

Saul rejected; David elected

1 Samuel 16

We will now concentrate on the history of the kingship of David. In doing so, we use the middle of the first book of Samuel as our starting point. This first book particularly recounts how the LORD works towards the establishment of David's kingship. The LORD's objective is to have a king sitting on the throne who acts in accordance to his will. Pay special attention to the way in which the LORD wants to accomplish this goal.

Receiving emphasis at the end of the book of Judges is the lamentation that the situation was deteriorating without a king (17:6; 21:25). At the beginning of the book that presently holds our attention, we are told about the birth of Samuel. Samuel plays an important role in the transition from the rule of judges to the rule of kings.

As was discussed in the previous outline, the role the Israelites played in this transition was far from appropriate. They desired a king for the wrong reasons. Yet, the LORD does grant Israel a king: Saul. In the course of time it became clear that he was an **autocratic** king, a king who acted on his own authority.

As a consequence of his autocratic rule, Saul was rejected by God. God chooses David in his stead. David was to be a **theocratic** king (i.e., a king who acknowledges the LORD as the one whose absolute authority can not be questioned). David will lead Israel in the service of the LORD. In this way he will contribute to the well-being of the nation. David's name would leave its mark on the subsequent history of Israel, even until the coming of the Lord Jesus. Read Luke 1:32,69 and 2:11.

1. Verse 1

Samuel's grief about Saul is understandable, but he ought not to dwell on it. He must go on. God does not delay his plans when Saul's 'unsuccessful' kingship comes to an end. When things go wrong with Saul, no one ought to draw the conclusion that the office of king was a complete fiasco. God's plans never fail! When God continues to carry out his plans, Samuel again must be involved. The LORD's exhortation to Samuel is at the same time a word of comfort: 'We will continue again, Samuel!'

2. Verses 2-5

Samuel conceals the actual purpose of his visiting Bethlehem by saying that he is going to offer a sacrifice to the LORD. After this the sacrificial meal would follow. In this manner Saul is being misled. Misleading someone, therefore, is not necessarily equal to committing a sin. After all, God himself had instructed Samuel to use this scheme. At this point in time, God does not want Saul to discover David's anointing yet. Naturally, he could have prevented this in some other way, but the LORD often makes use of 'ordinary' means.

***Question 1:** Compare the above with 2 Samuel 16:15-19. In that passage we read that Hushai hides his actual intention to appear before Absalom. Is there a difference in the way in which Samuel keeps his secret? Are Hushai's actions justified?*

Pay attention to the fear displayed by the elders in v.4. Apparently, Samuel has a reputation as a prophet of doom! This definitely tells us something about the spiritual situation in Israel!

3. Verses 6-12

In a very special way God reveals who he wants to anoint. It is striking that in v.1 already the LORD says: “I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” He could have right away mentioned the name David, but he doesn’t do that. The LORD chooses a more ‘roundabout’ method. He directs events in such a way that all the sons of Jesse appear before Samuel, David being the last one. In this manner he wants to teach Samuel (and us) a lesson. The lesson is this: God chooses differently - and judges differently - than we, as people, would.

Eliab is not selected by the LORD. “I have rejected him...”, the LORD says.

***Question 2:** What is the difference between the rejection of Eliab and the rejection of Saul?*

You must not automatically draw the conclusion that the LORD rejected Eliab because he was so ungodly. We do not read here a condemnation of Eliab but a reprimand directed to Samuel. The LORD wants to demonstrate to Samuel that he must not judge by appearance. Appearance is not a deciding factor. The history of Saul makes that very clear! Saul had the appearance of a king, but that did not mean that he was a king according to God’s will. Apparently, Samuel did not learn enough from the course of events during Saul’s kingship. God looks further than people could possibly see. He looks at what lives in the heart, whether it is receptive to his word. To him, that is the deciding factor.

Going by appearance, David is not exactly the most obvious candidate to become king. To Jesse, David certainly does not qualify; he does not even call David to attend. Does David, then, not have many suitable physical characteristics? In v.12 we find quite the opposite. In v.18, too, words of commendation are spoken of the youngest son of Jesse. However, David is not as tall in stature and does not have that same haughty bearing as Eliab, or Saul for that matter. Later, when David stands face to face with Goliath, the giant despises him, especially because of the things that are mentioned here in v.12 (see 17:42). Undoubtedly, David may make a good impression on young women, but definitely not on a hooligan like Goliath.

More often the LORD chooses someone who, according to others, does not have any positive features. One cannot point at certain qualities of David and say: “It was to be expected that the LORD chose David”. David will not receive such honour. In making this choice, God himself alone is worthy of all honour. He uses his own reasons to select someone you would not expect to be chosen.

Remark: It is not appropriate to say that God chose David **because** his heart was dedicated to the LORD. This makes it sound as if the LORD had to search for a suitable person, and fortunately found in David the right man for the job. That is, of course, not the case. It was in God’s plan to anoint David as king, and for that reason he **made** David’s heart fit for the office of king.

***Question 3:** Is there a parallel between the choice for David and manner in which Christ will later become king? Remember the description of Christ in Isaiah 53:2,3!*

How does this text demonstrate that the Lord does not conform to human expectations?

Question 4: *“Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” Can you think of circumstances that require us to take these words of the LORD to heart?*

4. Verse 13,14

The anointment is a sign that David is called by the LORD to his kingly task. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon David points to that as well. (Compare this with the manner in which Christ was called to his office: Is 61:1; Lk 3:22; 4:14-19; see also HC, LD 12, the beginning of Answer 31.) David will not be king yet for a long time to come, but through the Holy Spirit he is already being prepared for the office of king.

Previously, the Holy Spirit came mightily upon Saul also (10:10). Now, however, the Holy Spirit has left him. Naturally, he did not do that without ample warning. The Spirit's departure was a consequence of Saul's resistance against the will of the LORD. People are capable of resisting the Holy Spirit! (e.g. Acts 7:51.)

In essence, the evil spirit who now instills fear in Saul's heart is a devilish spirit. However, he does come from the LORD. Repealing the Holy Spirit is a punishment of the LORD, as is the sending of the evil spirit.

Question 5: *Compare the things that are mentioned in the previous two paragraphs with Isaiah 63:10. What is the resemblance between what is said there about the Israelites and what is said here about Saul?*

5. Verse 15-18

Notice how Saul's servant praises David and recommends him to Saul. It is striking that he does not only speak of David's musical talents. He also mentions other characteristics, which serves to make David more attractive to Saul. Saul liked to recruit valiant men to be in his presence (14:52).

The fact that the LORD is with David is supposed to be a good protection against this evil spirit....

Also notice that they try to use music as a solution. However, this music works similar to a painkiller; it eases the pain temporarily but it doesn't take away the actual ailment. Saul's ailment is his rejection of the LORD. Eventually this musical painkiller becomes ineffective (19:9,10).

At the same time, notice the guidance of the LORD. He wants David in the king's court. For that reason, he directs events in such a way that Saul and his servants search for a 'musical solution', that there is a servant who is acquainted with David, and that this servant praises David for his abilities.

6. Verse 19-23

David enters Saul's service, although not yet on a full-time basis (17:15). This prepares David for his kingship. He will become familiar with how affairs are conducted at the court.

What we must especially realize, however, is that David has to accommodate himself to the ways of the LORD. And his ways are not easy. For the time being, the chosen king will be of service to the rejected king. Afterwards he will even become like hunted game for the rejected king. He will have to wait for God's time. In this way David will realize his own weakness and his dependence on the LORD. This is an important lesson for a king-to-be. The Spirit who came upon him will supply him with the strength he needs to endure this learning-process.

7. The work of the LORD in this account

Satan attempts to turn Israel's kingship into a failure. However, even Saul's spiritual downward spiral does not occur outside of God's counsel. The kingship of Saul also comprises a punishment of the LORD over his people. Israel desires a king instead of God (8:7); Israel receives a king who wants to put himself in God's place. In addition, you have to understand who the LORD rejects or chooses. He rejects the king who rejects his will and he chooses a king who respects his will. In this manner he will fulfill his promises! After all, he had said that a king would arise out of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10). Saul was not from the tribe of Judah; David was. While God bends Saul's line (from election to rejection), he continues that other line, i.e. from the election of Judah to the election of David. It is in this manner that God works toward the coming of the Christ, for ultimately the line runs from Judah to the Christ. See Genesis 49:10 again, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah... until Shiloh comes." (NKJV) Shiloh refers to the Christ in this verse.

***Question 6:** Was Saul 'doomed' to fail because the LORD had to continue with the line of Judah? Consider chapter 12:14 to answer this question. Saul definitely had to take responsibility for his own actions.*

For the introduction

1. The introduction can be linked to the last verse of the previous chapter ("The LORD was grieved (RSV: repented) that he had made Saul king over Israel"). You could pose the question as to how it is possible that the LORD repents of something he did. We repent when we do something wrong. Was God wrong in appointing Saul as king? God does not make mistakes. However, when people change their attitude toward the LORD, he also changes his attitude toward them. Read chapter 15:11: "I am grieved that I have made Saul king, **because** he has turned away from me..." In this manner God does remain faithful to his covenant. At the same time, by way of repentance over Saul, he remains faithful to his promises to Judah (Gen 49:10). Do emphasize this. In this manner God sets the 'course' to the coming Messiah, born of the tribe of Judah. In short you could put it like this: God may change the course of **action**, but never will he change his **counsel**. Possibly you could add another example from the Bible to that.
2. Regarding the sacrificial meal (vv. 3,5) you could point out that Samuel more often visited different villages and cities. See chapter 9:12, 13. Those verses indicate that it was not uncommon for certain people to receive a special invitation to such a sacrificial meal. In Bethlehem the invited guests are some elders and Jesse and his sons. The elders must not have been surprised by the fact that Samuel gave the sacrificial feast as the reason for his visit.
3. Regarding verses 6-12 it is good to emphasize that the LORD is not doing something out of the ordinary. It is entirely his way to choose a person who, humanly speaking, is

regarded as the one least qualified. His choices are always based on his own good pleasure. He chooses whoever he pleases, not those who meet human expectations. For instance, see I Corinthians 1:26-29 and Deuteronomy 7:7. Nobody could ever say, 'I understand why the LORD would make that choice.' That kind of honour we will never receive.

4. You may want to pay some attention to the fact that God chose someone from the town of Bethlehem. The Lord Jesus was born here as well. This is highlighted in Luke 2:4 and 11 where Bethlehem is referred to as the 'city of David'. David's kingship started so new and beautifully when Jesse's son was called away from the flock in order to be king. It all appeared so beautiful. However, David's house also seemed doomed to failure. What remained of the 'flowering tree' of David's house? Only the trunk and nothing else remained (Isa 11:1). However, from this trunk a new shoot would arise, Christ the King. He started anew in Bethlehem. Again, this little branch appeared insignificant at first, just like David. He was a child laying in a manger in a stable. Bethlehem itself is insignificant. See Micah 5:1. However, God fashions something amazing from this 'insignificant' beginning. The shoot becomes a mighty tree that will bloom forever.

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