

I Samuel

Lesson 27 - Chapter 16

Samuel chapter 16 is where we encounter David for the first time. Samuel has (with great personal pain) done his job in firing King Saul at God's instruction however King Saul has no intention of relinquishing the throne. Let us not make the mistake of thinking that Saul didn't understand what the great Prophet did in pronouncing Saul's dismissal, nor think that it wasn't to be effective immediately. The same rebellious spirit of Sha'ul that caused God to react against the king of Israel in this devastating manner remained intact and so Saul was determined to ignore the Lord's will in favor of his own. Since Samuel had retreated to his hometown of Ramah, there was certainly no one among the king's court or advisors to challenge the validity of Saul's claim to be the ruler over Israel. Apparently the only ones who even knew that Saul no longer had God's backing were Saul and Samuel. In fact Saul went to great length to have Samuel make a public appearance with him at Gilgal (when Israel was celebrating the victory over Amalek) so that no one would be the wiser.

Sh'mu'el knew full well why King Sha'ul had insisted he come with him to the victory celebration and one can only wonder why he would be such a willing participant in this grand deception. I suppose we could speculate that he reckoned that it was necessary for Israel to have a leader in place (since God had yet to point out the new one) as a better alternative than having none at all. Israel, after all, was generally on constant war footing and (as we'll see in the next chapter) the Philistines had again gathered strength and were a great and present threat to the Hebrews. Having no leader in such a time would have been a sign of weakness and represented a perfect opportunity for the Philistines to gain more ground.

As we re-read chapter 16 keep the bigger picture in mind: King Saul was representative of the Anti-King, while young David was representative of the righteous king. King Saul rose to power because the unfaithful people of Israel demanded him; David was set apart at God's election and choice. King Saul was a demonstration of what happens when the human intellect and evil inclination rules; King David would be a demonstration of what happens when God's will is set above all else.

Also keep in mind Israel's geo-political situation at this time; Israel was an uneasy confederation of divided loyalties. To say that "Israel had a king" (in King Saul) is a very general and overly simplistic statement with many caveats attached to it. By no means was Israel recognized by her neighbors as a sovereign nation. There were no firm borders, no capital city, and no standing army to speak of (just a militia). In fact previously I have pointed out that when the Scriptures speak of military actions taken by King Sha'ul it will always speak of "Israel" on the one hand and then "Judah" on the other as nearly independent entities. Whatever the relationship was between the bulk of the tribes located to the north of Canaan, and the large population of the tribe of Judah that dominated the south, probably the best characterization would be as some sort of a reluctant tribal co-operative that functioned as long as each side's self-interest would be adequately served.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 16 all

The Prophet Samuel is directed by God to leave his one-man pity party behind and go to the city of Beit-Lechem in the territory of Judah; there the Lord would point out His choice for the next king of Israel. Bethlehem is an interesting location in this story for a few reasons, not the least of which is that since it was in the territory of Judah it indicates that there could not help but be that a radical shift in the politics of Israel's government was on the way. King Saul's loyalties lay with the northern tribes and theirs with him. If the next king was to be from Judah it would not be with the blessings of the northern tribes who represented the majority population of the Promised Land.

With that in mind we can more easily understand the goings-on in this and the next several chapters. When in verses 1 and 2 Yehoveh instructs Samuel to pick up his horn of anointing oil and to go to Bethlehem, Samuel is instantly fearful. Why? For a couple of reasons. First he's afraid of the increasingly unpredictable Saul. Any man, who would blatantly disregard the Lord's declaration that he was no longer the king of Israel and instead defiantly remain on the throne daring God to do something about it, was a dangerous man who would brook no challengers or insubordination. And secondly Samuel was uneasy dealing with Judah because he knew Judah's leadership wouldn't easily welcome or trust him. After all Samuel's personal heritage was with Ephraim, the chief tribe among the northern tribes, and his loyalty (as far as anyone knew) remained with Saul, a northerner. Samuel venturing into Bethlehem to pow-wow with the powerful family of **Yishai** could easily have been interpreted by Judah's clan leaders as spying or treachery and by King Saul and the northern coalition as treason.

So Samuel naturally inquires of God just how he is to survive such a dicey venture and he is instructed to take a heifer with him and tell the elders of Bethlehem that the purpose of his visit is to make a sacrifice. Such a thing could then be thought of by both sides as an attempt by Samuel to try and foster better relations between the northern and southern tribes. Samuel shows his loyalty and faithfulness to God by being obedient despite his well-founded anxieties as no further details were provided to him.

As Samuel arrives in Beit-Lechem (which means "house of bread") the leaders of that city rush to meet him equally as fearful as Samuel because they suspected that something was up. Bethlehem was not on Samuel's usual circuit that involved mainly the central Canaan area so the Bethlehemites were apprehensive as to the real purpose of this honor of Samuel wanting to offer a sacrifice there. The elders of the city ask him, "Do you come in shalom"? He responds that this is a friendly visit. Considering the ongoing cold war between Judah and the tribes Saul (and therefore Samuel) represented the leaders of Judah undoubtedly wondered if Samuel had come to curse them or perhaps to rebuke them or (just as problematic) to once again urge the leaders to turn their loyalty over to King Saul for the good of Israel.

Now the sacrifice that Samuel was preparing for (by bringing the female cow) is called in Hebrew a **Zevah**. Our Bibles nearly universally translate the Hebrew phrase **bazabbah** as "come with me to the sacrifice". And while indeed the **Zevah** is a Torah-ordained holy sacrifice, it is a particular KIND of sacrifice (among several kinds). This is a lesser kind that does not demand it be performed on a Biblically ordained occasion. It is a voluntary sacrifice that can be

performed any time a person wants to thank or honor the Lord, and it is also most suitable for a feast because all but the smallest portion of the meat can be eaten by the laypeople. Thus when one of Israel's recognized dignitaries came to a prominent location for a political visit and a festive meal was called for, a **Zevah** generally was also performed (and that is the case here). Thus other than for his surprising presence, nothing Samuel suggested was out of the ordinary or cause for alarm.

Because Samuel was the supreme religious figure for all the tribes of Israel (even though there were 2 High Priests active in Israel that we know of and probably at least a couple more rivals as well) his first instruction was for the participants to consecrate themselves (as preparation for the altar sacrifice). This would likely have primarily entailed no more than washing their garments and taking a bath.

The narrator says that **Yishai** and his sons were invited to this sacrifice and feast, but we're left to wonder if it was only Jesse's family or if others were also in attendance. But the narrator also wastes no time in immersing us into God's selection process for the next king of Israel. Verse 6 says that Samuel looked at Jesse's son **Eliav** (**Yishai's** firstborn) and thought to himself that certainly this must be the one he was sent to anoint. But the Lord told Samuel that he should not look at **Eliav's** physical characteristics and assume that his imposing appearance or family status (as Jesse's oldest son) were the same criteria that the Lord used to choose. And so here in verse 7 we get a foundational God-principle that even the most devout follower of Messiah has a difficult time in obeying: "Yehoveh doesn't see the way humans see, humans look at outward appearance but Yehoveh looks at the heart". Let me remind you that in the Bible heart means mind. Thus despite an implicit Christian doctrine that we can think one way and feel another, and that God looks mostly upon how we "feel" in our heart as a means of judging us, no such doctrine actually exists in the Bible. It's only that in ancient times they believed that rational thought, the seat of the intellect, took place in the heart organ. Therefore feeling, emotions, was generally not assigned to the heart but rather was dispersed (depending on the nature of the feelings) to such organs as the kidneys and liver.

It's interesting that Samuel instantly assumed that the tallest son MUST have been God's choice. We shouldn't be hard on him for this; after all, King Saul was described as a head and shoulders taller than his fellow Benjamites and this seemed to be the primary tangible factor in God's selection of Saul. But let's understand that in all eras leaders were (and still are) usually chosen for their charisma. And physical stature generally plays a role in that charisma factor. Even more since all ancient societies felt that their gods and goddesses were involved in selecting their royal leaders, and that the kings and queens reflected the characteristics of the gods, that a handsome king or beautiful queen was a given. This belief was not lost on the Hebrews as well.

After Samuel looks over **Eliav** and God says, "No", he then spies the next eldest **Avinadav**, but gets the same verdict. **Yishai** presents son #3, **Shammah**, and God also rejects him. After standing before all of **Yishai's** sons in turn and the Lord still not approving any of the 7, Samuel asks Jesse if this is all of his sons (because it's obvious to Samuel that someone in **Yishai's** family is the new anointed king). Jesse says that there is one more, the youngest,

but he is out tending the family's sheep. Samuel sends for this last son and the Lord approves of him. This son's name is David and even though he is not physically dominant in stature he has kingly traits.

Now very likely something like lots was being used by Samuel to determine which son would be the chosen one (there is nothing to indicate that Samuel was having audible conversation with the Lord). But this passage also creates an interesting problem that Bible skeptics enjoy pointing to because we're told that after looking at Jesse's 7 sons, Samuel calls for David seemingly indicating that David is the 8th son. Yet in 1 Chronicles 2 we are told this:

CJB 1 Chronicles 2:12 Bo'az fathered 'Oved; 'Oved fathered Yishai;¹³ and Yishai fathered Eli'av his firstborn, Avinadav second, Shim'a third,¹⁴ N'tan'el fourth, Radai fifth,¹⁵ Otzem sixth, David seventh,¹⁶ and their sisters Tz'ruyah and Avigayil. The sons of Tz'ruyah: Avshai, Yo'av and 'Asah'el, three of them.

To further complicate matters, later on in 1 Chronicles we find this reference to **Yishai's** sons:

CJB 1 Chronicles 27:16 Over the the tribes of Isra'el: leader of the Re'uveni: Eli'ezer the son of Zikhri; of the Shim'oni: Sh'fatyah the son of Ma'akhah;¹⁷ of Levi: Hashavyah the son of K'mu'el; of Aharon: Tzadok;¹⁸ of Y'hudah: Elihu, one of David's brothers; of Yissakhar: 'Omri the son of Mikha'el;

So here is a brother of David (**Elihu**) who has not previously been mentioned and if we add him in we come up with 8 total sons and not 7. What's happening here; are there 7 or 8 sons? Well there is no end of academic speculation that ranges from copyist error, to two differing traditions about David and his family being interwoven in the various Biblical accounts, to even possibly just an ancient Hebrew traditional manner that such families were spoken of especially when it came to royal families. Skeptics prefer to think of this is a simple case of Scriptural contradiction that proves the Bible is anything but infallible. I cannot possibly say with certainty which is correct but I do think there is an interesting clue in 1st Samuel 16 verse 11 that is suspicious enough to at least consider as the simplest and thus most probable solution.

Where we have Samuel saying (in English) "are all yours sons here", that is not a very accurate translation. The Hebrew is **hatammu hanne-arim**, meaning, "are the boys (sons) complete?" Now without doubt simplifying it to "are these all of your sons" is the proper sense of it. But we also need to understand the commonly understood correlation between Hebrew numbers, letters, and symbolic meaning within ancient Hebrew and Eastern culture. The number 7 is the divine number of completeness. 7 is the ideal number, thus we find that Job had 7 sons, Kereth had 7 sons, and we read that Ruth (Naomi's daughter in law) was said to be "better than 7 sons".

So since Hebrew literary form paid great attention to selecting words that could be coupled together to emphasize a point I don't think it was any coincidence that Samuel asks if the number of **Yishai's** sons is "complete", and then we're told that there were 7 sons in later documents. The number 7 and the word "complete" are parallel and complementary and

essentially denote the same thing.

And remember that all this that we are currently reading in our Bibles was for hundreds and hundreds of years handed down word of mouth before it was ever written down. This is why I often point out that the Bible (at least the Old Testament) is much better comprehended if read out loud with our mouths than silently with our eyes. The sentence structures were designed to be spoken (and heard) in a manner conducive to interesting story telling AND thus also for easier remembering so that it could be passed on to the next generation in the same way.

Was David the 7th son or the 8th son of Jesse? I don't think that theologically it matters nor is which number of son he was (other than being the youngest of them) even the point of the passage. The point is that **Yishai's** family was assigned the divine ideal number of 7 (completeness) as an easily recognizable, admirable and appropriate characteristic so that future listeners could understand that a God-thing was going on here since Israel's first REAL king was being selected and anointed from this divinely blessed family. Of course this is generally lost on us Western gentiles but many Middle Easterners catch on to its symbolism even to this day.

Once David was identified by the Lord (again, probably through using lots) Samuel anointed him with oil. And then in verse 13 we're informed that the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David and was with him from that day forward. The key is that we see how the Lord withdrew His spirit from Saul and essentially transferred it to David. The next king was officially selected and equipped for the job.

Thus in the next verse we are told that the Spirit of God (which was now upon David) had of course left Saul. But now Saul had instead received an evil spirit from Adonai. Oh boy; there is a can of worms waiting to be opened, so let's open it. It's been a very long time since we've had a discussion about where evil comes from. In fact I think we haven't directly dealt with this subject since early on in Genesis. We just don't have the time to go into this in any kind of depth so you can refer to lesson #6 of the Genesis series for a refresher on the nature and source of evil.

So as not to take up too much time with it, let's approach this challenge by examining the several ways that we could reasonably explain what is meant by the author of this section of 1st Samuel when he says that an evil spirit from Adonai was sent to King Saul. Some say that this proves that God (from whom both good and evil are derived) has indeed removed the holy and good nature of His own spirit from Saul, and replaced it with a spirit of malevolence that is but another aspect of God's nature. Others say that it means that God has removed His holy spirit and in its place He sent an evil spirit-being (a demon) to torment the king as punishment. Another view point is that when the Lord withdrew from Saul, Saul's own evil nature took over since there was nothing to counterbalance it. Some say this is just an ancient or quaint way to describe that as a result of God and Samuel abandoning Saul, Saul tumbled into depression and mental illness. And then there are variations and nuances of each of these proposals.

Let's look at 3 key Biblical passages concerning evil and its source:

^{JPS} **Isaiah 45:7** *I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I am the LORD, that doeth all these things.*

^{JPS} **Amos 3:6** *Shall the horn be blown in a city, and the people not tremble? Shall evil befall a city, and the LORD hath not done it?*

^{JPS} **Lamentations 3:38** *Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not evil and good?*

There is no doubt from these passages that God has something to do with the existence of evil. The difficulty is where does His responsibility end and begin for evil's existence? It is simply untenable in the Judeo-Christian faith to make evil self-existent since God is the only self-existent being or thing. So in some way or sense God created and controls evil.

Here, I think, is a definition of the source of evil that is balanced and does not seek to dismiss evil or to assign evil to God as part of His nature or character.

“Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light.”
Albert Einstein

Mr. Einstein nailed it (at least to a point). Evil is the absence of God, just as darkness is merely the absence of light. When God is not present, evil surely is. This is NOT some lofty poetic thought; it's how the Universe operates.

So how do we apply this concept to 1st Samuel 16:14 and deal with the matter of “the spirit of evil that came from God” and went into King Saul? First, part of our problem in dealing with this is not so much the theology as it is the language. Dr. David Tsumura points out that following Hebrew grammar rules makes the most typical English translations of, “an evil spirit from the Lord” as incorrect. The Hebrew phrase is *ruach raah* (*ruach* = spirit, *raah* = evil). And in this construction it cannot be that *raah* is an adjective but rather it is a noun. In other words, it is not that evil describes or defines or modifies the kind of spirit; rather it is that the presence of one brings about the other (which is a rather typical Hebrew language construct). So the better translation is probably, “God sent a spirit that causes evil”, or “God sent a spirit that brings forth evil”. Thus it is NOT that the spirit itself is necessarily evil in nature. We see this same sort of logic used in a number of circumstances in the Bible such as in Proverbs 24 when it is discussing “men of evil”. The meaning in Proverbs 24 is, “men who do evil to others”, not “men whose nature is evil”. As used here in 1st Samuel 16:14, “evil” is the result of the effect of the spirit; evil is not a state of being of the spirit. An “evil spirit” (in common English speech) means a spirit whose state of being is inherently evil. A “spirit that causes evil” (in common English speech) is a spirit of some kind whose actions result in evil things (calamitous things, disastrous things) happening.

Now that may sound like slicing the onion awfully thin but we make these kinds of distinctions all the time in everyday life and they are necessary. A child who does a bad thing is not

necessarily an inherently bad child. A knife designed as a weapon of war that is used to kill someone is not constructed of homicidal metal. Money used to corruptly purchase power is not inherently corrupt money.

Thus we see how these Biblical principles of evil work together. God can allow or not allow evil to occur, and can at times even facilitate evil to bring about His righteous purposes. So in that sense He can control evil by His hand. We also see that no human can be spiritually neutral; we either are occupied with a holy spirit or a spirit of another kind. When the Holy Spirit left Saul another kind of spirit rushed in to fill the vacuum; it entered Saul and resulted in evil being done. It was similar to the spirit that God sent to Pharaoh that resulted in a hardened heart, which itself resulted in evil being done (but God did not directly cast evil into Pharaoh's heart). The idea that this spirit is "from the Lord" indicates that it is either divinely permitted, or allowed, or directed, or that merely the fact that God is not there automatically meant that this alternative spirit would come into Saul. Yet there is also divine purpose behind it; this spirit (even though it is not a holy spirit) will play its part in Saul's life in working out the divine plan that brings David into power and (in ways hard to fathom at this point in the Bible) eventually pave the way for Messiah.

How often I've said that part of our challenge as those fortunate humans who are aware of being God's created creatures, is how we can reliably communicate about Him with one another. The writers of the Bible faced the same dilemma. God is a spirit being, he is not a physical being or super human. His ways are not our ways. Our vocabulary will never allow us to adequately describe those mysterious things of God that can only exist, and therefore only be understood, in the context of the spiritual sphere. Thus it is so terribly important for us to comprehend the foundational principles of God that are presented in the Torah (those precious few things that ARE comprehensible for us) so that we don't see a confounding statement in the Scriptures and (simply due to our willful ignorance) make something out of it that runs counter to God's nature and justice system.

The story of David's anointing is brief and to the point. In fact there is no indication that David or his brothers or even his father had any idea what the anointing consecrated David FOR. And as we think about the circumstances and move forward in the story I suspect that only Samuel knew what had actually transpired. However it must have been that David was at least aware of God's powerful new presence upon him and in time such that he developed a bit of a fear of LOSING God's presence in His life. After watching King Saul do the most paranoid and irrational things, living life as a terribly tormented man (because he was living with God) David created a Psalm pleading to the Lord for this to not happen to him. With that understanding let's close by reading a portion of Psalm 51.

READ PSALM 51:1 – 15 (NOTE: some versions may have the verses numbered differently)

David knew that Saul had the Spirit of God removed from him and it left Saul a nearly incapacitated man. David knew that it was callous sinning against God that caused God to react this way against Saul, and David knew that not only was he himself born as a sinner (born with a sinful nature) but that at times he also committed trespasses against Yehoveh. Unlike Saul however, he clung to the Lord. Unlike Saul he contritely confessed his sin. Unlike

Saul he didn't challenge the Lord but rather submitted to Him and knew that Salvation comes only from the God of Israel and only by His grace.

And David had many sleepless nights (during which he wrote some of these Psalms) worrying about losing the Ruach HaKodesh and as a result becoming a deranged man who lost his place in God's Kingdom as had Saul. Saul was willing to give up the Holy Spirit if he could retain his kingly power and do things his own way.

I've told many a concerned Believer this and so now I'll tell you (assuming you have turned your life over to Messiah Yeshua): that you WORRY about your status with the Lord occasionally, and wrestle with it from time to time, and have a few sleepless nights over it is NOT a bad thing or a sign of little faith. To the contrary it is to your merit. It is that you KNOW the seriousness of the matter; you KNOW where your Salvation lies, you KNOW you have responsibilities and obligations as a redeemed person, and that in itself is a GOOD sign (just as it was for David) that despite your inevitable failings you greatly value your personal relationship with God and don't ever want to let it go. The Lord will never leave those who truly want Him, even though we will stumble and fall repeatedly in our lives.

We'll continue with chapter 16 next time.