

Never “Saul” That Coming (1 Samuel 16:14-23)

Summary: After Saul had forfeited his future kingdom, the LORD informed Samuel that God’s heart is after another man (13:14). After Saul lost his current kingship, Samuel informed him that the kingdom will be handed over to someone who is “a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.” (15:28). We are introduced to this man after the LORD commanded Samuel to travel from Ramah to Bethlehem (16:1-4). Samuel has anointed the shepherd-boy in front of his brothers and father in a private setting without saying a word (16:13). David returned to shepherding. Both Samuel and the reader have been given no additional information.

1. Spirits (v.14-16, 23)

A. The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul (v.14):

- This is the only place in the OT where the Spirit of the LORD is specifically stated to have left someone permanently (Judges 16:20).

B. Harmful spirit from the LORD tormenting Saul (v.14):

- This is not the first time a “harmful” spirit has been sent by the LORD (Judges 9:23; 1 Kings 22:18-23).
 - “Harmful” as the adjective can be described as “bad, evil, unpleasant, or unhappy.”
 - “Tormenting” as the verb can be translated as “terrorizing, frightening, terrifying, or startling.”
 - “spirit” can be interpreted as an angel, demon, or system of thinking. Regardless of what this was, it was from the LORD.

*The Hebrews believed that everything was from the LORD, including evil (Deut. 32:39; Job 2:10; Isa. 45:7; Amos 3:6). No Biblical writer attempts to defend or reconcile this. Instead, they point to man’s sinfulness as the problem (Gen. 8:21; Eccl. 9:3; Jer. 17:9; Matt. 13:15; Mark 7:21; Eph. 4:22).

Points of Application:

- Saul’s sickness is spiritual in manner, not psychological. The whole point of this “spirit” is to show that his sickness is directly related to and the result of his rejecting the LORD’s commandments through the prophet Samuel.
- Saul rejected the LORD, and the LORD is justified in sending this spirit. Saul will not repent, and as a result will have a spiritual sickness that manifests itself through an emotional, psychological and physical distress. Since Saul will not repent and refuses to acknowledge his sin to the LORD he will suffer in his unbelief.
- This harmful, terrifying spirit came about after Saul disobeyed the LORD. If Saul had repented, this harmful spirit may have departed permanently.

2. Service (v.17-22)

- Saul’s servants asked for permission to find someone who was skilled at playing an instrument in attempt to help Saul during these outbreaks. One servant mentions a “young man” from Bethlehem and Saul is the first man to personally name David. There are four characteristics given to describe David (v.18):

A. Skilled with the Harp:

- In the ancient world, the harp was believed to combat evil spirits.
- David’s harp (“kinnor”) would have been small enough to hold in a bag, which he possessed and played as he carried out his shepherding duties.
- David was skillful in playing and has authored nearly half of the Psalms. He is described as “the hero of the Psalms” (2 Sam. 23:1) and presented as the founder of temple music (1 Chron. 6:31-48; 15:16-22; 25:1-31).

B. Man of Valor:

- The Philistines occupied territory only a few miles to the west of Bethlehem. David would have fought small skirmishes against them as they encroached into Israelite territory. As Jonathan is fighting the Philistines at Michmash, David is fighting as well. Since the Philistines were never defeated (14:52), they continued to be a nuisance. We do not know how many months/years transpired after David was anointed. If it was several years, there would’ve been time for him to show his courage.

C. Skillful in Speech: This may refer to his singing voice, or a commitment to the wholeness and integrity of his words.

D. The LORD is with him: David has a reputation of being God’s man; what he does prospers.

*The servant spends more time describing David’s character than skill with the harp.

Saul loved David and made him his armor bearer (v.21). Despite Saul’s conscription, David returned home to shepherding in Bethlehem when his services were unneeded.

3. See (v. 1, 7, 17, 18)

- The LORD has seen (provided) for himself a king, David (v.1). While Samuel does not “see” properly, the LORD does (v.7). Saul ordered his servants to “provide for him” a man who can play well (v.17). One of the servants had noted in response that “he has seen” a son of Jesse, a Bethlehemite (v.18). All four verses use the same Hebrew word which means “to see/provide.”
- David is not only the LORD’s choice (v.1) but also Saul’s (v.22).
- The irony is that while David has found favor in Saul’s sight (v.22), Saul is unaware that David is the LORD’s anointed king. It is the chosen king that keeps the rejected king from falling into misery and unceasing anguish. David’s presence in Saul’s company was a means of divine grace. In any other scenario, David’s presence would have caused rage. Instead, it is soothing (v.23).