

SESSION FIVE

SAUL'S JEALOUSY OF DAVID

1 Samuel 16:1–31:13

I. INTRODUCTION

The preceding section (1 Sam 13–15) had confirmed that Saul's rule as king was rejected by the LORD. This was more than a personal denunciation; it was a lesson to the whole nation that their decision to reject YHWH as king and to have a king from among themselves was wrong (1 Sam 12:17).

With the lesson learned, however, God does not remove the monarchy in order to reestablish a theocracy. They had previously failed under the theocracy arrangement; to resort back to it would be of no avail. Since their choice had been made to have a king, they will have to attempt to serve YHWH under the governing arrangement of the monarchy. Thus, God uses Saul to reveal that the nation's decision was wrong. However, He will continue to work through the kingship. The Lord raises up David, a man after his own heart, to reveal that the nation will only succeed in the place of blessing (don't forget the Abrahamic covenant) when they are under the ruling authority of the one whom God has chosen. By raising up David, YHWH conveys this principle, but that right "ruler and king" will never be found among the human kings of Israel; ultimately the true king who does fulfill the plan of YHWH will be in the person of the Messiah himself. In the progress of revelation, the prophet Isaiah will elaborate the person of Messiah.

So, the principle for the nation is that YHWH must select a king for Himself (cf. 1 Sam 16:1). Thus David is tapped to be king. However, God does not just break in, cut Saul off, and establish David as the king right away. Rather, a long struggle ensues between Saul and David in which David gradually emerges. This period of struggle occupies 16 chapters (1 Sam 16–31) and no doubt transpires over a great deal of time. Yet it is clear from the outset that David is to be the king. That is why God has Samuel go to Bethlehem in chapter 16 to anoint David as the king. All the events between chapter 16 and chapter 31 must be seen against the backdrop that David is the king destined for the throne by YHWH's decree. He does not just happen to win out over Saul; God sovereignly works in the events to ensure David's place on the throne of Israel. The real question is why YHWH has David wait . . . why the delay?

There is a fundamental difference between Saul's occupancy of the throne and David's: Saul is thrust into the office as he was, whereas David is prepared by God. As we wade through the various episodes in these 16 chapters, we know that David is aware of YHWH's intention for him to be king. Yet he is made to struggle, to face difficult situations, to have his life threatened, etc. Although David knows that he will eventually be king, he had to live with the reality that it would only come about in God's time and in God's way. As for the intermediate period, he must learn to walk by faith, trusting God in every situation. In contrast to Saul, David is prepared for ruling by being tried, learning faith, and depending on YHWH's promise rather than resorting to his own devices to secure the throne (e.g., taking Saul's life when he had the opportunity).

In this matter, David's life is very much parallel with that of our Lord Jesus. He has the promise of the throne (the kingship), but before it can be realized, there must be sufferings, opportunities to trust and learn obedience, etc. This period of preparation is the opportunity for David to grow in faith and learn patience. He does not always display exemplary faith, but out of these experiences will come a heart that beats for God . . . a heart that will give us many of the great psalms.

"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for Thee, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Ps 42:1-2a).

II. THE KING AND THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD

As one reads through these chapters, it becomes more and more obvious that God is in control of the whole situation regarding the king on the throne. One evidence of this is to be found in the matter of the Spirit:

"Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from the day forward . . . Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him" (1 Sam 16:13-14).

We must be very careful not to confuse these events with the New Testament doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is not David's "conversion," nor is it Saul's loss of salvation. The Spirit's presence is related to the kingship. David is being anointed as the new king and Saul is now rejected; thus the Spirit comes mightily upon David while being removed from Saul. This explains why David cries out in Ps 51: "Do not take thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). In this Psalm, he is repenting of his sin with Bathsheba, and is aware that God could remove him as king (and hence the presence of the Spirit upon the king) just as He had done with Saul.

The interesting thing is not just that the Spirit is withdrawn from Saul, but that an evil spirit is now sent to terrorize him.¹ Furthermore, this evil spirit is from the LORD, though we must see God's action in light of Saul's sin (esp. ch 13–15), i.e., it happens in response to Saul's sin and rebellion. This probably indicates that God, who has authority over the evil spirits, purposely sent one to terrorize Saul (though some scholars see it as a form of mental imbalance with which he was plagued). This evil spirit is seen to attack and withdraw on several occasions (cf. 16:15, 16; 18:10; and 19:9). The important point is that God makes use of this evil spirit to accomplish His purposes. Primarily, this is to bring about Saul's hatred and envy of David. By establishing this tension, God sets up the situation in which David can be tried and thus prepared for his role as king.

Yet Saul's involvement with God's spirit is given further opportunity in chapter 19 when David fled to Samuel at Naioth. In this instance, Saul sent messengers to take David, but they end up prophesying with the prophets when they reach Naioth. Finally Saul himself goes to Naioth and on the way "the Spirit of God came upon him also" and even Saul prophesied. The point is not that Saul had regained favor with God and was now submissive to God's Spirit. On the contrary, this is a deliverance of David from Saul in

¹Further help in dealing with the theological tension of this matter can be found in Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 179-80; C. F. Keil, *The First Book of Samuel*; and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *More Hard Sayings of the Old Testament*, 151-53.

which the Spirit of God is seen to be in control. Hence, the incident is an encouragement to David, reassuring him that Saul and all his forces are subject to the Spirit of God!

III. THE PSALMS

As mentioned previously, this period in David's life gave occasion to a number of the Psalms. Some of these can be historically identified while others remain obscure. Nevertheless, these chapters in 1 Sam 16–31 are worthy of close study, since they reflect the historical situation out of which the Psalms arose. By meditating upon them carefully, one can capture the emotional struggle that David must have gone through. Here are a few of the Psalms that we can pinpoint from this period of David's life:

- 1) Ps 59 - While at David's court, Saul becomes jealous and sends men to surround his house. But David escapes from Gibeah of Saul with the help of his wife, Michal, the daughter of Saul.
- 2) Ps 52 - David is befriended by Ahimelech and the priests of Nob, but betrayed by Doeg the Edomite which leads to Saul having the priests slain.
- 3) Ps 56 - David goes to Gath and is seized by the Philistines. There, he feigns madness to escape from Achish, king of Gath.
- 4) Ps 34 - David leaves Gath to return and protect the safety of his family. He reflects on his experiences at Gath, while on the way to Adullam.
- 5) Ps 54 - In the wilderness of Ziph, David is betrayed by the Ziphites.
- 6) Ps 7, 142, 57 - After some wanderings, David finally goes to a cave at Engedi where he writes three psalms.

IV. THE WANDERINGS

Some indication of David's life as a wanderer can be traced in chapters 21–27:

- 1) flees from Gibeah of Saul to Ahimelech the priest at Nob (21:1)
- 2) to Achish, king of Gath (21:10)
- 3) to the cave of Adullam (22:1)
- 4) to Mizpah of Moab (22:3)
- 5) to "the stronghold" (Masada? - 22:4)
- 6) to the forest of Hereth (22:5)
- 7) to Keilah where he delivered the city from the hand of the Philistines (23:5)
- 8) he hides in the hill country of Ziph (Horesh); i.e., the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon (23:14,15,19)
- 9) to the wilderness of Maon (23:24)
- 10) the stronghold of Engedi (23:29)

- 11) the wilderness of Paran (25:1)
- 12) the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon in the wilderness of Ziph (26:1)
- 13) back to Achish, king of Gath (27:2)
- 14) at Ziklag for 16 months (27:6)
- 15) David established as king at Hebron (2 Sam 2:1)

V. GOD'S PURPOSE WITH DAVID'S LIFE

Much of the material in these chapters is concerned with the development of David's faith and patience. Of course, we recognize that even early in his career when he challenged Goliath that he had faith:

"Then David said to the Philistines, 'You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted . . . the battle is the LORD's and He will give you into our hands'" (17:45-47).

But youthful faith, as exemplary as it was, remained to be tested and thoroughly tried. When David fled to Ahimelech the priest (21:1-2) he lied about his purpose for being there. When he came to Achish, the king of the Philistines at Gath, he feigned madness and thereby compromised his testimony (21:13). I think it is valid to conclude that David is lacking in faith at this stage. He is motivated by fear until he casts himself on the LORD and gains perspective and fresh strength (see Ps 34:4 in which David reflects upon this experience at Gath).

When he journeys to Moab to seek a safe place of refuge for his parents, he says, "until I know what God will do for me" (22:3). This reflects the uncertainty in David's life, in which he does not know how God is going to work things out for him.

Appl. - There are periods of time when you know you are called, but you don't know what God is going to do for you! In such times, we must learn (by faith) to cope with uncertainty and to simply trust God.

In 25:39ff., David marries Abigail and takes another wife without consulting the LORD. David would inquire of the LORD before battle, but did not look upon his personal relationships with any great importance. He takes several wives, in fact (25:43), and this tendency will eventually come back to trouble him. He does not seem able to establish a firm loving relationship with a woman, and has trouble being satisfied (no wonder he becomes an easy prey when he encounters Bathsheba).

In 27:1, we see David in a deep moment of depression in which he makes a poor decision to return to Gath (the Philistines). This is only a plan born out of despair, not faith. While dwelling in Ziklag, he lies to Achish about his exploits (comp. 27:8 and 27:10), because the victims of David's raids were the friends of Achish.

Thus, David is certainly no perfect saint himself, but the striking thing about David is his heart. He could sin, he could make poor decisions, at times he would not be walking in faith . . . yet he had a heart for God and these experiences in the wilderness brought this out: "As the deer pants for the water, so my heart pants for Thee, O God!"

VI. PRINCIPLES FROM DAVID'S EXPERIENCE

- 1) God's purpose for David stands in contrast to that of Saul, as seen in their initial positions
- 2) Lessons David must learn:
 - a) to be rejected
 - b) that the LORD is always adequate in every situation
 - c) about the consequences of compromise: 27:1 and 22:5; 27:8 and 10-12; 29:8

VII. THE IRONY OF SAUL'S DEATH

One of Saul's early desires to get rid of David was to thrust him into the battles with the Philistines in hopes that he would be killed (18:25). Ironically, it was Saul who died as a result of the battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 31).

LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Chapter 18 gives us an insightful look into the personality of Saul and the way in which sin got out of control in his life and led to numerous consequences. The root of the problem was jealousy. It not only spoiled the relationship between two leaders of God, but it brought Saul to the point of desiring murder. The problem surfaces when Saul hears the women of Israel giving more credit to David than they do to him. The women sing,

*"Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands."*

David had done nothing wrong nor had he made any gesture at usurping Saul's position, but Saul could not stand the fact that someone was getting more glory than he. Trace (in this chapter) how this sin of jealousy led to anger, then to paranoia, and on and on until he wanted to kill David. Compare James' comments on having bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart (Jam 3:14-16).