

Bible Study Series: The Book of First Samuel (Week Three Notes)

September 4, 2011

Young David enters the scene.

16:1-4

So God says to Samuel, “Well, that one didn’t work out so well, get over it and let’s find the right one this time.” But Samuel is a little nervous about taking such a step. Kind of strange for a prophet, don’t you think? Here he has a direct pipeline to God, and he is doing exactly what God wants him to do, and he seems worried that Saul is going to kill him. You would think a prophet would just “boldly go where no one has gone before” without a care in the world. After all, the Big Guy is on his side and has told him to do this. Yet we see that even those folks who have this particular relationship with God still suffer from the normal concerns of us normal creatures.

Some people might say this is an example of how “faith in God” doesn’t really do all that much for you. I would say it is a very inspiring example of the fact that even those super stars of faith have normal human concerns. It makes me feel all the more confident when I feel nervous about following God. Fear is a normal human emotion, and yet God chooses to work with people who are still filled with fear. You don’t have to be completely fearless to be part of God’s plan. You just have to keep on following the path he lays out for you with a confidence that will lead you beyond the fear. That’s how faith works.

16:5-13

So we then come to the selection of David. The importance of this scene is the line vs. 7: “Pay no attention to his appearance or his stature, for I have rejected him. For not as Man sees does the Lord see; man sees only what is visible, but the

Lord sees in to the heart.” David was the most unlikely candidate. He was the youngest and smallest of the clan, but his spirit was just what the Lord needed. And he was willing to take on the task. Remember that the next time you don’t feel like you are worthwhile or that you can be of any use to the Lord. God sees each of us in his own way and has a use in mind, if we will follow.

16:14-23

Now comes some strange parts of the story. You might wonder, if God had chosen David to replace Saul, why didn’t he just strike Saul down and put into his place young David. The answer, I believe, is that neither the country nor David was yet ready for such a transition. Remember that David was quite young at the time. He didn’t know a thing about being king, and the people of Israel probably would have been quite unready to accept a pronouncement that this young guy was to be their new leader. So God sets up a situation to deal with both of those things. He places David in proximity to the throne, where he can watch and learn how to be a king. He will also provide him with situations that will demonstrate his innate leadership skills to the people so that at the right time, he will seem to be an obvious choice.

17:1-58

Enter the great opportunity. This part of the story seems in some ways, to be disconnected to the previous chapter. David seems to be an unknown person to Saul and Abner his general. He seems to have been left behind when his older brothers went off to fight the war. Seems kind of strange considering he has 1) been anointed as the next king in front of his brothers and 2) been playing his harp for the troubled King Saul. There are various explanations for this.

First, this story could have come from a different source than the previous chapter and simply been “conflated” into the narrative. Remember how I told you at the beginning that different sources told different parts of the story, each to enhance their point of view. So the people who told this story, the one that everybody knows – David and Goliath – could have a very different agenda than those of the previous chapter.

It is also possible that, after the anointing, David went back to being the little brother. Remember that God was not instituting a revolution here; he was setting up a process. Much of the hostility you may hear in this chapter from David's older brothers may, in fact, stem from their residual anger over his being anointed over them.

Finally, as to his being unknown by both Saul and Abner, you must remember that he was only in the king's presence as a musician. He would have been more of a "thing" than a person. He only came to Saul when the king was in a funky mood, not exactly the kind of way to be noticed by the king. As for Abner, it is quite likely he never saw David, or if he did, the kid never registered on his radar.

So then we come to the meat of the story. It is probably set up in this way to show that something miraculous happened here. Everybody knows that some kid with a bag of rocks is going to be crushed by this giant of a warrior. But he isn't – and for those paying attention, this is a signal that powerful forces are at work here. Was this just luck, or was it the hand of God that guided the stone? Only the future will tell. But notice David's attitude in verses 46-47:

"This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hands. I will kill you and cut off your head; and I will give the carcasses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. All the Earth shall know that there is a God in Israel. And this whole assembly shall know that the Lord can give victory without sword or spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will deliver you into our hands."

David's got the right attitude and proceeds to demonstrate it.

18:1-30

David is now firmly established as part of Saul's household. He begins a great friendship with Jonathan and proceeds to marry one of the king's daughters. Things are going well for him, perhaps too well. This is perhaps part of David's learning process in how to be a king. He begins to outshine Saul, never a good thing to do especially with a paranoid like Saul. David basks in the glory, but it is the beginning of the end for his relationship with the king.

Saul sets up a “bride price” that he is sure will get David killed. But David not only brings in the 100 foreskins from the Philistines, he doubles it. Once again, the kind of thing a pride-filled young guy would do, unaware that he is provoking the confrontation sure to follow. Saul is trapped into giving his daughter Michal to David – but then, marriages are only valid “until death do them part.”

19:1-24

So it begins. Saul has decided that the best course of action for him and Jonathan is to get rid of David. But he runs into a snag, because Jonathan and David have become fast friends. Some in our time have speculated to the nature of this relationship. They interpret some of the verses about them to mean that they had an “intimate relationship.” I’ve read the arguments both for and against this and have come down on the side of those who say that they were not “lovers” but shared a love that warriors can have for each other, one that is difficult for those who have never been in combat to understand.

The Knights of Malta, centuries after this story, actually had a bonding ceremony for their knights when they would develop a particular bond for each other. This was not (as we would understand it) a “same-sex marriage.” It was a covenant between two warriors that committed each to each other, even if it cost them both their lives. They would know deep in the hearts that, if one of them was trapped by the Saracens, the other one was coming for him, come hell or high water. It was that sort of sacred bond that Jonathan had with David and vice versa. It was a bond that took Jonathan to value his relationship with David above that with his father. It is also a bond that David will honor beyond the gates of death when he cares for Jonathan’s children after he is killed in battle.

We also see demonstrated here that the words we hear in the marriage ceremony have been sacred throughout time. When the two people say to each other that they will “forsake all others,” basically they are committing themselves to honor their marriage above any other commitment. This included the commitment that they might have to their own family. This is demonstrated by Michal when she both helps David to escape and buys him time to get away by lying to her father’s messengers, and then telling her father that she had sided with her husband. You must remember that Saul could have killed her for this “treasonous” act, so she was literally taking her life in her hands.

God then decides to give a little assist when Saul's messengers come seeking David. Finally Saul too is stricken by the intervention and incapacitated for a whole day, giving David enough time to disappear.

20:1-42

David then flees to the only person he can truly count on. If he had gone back to his family, he would have put them in danger of the king's wrath. So he gets with Jonathan and the two of them cook up a plan to find out just how deep the rift is between Saul and David. Once again, we have language speaking of the "love" that Jonathan and David have for each other. The story even speaks of them "going out into the open" together. Some would say that this was for "hanky-panky," but again I would maintain that they are using circular reasoning. Circular reasoning is a process of entering into a search for the truth with your mind already made up. Then all you do is find facts that will support your point of view and ignore anything that might conflict with it. In our time, both sides on the "global warming" argument accuse each other of circular reasoning, and you can see how well that is working out. Same thing here. If you want to find something to support your point of view, you probably can.

Saul finally figures out that Jonathan is siding with David and flies into a rage, to the point that he even throws a spear at him – a treasure that up until now has been reserved for David. Jonathan then has a choice to make and takes a couple of days to think about it. In the end, he decided that his bond to David outweighs his loyalty to his father, perhaps even to himself. Remember Saul has perfectly framed the dilemma for him. As long as David lives, Jonathan's succession to the throne is in jeopardy. But Jonathan is the epitome of loyalty and chooses that bond even above his own future. Very few people have ever had a friend that loyal, and Jonathan is the "patron saint" of friendship and loyalty in my opinion.

21:1-16

David then goes on the run, and drags other people into the problem along the way. He goes to the priest at Ahimelech and flat out lies to him. In doing so, he signs the death warrant of the priest and his followers. Doeg the Edomite sees that David has come there and goes back to tell Saul all that happened. Whether he told Saul that David deceived the priests is unclear. Later text seems to

indicate that he did not include that little tidbit of information. This may be a way for the storyteller to absolve David of the responsibility for the actions that are to follow.

David scoops up some bread and the sword of Goliath and heads for Gath, a town of the Philistines. He goes there seeking refuge, but is recognized as one of their greatest enemies, and many there want to kill him. So he pretends to be crazy, invoking the protection that their culture had for the insane. Many cultures throughout history have felt that the mentally ill are specially protected by God. David is counting on this and feigns madness well enough to escape from Gath to the caves of Adullam.

22:1-5

David finds a place to hide, but he worries about the safety of his parents. If you remember from the previous Bible study, David's grandmother Ruth was from Moab. So there are family ties to Moab, and not just to some small unimportant family but to the king of Moab. Remember that, once Saul finds out, as he is sure to do, that the king of Moab is helping David and protecting his family, he could find himself in a war with Saul. The subtle message here is that David was destined for power, having been descended from the royal house of Moab as well as having been anointed as the next king of Israel. In other words, he comes from good stock, and that blood will show itself worthy in the future.

22:6-23

Saul proceeds to find out that the priests of Ahimelech have assisted David. Doeg the Edomite brings him the message. Doeg might be intentionally omitting the information of David's deception, and in doing so hoping to curry the king's favor by making his story even more important, because he's being loyal by bringing in news of a conspiracy on top of the information of the way the David has fled. We don't know that, but it could be a factor in the story.

Saul and David then begin a protracted game of "cat and mouse" that lasts for a long, but unspecified, time. He and Jonathan have their final meeting, and Jonathan acknowledges that David is to be the next king, not him.

The story then goes on to show that support for David was not universal. Some people chose to inform on him, and others chose to assist him. David is taking great pains to not confront Saul and his army. There could be several reasons for this. The first could be that he had few followers at this time, and Saul had a big army that would wipe them out in open battle. But the unspoken, at this point, reason is probably more to the truth. David knows that he is on the road to becoming king. He doesn't quite know how that is going to work out yet, but he wants to make sure that it is done in the right way. If he proclaims an open rebellion to Saul, raises an army, and takes the throne from him, he will be doing two things:

- 1) He will be taking the throne by force, not receiving it from the hand of God.
- 2) He will be establishing a pattern of behavior that might well carry into his kingship. If he came to power through rebellion, then he can hardly have valid objection to a rebellion happening to him.

So, for whatever reason, or combination of reasons, David avoids combat with Saul, and the Philistines settle the situation for now by a convenient invasion that Saul has to go take care of.

24:1-23

David and Saul then go at it again. Saul takes an army to En-gedi to find David. David and his men are hiding in a cave that Saul uses for some privacy as he follows the call of nature. The whole problem could have been solved in a heartbeat, but David refuses to raise his hand against the anointed king of Israel instead he cuts off the corner of his cloak to prove how close he was to him. David even laments this intrusion against the king and publicly declares so as Saul leaves the cave. This is a dangerous thing for him to do, because Saul could have just ordered the army to come and get him.

But Saul does a strange thing instead. He, at least for now, acknowledges that David is not his enemy, or he would be dead. He also extracts from David a pledge that his family will be cared for after David becomes king. The "handwriting is on the wall," and even Saul can see it.