deuteronomy 28:28 " The LORD shall smite thee with madness, and blindness, and astonishment of heart:"

Perhaps, the troubling from the LORD was something like this.

1 Samuel 16:15 "And Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubleth thee."

God sent the “distressing spirit” (some translations call it an “evil” spirit), as punishment for Saul’s rebellion. The Lord does not do evil, but evil spirits are subject to His control and can operate only within the boundaries He sets (Judges 9:23; Job 1:12; 2:6). In this case, Saul seemed to suffer psychological difficulties such as depression, jealousy, terror and rage.

Whatever this evil spirit brought, it was obvious to this servant. There are many people who attribute all bad things to the devil and not to God. They must re-think that after seeing this and the above Scripture. Even in the book of Revelation, the wrath of God sends terrible happenings to the earth. The LORD is in control of everything good and bad.

Verses 16-23: The “evil spirit” brought on “Saul” a demonic dementia that apparently was soothed by David’s playing. Such musical therapy is well documented in the ancient Near East. The evil spirit is said to come “from God” because, although God is neither the author of evil nor tempts any man with evil (James 1:13). All forces natural and supernatural, are under His ultimate control. The whole episode is both an outgrowth of Saul’s sinful nature and the departing of the Spirit of the Lord from Saul. It provided the circumstantial means for bringing the Lord’s newly anointed man to the royal court and to eventual prominence.

1 Samuel 16:16 "Let our lord now command thy servants, [which are] before thee, to seek out a man, [who is] a cunning player on a harp: and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon thee, that he shall play with his hand, and thou shalt be well."

“He shall play ... thou shalt be well”: God used the evil which had befallen Saul to introduce David into the court of the king and to the watching eyes of Israel.

We see the plan unfolding. All of this, even the statement from the servant, was planned of God to get David into the house of Saul. This spirit affected the nerves of Saul. It was a tormenting spirit. David was well-known for his ability to play the harp and sing. He sang to the sheep to keep them calm. This soothing music should help Saul, as well.

1 Samuel 16:17 "And Saul said unto his servants, Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring [him] to me."

The medicinal effects of music on the mind and body, especially as appeasing anger, and soothing and pacifying a troubled spirit, are well known. It is deeply interesting to have the youthful David thus brought before us, as using music for its highest purpose, that of turning the

soul to the harmony of peace and love. We may infer that some of his Psalms (such as Psalm 23:1-6), were already composed.

Saul takes the advice of his servant. He sends for someone, who will soothe his nerves with music.

1 Samuel 16:18 "Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Beth-lehemite, [that is] cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a comely person, and the LORD [is] with him."

“Cunning in playing ... a comely person”: The writer of Samuel introduces David the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1) before introducing David the warrior. Later proven so skillful in the art of war and killing, David was also a tender musician of exceptional skill and reputation.

“The Lord is with him”: The saints of God, Old Testament and New Testament are recognized by their fruit (2:26; Luke 2:40). God’s approval of David was already recognized by certain people in Israel.

This one verse describes at least five things about David: he was a “skillful” musician, a “mighty” warrior, a wise man (“prudent in speech”), a “handsome” man, and a godly man (“the Lord is with him”). David’s gifting prepared him to enter Saul’s court and eventually ascend the throne. God gives people the talents and opportunities they need for the tasks He wants them to accomplish.

The servant was probably a friend of David's. David was a handsome young man. He had killed a bear and a lion to save his sheep, so his bravery is well known. "Prudent in matters" means that he was intelligent. He seems to be a very near perfect young man. The servant is also aware that all of this is so, because the LORD is with David.

1 Samuel 16:19 "Wherefore Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, Send me David thy son, which [is] with the sheep."

“Sent me David thy son”: Verbal link with 16:1, “I have selected a king for Myself among his (Jesse’s), sons.” David’s lineage was of importance to Saul in the near future when he arranged a marriage between Michal, his daughter and David.

“With the sheep”: David’s lowly, humble occupation is emphasized. He gave evidence of that humility and patience as he returned faithfully to his duty following Samuel’s anointing.

We had already discussed, in a previous lesson, how the king chose out all of the choicest of the young men to serve him. Since Saul is king, Jesse cannot refuse him. Jesse will have to send another of his sons to tend the sheep.

1 Samuel 16:20 "And Jesse took an ass [laden] with bread, and a bottle of wine, and a kid, and sent [them] by David his son unto Saul."

It was and is ever customary in the East to acknowledge obedience and subjection with a present. Jesse, the sheik of Beth-lehem, would thus be expected on sending his son to the court of Saul to acknowledge his sovereign by some token of homage.

The nature of Jesse's gifts shows how simple and primitive were the customs of the Hebrew people at that time.

Jesse, not only sends David to the king, but sends gifts to the king as well. It was customary to take the king a present to have audience with him.

1 Samuel 16:21 "And David came to Saul, and stood before him: and he loved him greatly; and he became his armour-bearer."

The words translated "stood before him" mean that David reported for duty to his king. Even though David was God's chosen leader, he was willing to stand and do his duty for the king. Not only that, this verse says that David "loved" Saul "greatly."

"Saul ... loved him greatly": Saul loved David for his abilities, but later grew to jealously hate him because he knew he was blessed by the Lord (18:29).

"His armor-bearer": David was most likely one of many such young men assigned to Saul's barracks.

This just means that Saul was greatly pleased when he saw David. It appeared he was all the things the servant had spoken of him. The statement "stood before him", is possibly speaking of David becoming one of Saul's attendants. He was not just a servant, but a servant in Saul's house. He was made armor-bearer, because that would put him near Saul all the time.

1 Samuel 16:22 "And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, Let David, I pray thee, stand before me; for he hath found favor in my sight."

Continue in his service; which was great condescension in him, and great respect shown to Jesse, not to detain his son without his leave, and to ask it as a favor of him.

"For he hath found favor in my sight", was very acceptable to him which must be very pleasing to Jesse to hear. Especially if he was in any fear that Saul had an ill design upon him, when he first sent for him.

David was probably very young, and not quite as old as some of the men who were taken as soldiers. Saul sends to Jesse, expressing the desire for David to remain with him. Saul is pleased with David.

1 Samuel 16:23 "And it came to pass, when the [evil] spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."

The “harp” David played was a stringed instrument made from the small intestine of a sheep, stretched over a piece of wood. It had a hollow chamber and multiple strings stretched to different tautness, very similar to a modern guitar.

In all of this, we do not hear of David's fight with Goliath. The fight with Goliath apparently happened before Saul sent for David here. It possibly, is why the servant spoke of David as a brave soldier. We see that God had planned all this. The music that David played was soft enough to keep the sheep quiet. We know it calms the nerves of Saul here as well. It seems, when Saul was tormented, David played and quieted the spirit. God gave David the ability to play and sing as well as all the other gifts He gave him. God has placed David in Saul's house.

1 Samuel Chapter 16 Questions

1. And the LORD said unto Samuel, _____ wilt thou mourn for Saul?
2. What did the LORD tell Samuel to do in verse 1?
3. Why do you suppose Samuel was mourning for Saul?
4. If Samuel does not stop mourning, what will happen to Samuel?
5. What answer does Samuel give, when God tells him to go anoint someone else?
6. What does the LORD tell Samuel to do, so Saul will not know what he is doing?
7. Who was Samuel to call to the sacrifice?
8. How will Samuel choose which son is to be anointed?
9. Where did Samuel go to sacrifice?
10. How did the elders feel about Samuel coming to their town?
11. What one word describes the way Samuel came to them?
12. Who was Eliab?
13. What does "Eliab" mean?
14. What does the LORD look upon to choose the next king?
15. What does "Abinadab" mean?
16. What was wrong with these fine sons of Jesse's, that passed by Samuel?
17. Where was the youngest son of Jesse?

18. What do they delay, until the youngest son comes to Samuel?
19. Describe the appearance of David?
20. What happened to David, when Samuel anointed him?
21. What does "David" mean?
22. What happened to Saul, after David was anointed?
23. Where did the evil spirit, that troubled Saul, come from?
24. What did Saul's servant say to him?
25. Who did the servant suggest they seek out to help Saul?
26. How could David help Saul?
27. How did the servant describe David to Saul?
28. What does "prudent in matters" mean?
29. What did Jesse send with David to Saul?
30. David became Saul's _____.
31. What effect did David's music have on Saul?
32. Who had David killed earlier, that caused him to be thought of as brave?