

The Rise of David

(Lesson for April 26)
1 Samuel 16:1 to 18:16

GOLDEN TEXT — The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. — 1 Sam. 16:7

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

Approach to the Lesson

This lesson reveals the mental and spiritual decline of King Saul and the introduction and growing popularity of David. One fact serves as a background to the entire series of events: God had declared to Saul through the lips of Samuel that he was rejected as king of Israel and that the kingdom would be given to a "neighbour of thine, that is better than thou" (1 Sam. 15:28).

This declaration preyed on Saul's distraught, self-centered, and jealous mind. When he beheld young David's physical beauty, ability to attract men and elicit their loyalty, his physical courage and mounting popularity, the ruler went into a royal frenzy of frustration. But the same declaration had the opposite effect on David's career: He was the "neighbour" who would receive the kingdom. God made a promise (1 Sam. 15:28). David was chosen and anointed (chap. 16:13). It was then simply a matter of time before Saul would be eliminated and David would mount the throne. Saul might chafe at the bit and paw the earth with fury, but the purposes of the Lord would be inexorably fulfilled.

Verse by Verse

1 Sam. 18:5—"... David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, ... behaved himself wisely ... Saul set him over the men ... he was accepted in the sight of all the people." David's obedience and exemplary conduct were rewarded. His promotion to a position of military leadership was popularly and universally acclaimed.

Verse 6—"... when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine ... the women came out ... singing and dancing, to meet king Saul." The occasion of this musical celebration was probably the close of the campaign against the Philistines, of which the slaying of Goliath was the turning point. Such dances were not uncommon. David himself, when king, danced joyously at the return of the ark of the Lord to his city (2 Sam. 6:12-14).

Verse 7—"... the women answered ... as they played, ... Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." This lifting chorus, part to a popular refrain, was heard across the land as women from city after city jubilantly echoed it. The singers were presumably expressing their joy over the victory rather than gloating in a comparison derogatory to Saul.

Verse 8—"... Saul was very wroth, ... he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, ... to me ... but thousands ... what can he do more but the kingdom? Saul's anger was not the result of envy or petulance. Before his eyes he was seeing the beginning of the fulfillment of Samuel's prophecy (1 Sam. 15:28). Could this new popular hero be the king who would replace him?

Verse 9—"And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." Envy, suspicion and fear now marked the king's attitude toward the young man, whom he began to regard as his rival for the throne.

Verse 10—"... the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, ... he prophesied ... David played ... as at other times: there was a javelin in Saul's hand." God occasionally permits evil spirits to do their devastating work (see Job 1:12; 2:5, 7). A spirit contributed to Saul's mental derangement. The "prophesying" was the utterance of strange, and doubtless incoherent, thoughts under the influence of the wicked spirit.

Verse 11—"... Saul cast the javelin; ... he said, I will smite David ... to the wall ... David avoided ... twice." David, young and agile, escaped the spear thrust of the maddened king. The ruler's mental tension had reached such an advanced stage that the harp chords no longer brought him relief, but rather infuriated him.

Verse 12—"... Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul." This was the crux of the matter (see 1 Sam. 16:13, 14). The secret of Saul's mental, temperamental, and moral decline, and of David's rise in popular esteem, was the relation of each to the Spirit of the Lord.

Verse 13—"Therefore Saul removed him from him, ... made him his captain over a thousand ... The king did not dare to eliminate his young aide, whom in his heart he could not but admire. He demoted him instead (see 1 Sam. 18:5).

Verse 14—"... David behaved himself wisely in all his ways and the Lord was with him." To "behave" oneself is to act, or conduct oneself. The reason David acted thus was the presence and help of God. This verse reveals an interesting facet of David's character: he could continue his "wise conduct even when demoted."

Verse 15—"... when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him." David's acceptance of his military rebuke increased Saul's fear. Why? Because only one who was obviously led of the Spirit could act so humbly and wisely. Saul therefore concluded that David must indeed be approved of God as his successor to the throne.

Verse 16—"But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them. The increasing popularity of the young man was due (1) to his worthy character, and (2) to the fact that in the performance of his military duties his virtues were on public display.

Outline of the Lesson
1. David's anointing and promotion (1 Sam. 16)
2. David's triumph over Goliath (chap. 17)
3. David, both loved and feared (chap. 18:1-16)

The Heart of the Lesson
Saul and Jonathan were father and son. They had the same lineage and background. Yet Saul feared David and sought to destroy him, while Jonathan "loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). How can these contrasting reactions be explained?

David was loyal and obedient to Saul. He played the harp at the royal command. He instituted no revolt when Saul tried to smite him with the javelin. He accepted his military demotion (v. 13) without complaint. In all things he behaved himself wisely. Yet Saul, although at first loving David (chap. 16:21), soon became envious and suspicious of him.

On the other hand Jonathan, who might with some reason have been jealous of David as of a young man who could deprive him some day of the throne, was drawn to him by a wonderful love. He made a covenant with the shepherd boy and presented him with his choicest gifts (chap. 18:3, 4). Later in lamenting Jonathan's death David sang, "... thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26).

The reason for the contrast is clear. David and Jonathan were knit together in a bond concerning which Saul seemed to know nothing. Was it the bond of youth? To some extent perhaps. Was it the bond of courage? Both young men were very brave; but so was King Saul. No, the cementing bond was the common reliance of David and Jonathan upon their God. Saul put his confidence in valiant men. But notice the conduct of Jonathan and David.

When Jonathan went out against the Philistines, he uttered his declaration of faith: "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." His entire trust was in God. When David faced Goliath, he voiced the same assurance: "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel ..." (chap. 17:45). The young men were knit together by the ties of their loyalty to, and dependence upon, God.

The "Spirit of the Lord came upon David" (chap. 16:13). But "The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul" (v. 14). No wonder the king feared David while his son Jonathan, who shared David's trust in the Lord, was strangely drawn to him.

To be permanent, love for one's fellow man must be rooted in love for God. And one can never really know the love of God until he has put his deathless trust in God's Son.

Tutankhaumun's tomb discovered in 1922, is the only un plundered sepulcher of an Egyptian pharaoh yet found.

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