

Lecture #7 – Exposition of I Samuel 16-20

Chapter 16 – David Anointed King – 1067 B.C.

vs. 1-13 – David’s Anointing

“The king after the people’s heart has failed and is set aside, and now Jehovah brings forth His king after His own heart.” – A.C. Gaebelein¹

Note the change in Samuel regarding Saul. He is still mourning Saul’s rejection but also is afraid that Saul would kill him. This is a marked difference from the previous chapter when Samuel boldly confronted the king. This is likely not so much a change on Samuel’s part as on Saul’s. His jealousy and paranoia are growing, and it is well known to the people. The residents of Bethlehem are aware of this also.

Edersheim note regarding the religious practices of time:

“The narrative also affords some interesting glimpses into the history of the time. Thus we infer that Samuel had been in the habit of visiting various places in the land for the purpose of sacrifice and instruction. The former was quite lawful, so long as the ark was not in its central sanctuary. On the other hand, it needs no comment to show the importance of such periodical visits of the prophet at a time when religious knowledge was necessarily so scanty, and the means of grace so scarce. It helps us to understand how religion was kept alive in the land. Again, the narrative implies that the family of Jesse must have occupied a leading place in Bethlehem, and been known as devoted to the service of the Lord. Nor do we wonder at this, remembering that they were the immediate descendants of Boaz and Ruth.”²

Note God’s words in vs. 7 – “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.” Seven sons passed by Samuel and at least Eliab *looked* like a king. But Israel already had a king like that. God was looking for someone who wouldn’t just *look like* a king but would *be* a king through and through.

The description of David is that he was “ruddy” (meaning “reddish”, possibly his hair or skin tone), had a “beautiful countenance” (likely referring to big, bright eyes), and “goodly to look at” (handsome). Where Saul was a towering and intimidating presence, David was attractive and personable. Reese estimates David to be 17 and Saul 67 at this time.³

Carroll writes:

“The history we are studying makes it evident that Saul had neither the character nor the training to become a great ruler, but David had both. Woe to any of us who under-estimate the knowledge

¹ Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

² Bible History: Old Testament by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 81

³ Reese’s *Chronological Bible*, p. 392.

of these three things: (1) a right state of heart toward God, (2) the discipline of preparation and training, and (3) dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Only men of great heart, great preparation, and great power with God achieve anything worth while in the ministry.”⁴

♪ Psalms 19, 8⁵

On the importance of including the Psalms into studying these books, Carroll writes:

“Apart from the history of David, we cannot understand the Psalms, and apart from the Psalms, we cannot understand the history. A great number of these Psalms, written by David himself, reflect and expound his own life experiences, and forecast the experiences of Christian people of all subsequent generations. Most of the others were written by his singers and their successors. There is for every Psalm an historic occasion and background.”⁶

vs. 14-23 – David in Saul’s Court

What is the “evil spirit” that God sent upon Saul? That phrase is used in six verses concerning Saul (I Samuel 16:14,15,16,23; 18:10; 19:9) and the only other time in the Old Testament that it appears is in Judges 9:23. There is also a “lying spirit” mentioned in I Kings 22:22.

A case can be made that the “evil spirit” was a demon. In the New Testament, demons are called “evil spirits” in Luke 7:21 8:2; and Acts 19:2. Also the seven sons of Sceva were dealing with an “evil spirit” in Acts 19:11-20. The description of events in I Kings 22:19-23 sounds demonic if it is not figurative language.

It appears to be a combination of both natural and supernatural. Saul’s actions and mood are very human, suggesting depression or bipolar issues perhaps. The effect of music on the condition makes it seem more natural than supernatural. But these fits were also supernaturally sparked. James M. Gray does about as well as anyone in analyzing this:

“But what about the evil spirit from the Lord? Well, that is deep and mysterious surely. But this is not the only place where such allusions occur. (Job 1:6; 1 Kings 22:19-23.) Some would resolve this whole circumstance into an experience of melancholy on Saul's part, but the narrative clearly speaks of an objective spiritual wicked power that had control over him. But how did this come from the Lord? Only in the same sense that Pharaoh's heart was hardened by the Lord. ‘The Lord gave him over to the power and might of this spirit as punishment for his disobedience and defiant self-will.’”⁷

⁴ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 96. Emphasis original. I love this quote.

⁵ I will so mark the appearance of Psalms according to Reese’s chronology.

⁶ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 91.

⁷ *Synthetic Bible Studies* by James M. Gray. p. 77.

Can you imagine the panic in the heart of Jesse when someone comes from Saul calling for David? Surely the feared Saul knew about David's anointing.

David plays his harp, and its music relieves Saul. It is a well-known fact that music affects people psychologically, emotionally, and even spiritually. But if this was a demon this "music therapy" is not repeated anywhere else.

Note the training of David in this passage that prepares him for the throne: (1) his work as a shepherd, (2) his place in his family, (3) his supernatural equipping by the Spirit, (4) his service as a soldier⁸, and (5) his time in Saul's court.

Chapter 17 – David and Goliath

vs. 1-11 – The Setting of the Battle

The two armies are on opposite sides of the Valley of Elah ("oak" or "strength"). Instead of immediately clashing against each other, the Philistines send out a champion to challenge the Israelites into a one-on-one battle. Perhaps their recent defeats caused this change of tactics. Heroes fighting these solo fights are common in Greek and Roman legends.

A few notes on the size and armor of Goliath ("splendor")¹⁰. Assuming¹¹ the *cubit* is 18 inches (the length from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow) and the *span* is 9 inches (the length from the ends of thumb and pinky finger when fingers are spread out, or half of a cubit), Goliath's height would be 9' 9". It is possible that he has some relation to the descendants of Anak (Numbers 13:33), as the Philistines intermarried with the local tribes. But he was not only tall, but he was also *massive*. His mail coat weighed 126 pounds and spear head 15 pounds.¹²

If anyone should have faced Goliath, it should have been Saul. He was the logical choice as the tallest Israelite and the king.

Now for an historical tangent...

A quick historical note on the word *brass*. Some critics falsely state that this term is anachronistic, and that brass was unknown in the ancient world. This is all patently false.

First, brass was not unknown in the ancient world and many artifacts made of it have been found. The Encyclopedia Britannica says regarding an early form of brass called calamine brass: "Apparently invented in Asia Minor, this method of brass manufacture was common from the 1st millennium BC."

⁸ I Samuel 16:18 – David already has military experience and proven himself to be a good fighter.

⁹ Smith's Bible Dictionary.

¹⁰ Smith's Bible Dictionary.

¹¹ There is a lot of debate on how to calculate these measurements in modern units. These estimates are good for quick analysis but are likely a little too large. Remember that people were smaller back then, so body-based measurement will almost certainly be a bit smaller than what we would measure with our modern, larger bodies.

¹² Calculated at 5,000 shekels at .40 oz (.025 lbs).

An academic paper by Christopher P. Thornton states that examples of copper-zinc alloys “have been found in prehistoric contexts from the Aegean to India in the 3rd to the 1st millennium BC.”¹³

Second, the word *brass* today means a specific alloy of copper, but it used to be a more general term for any copper alloy. The Online Etymological Dictionary states: “originally any alloy of copper, in England usually with tin (this is now called bronze), later and in modern use an alloy of roughly two parts copper to one part zinc.”¹⁴ The same source also says: “In Middle English, the distinction between bronze (copper-tin alloy) and brass (copper-zinc alloy) was not clear, and both were called bras (see brass (n)).”¹⁵ Wikipedia states of brass: “...its true nature as a copper-zinc alloy was not understood until the post-medieval period because the zinc vapor which reacted with copper to make brass was not recognised as a metal.”¹⁶ A clear distinction between brass and bronze was not introduced into common language until the early 1700’s.

Therefore, we know that (A) brass by its modern definition existed in ancient times, and (B) that the term *brass* applied to a broader range of copper alloys before the 1700’s. This proves the critics wrong on both accounts. However, we must be able to admit that what the Bible refers to as *brass* may by its modern definition not be *brass* and but instead *bronze*, which historically and archaeologically is much more prevalent. The distinction is so fine that it honestly does not matter very much at all.

vs. 12-31 – Enter David

David is not at this battle, though he is an experienced soldier. Likely Jesse is too old for service. This is not set to be final, all-out battle so not all men are taken or called to the front. The three eldest sons of Jesse are there fulfilling their family duty to defend the nation.

David is sent to the front lines with supplies for his brothers. While there he witnesses Goliath’s daily challenge. David is no doubt moved by the Spirit to take bold action.

Note the reward in vs. 25 offered to the one who would fight Goliath: (1) great riches, (2) marriage into the royal family, and (3) his family elevated to noble status.

vs. 32-39 – David and Saul

Saul is not looking for a solution but an excuse to maintain the status quo. Yet he cannot deny David’s zeal and faith. He arms David with his own armor and sword, but David refuses these as being unfamiliar with them. He will face Goliath not as an armored warrior but as humble shepherd.

Was Saul already trying to get David killed?

¹³ <http://www.safarmer.com/Indo-Eurasian/Brass2007.pdf> - accessed 9-1-22

¹⁴ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/brass> – accessed 9-1-22

¹⁵ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/bronze> – accessed – 9-1-22

¹⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brass> - accessed 9-1-22

vs. 40-54 – David’s Victory

Saul seems to have always wanted credit for the victories, but David gives the glory to God before the battle even starts.

B.H. Carroll, a veteran of the Civil War, observes:

“The text says that the giant so struck fell on his face. Why did not he fall backwards? It is a notable fact, witnessed a thousand times on the battlefield, and in executing men by shooting, that when the firing squad fires and the bullets enter the man’s heart, he always falls on his face, never backwards. It is one of these natural things that continually creep into Samuel’s narrative that makes one know it is a true story. I have seen thousands of men fall in battle, and I never saw a man shot through the brain or heart that did not fall forward.”¹⁷

David takes the giant’s own sword to cut off his head as a trophy. He must have kept it all his life since it says he takes it to Jerusalem, which he will not conquer for another twenty years.

David is now the national hero.

vs. 55-58 – Saul’s Inquiry

Did Saul not know who David was after the battle? Yes, but he did not recall his family. That is the question asked of Abner and David – “who is David’s father?”. This could very logically be explained as necessary for the promised reward of elevating the family of Goliath’s victor.

Chapter 18 – David in Saul’s Court

vs. 1-4 – David and Jonathan

David is now a full-time employee of Saul.

The legendary friendship between David (18?) and Jonathan (40?) is the most remarkable in history. They are bound together in their courage and faith. To read anything “romantic” into this is perverse and should be dismissed with the utmost disgust.

The first covenant between these two is made in vs. 3.

♪ Psalm 33

¹⁷ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 102.

vs. 5-9 – David’s Growing Fame

Where Saul cannot seem to do anything right, David does everything exceptionally well.

Remember that Saul knows he has been rejected as king. He must be on the lookout for his successor to rise. Seeing the popular acclaim David is receive must remind him of his own popularity after rescuing Jabesh-Gilead. As on that has taken all the glory he could grab, it pains him to see David given the glory for the victory at the Valley of Elah.

This moment is the turning point in the relationship between Saul and David.

vs. 10-16 – Saul’s Growing Jealousy

The “evil spirit” returns upon Saul and causes him to prophesy. There are many interpretations of what Saul is doing here. Some say he is mocking true prophets, others that he was raving. I think he is in a state of melancholy or depression and saying things that would prove true; perhaps, “David will be king and not me”. This sort of “unintentional prophecy” is also seen in John 11:49-52.

Saul seems to keep this javelin or spear as a royal scepter. Somebody really should take it away from him before someone gets hurt.

Note that David escapes Saul’s attacks twice in vs. 11.

Saul in vs. 12 appears to realize that David is to be the next king. God had removed Himself from Saul, but He was also certainly with David.

Saul puts David in command of a company of 1,000 men. He is likely attempting to kill David by proxy by putting him in battle. This backfires as again David is successful in all that he does. Also, it appears that Saul is hiding himself away and David is more visible and is loved even more by the people.

vs. 17-30 – Saul’s Dowry Trap

The opening verses clearly state that Saul was attempting to kill David by placing him in harm’s way against the Philistines. The prize to keep David fighting was the hand of Saul’s oldest daughter Merab. However, Saul gives her to another.

Then Saul learns that his other daughter Michal loves David. Saul seizes this opportunity to put David back into battle. Since David could not afford the dowry for a princess, he could instead kill 100 Philistines as a dowry payment. David instead goes out and slays 200, bringing the proof of the kills to Saul.

Regarding Michal’s love for David, I think she loved his fame more than she loved the man himself.

Saul cannot win for losing. David is on the rise, and he is on the decline.

♪ Psalm 26

Chapter 19 – David’s Departure

vs. 1-7 – Jonathan Intervenes for David

Saul’s intentions to kill David are not private any longer. Now the royal court knows of his intentions.

Jonathan is able to dissuade Saul from attacking David. For now...

♪ Psalms 11, 12, 120

vs. 8-17 – David’s Narrow Escape

After David is proven a war hero again, he returns to Saul’s court. As he plays the harp to soothe Saul’s troubled spirit, Saul again tries to attack David with his javelin (seriously, someone needs to take that away from him!).

Saul’s murderous intentions are not abated, and he sends men to assassinate David the next morning. Michal aids David in escaping and covers long enough for him to get a good head start on Saul. She turns out to be a very good liar.

Note that Michal used an image (Hebrew *teraphim*, Strong’s H8655) to hide David’s absence in vs. 16. This is almost certainly an idol. Either she is a secret idolator or trying to worship Jehovah through idolatrous practices. Even though there is no record of Saul being himself an idolator, there were such in his house and court.

♪ Psalms 58, 59

vs. 18-24 – Saul’s Failed Pursuit

This section is almost comedic. David escapes to the prophet Samuel in Ramah. They are at Naioth (“habitations”)¹⁸, many believe at the school of the prophets.

Three times Saul sends assassins, but each time they succumb to the Spirit’s power and join in with the prophets and prophecy. Finally, Saul goes himself and the Spirit causes him to prophesy also. Saul was not “naked” in the modern sense: he had taken off his outer, probably royal, robe. This detail shows the sincerity of Saul’s action.

¹⁸ Smith’s Bible Dictionary.

Chapter 20 – David and Jonathan

vs. 1-23 – The Plot

Jonathan is in disbelief or denial of his father's murderous intent. Perhaps it is his own faith in God and David that he cannot imagine something tragic happening to his friend.

The time for the new moon approached, heralding a new month, and celebrated with sacrifices and blowing trumpets (Numbers 10:10, 28:11-15). David and Jonathan are discussing their plan in vs. 5 on the last day of a month (30th), which would be day one of three. The new moon began the new day on the 1st, which would be day two of three. Therefore, David would remain hidden until the evening of the 2nd, which would be day three.

The plan is to gauge Saul's disposition toward David by David being absent at the meal to come. If Saul noticed David was missing and had no problem with the reason offered, then that was a sign that everything was OK. However, if Saul noticed and became angry, then Jonathan would know Saul truly intended to kill David.

A second covenant is made between David and Jonathan in vs. 16-17.

The plan to relay the news to David is for Jonathan to shoot arrows. If Jonathan's servant retrieved the arrows, Saul is not planning on murdering David; if Jonathan's servant did not retrieve the arrows, Saul is planning on murdering David.

vs. 24-34 – Saul's Anger

In vs. 30-31, Saul again murderously rages against David. Jonathan attempts to intervene on his friend's behalf. His father responded by trying to attack Jonathan with his javelin (please, someone take it away from him!).

vs. 35-42 – David Parts from Jonathan

David and Jonathan parted with many tears. They will only meet each other once more.