

“So Who Is That Kid?” -- An Introduction to David

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Text: 1 Samuel 16. 1 - 13

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Once David had killed Goliath, King Saul asked one of his advisors, “Who is that kid?” It really was an excellent question because David sort of came out of no where to be the exact right person needed for that pivotal moment in the Israelite’s history...to be (along with Abraham and Moses) a central character in their history. But to understand David’s central role we need to have some historic background on the Israelite people and David himself. So today we will consider some deep background.

When the people of Israel finished the exodus and began to take over Canaan (“the promised land”) the Israelites were not the only settling newcomers. The “Sea People” (the Egyptian name for the Philistines) also showed up. So both groups colonized Canaan at the same time: the Philistines along the coast and the Israelites in the interior. It was inevitable as both groups established themselves in closer and closer proximity that a territorial war would break out. They became arch enemies who were at each other’s throats for about 300 years. After the Israelites lost one particular battle (with 30,000 dead) some approached the prophet Samuel, calling for a king. Up until this point the Israelites were still a ragtag coalition of 12 tribal groups and their fighting force was an as-needed amateur militia. Other peoples—like the Philistines—had kings and these kings maintained standing armies. The Israelites thought that if they had a king and a standing army they would be more effective against the Philistines. Well, the prophet Samuel took the idea to God and God was not impressed. In essence God said to Samuel, “Here we go again! Just like on the exodus journey my people are not trusting me. Again! They don’t appreciate that a king will press their sons into his army and the king will tax everyone to pay for his army. A king will turn his cronies into courtiers, and then the king will take your land and wealth and give it to his cronies.” God said, “that’s what is going to happen if I let you have a king. And I won’t stand the people’s complaints once it does start to happen.” Well Samuel went back to the Israelites. The people still insisted they needed a king. So God said, “So be it, but I told you so.”

The first king was Saul. Saul was a self-confessed nobody from the tribe of Benjamin. But God had directed the prophet Samuel to seek out Saul, tell Saul that God would have him be the king, And Saul was given one direction: walk in the ways of God. Now many of the Israelites questioned the choice of Saul but after Saul led the army to a few victories they accepted Saul as king. Saul’s reign was successful...until Saul did a few things that displeased God. He was not walking in God’s ways. And so we hear in the story of First Samuel “And the Lord was sorry he had made Saul king over Israel.” God took back his blessing from Saul. And after that in First Samuel we begin to see Saul’s reign and life slowly begin to unravel.

It is here that the story of David commences, and it commences again with the prophet Samuel. God directed Samuel to go to Bethlehem and find a man there named Jesse. God said, “I have

provided for myself a king from among his sons.” This took a little subterfuge to avoid being found out by Saul, the current king, who would not be pleased to know God’s prophet was recruiting his replacement. As a pretext Samuel invited Jesse to participate in a sacrifice that gave Samuel the opportunity to meet Jesse’s sons. Jesse started by presenting the eldest son but Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this one.” Seven sons were presented and each time Samuel said, “Nope, not him. Next!” After meeting seven sons Samuel asked “Is that it? Do you have any more sons?” At that point Jesse said, “Well, there is the youngest boy who is out tending sheep.” It’s interesting that when asked to produce all his sons Jesse brought forth all except David. There seemed to be an assumption that David didn’t count...that it wouldn’t be him. The story is driving towards a point. Who is this next king? Who is David? David was a nobody in the eyes of his society. A kid, the youngest son of a local farmer in a small village. No royal bloodline. No status. No record of accomplishments. Why him? When Samuel first saw the eldest son Eliab, Samuel noted that Eliab was tall, sturdy, handsome and looked the part of a king. He thought to himself, “this must be the one.” But we hear God whisper to the prophet Samuel, “It’s not the outward appearance that matters. The Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16.7). The Lord looks at the heart. The Old Testament sense of “heart” speaks to the core of one’s being. Speaks to one’s essence and character. As Jesus would teach 1,000 years later, “The good person out of the treasure of the heart produces good” (Luke 6.45). The beliefs, values and priorities of a person with a good heart leads to that person doing good things...doing right in the eyes of the Lord.

So why choose David? Of all the people of the 12 tribes of Israel God saw something vital, crucial, faithful in David. Unique. And we are not told at all at this point in the story what those qualities were...what it was about David’s heart that made him stand out for God. But if we look ahead at David’s story we discover some of those qualities emerging out of the story. To begin with, David was clearly ambitious. We see this early on in the David and Goliath story. At his father’s direction David went down to the battlefield with food for his brothers. While mingling among the soldiers David overheard that Saul would provide wealth and the hand of Saul’s daughter in marriage for any Israelite who killed Goliath. Intrigued, David sought clarification. “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine?” The story says he went on to ask others the same question and he got the same answer. So David volunteered to take on Goliath. Ambition. As the story of David moves on we discover that he was an exceptional military commander and charismatic leader. Saul in time placed David in charge of a battalion and David had much success in the campaign against the Philistines. Consequently, people sang songs about David. “Saul has killed thousands and David his ten thousands” they sang. He could earn people’s respect, trust and loyalty. Early on we also see David’s sensitivity. King Saul likely had a mental illness. David played the lyre. David was able to play music in such a soothing way that it calmed Saul. David was also loyal to others. As the story moves on a jealous Saul tried a few times to kill David, but failed. David, in contrast, had two opportunities to kill Saul but chose not to. And even though Saul pursued him mercilessly as a threat to his throne, upon Saul’s death David mourned him deeply. Loyalty. But most importantly David had a deep abiding faith. As you read through First and Second Samuel you hear David’s contemplations of God...even conversations with God. The depth of David’s faithfulness to God is made most evident for us through the psalms that make it so clear that David had a heart for God. As the

prophet Samuel was looking at the sons of Jesse, wondering which one was to be the next king of the people of Israel, God whispered to Samuel, "It's not the outward appearance that matters. The Lord looks on the heart." God knew David's heart. God knew the man this teenager would one day become. When David was presented to Samuel God spoke to his prophet, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." Samuel anointed David to be the next king of Israel in the presence of David's family. And this part of the story ends with this detail: "And the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward." David had a heart for God, would walk with God, had the good heart to be king. And God partnered with David for the upcoming journey of his life.

God partnered with David in a history-changing way for the people of Israel. This is crucial too in the whole scope of Biblical history. 21 chapters after David's anointing we hear how God made a covenant with David. And in that covenant God bound Godself to David and his descendants in a permanent way. In Second Samuel chapter 7 we hear how God directed his prophet Nathan to go to (now) King David and disclose God's promises to him. "Thus says the Lord God: I took you out of the pastures and from your sheep to make you king of Israel. I have gone with you everywhere. I have helped you be victorious in battle. I will make you a great name, among the greatest names in history. Your kingdom, your house and your descendants shall be made sure forever before me, and your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7). God was making a huge, huge commitment to David.

What God had in mind with David is pretty reminiscent of what God had in mind with Abraham. Through Abraham God intended a history changing move. God made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would become as numerous as the stars of the sky. And God's purpose in this was to see Abraham's descendants form a nation to be a "light to all nations"...to be a people who could show the world how God would have all peoples live. Now here, through David, God was intending another history-changing move. The people of Israel had been in the promised land for some 200 years, but it had been 200 years of warfare. It had also been 200 years of tribal division. In God's covenant with David we hear God's promises to the people of Israel: I will plant my people in the land, I will give them peace from their enemies, they will be disturbed no more, I will give my people rest. God's intention through David's reign was to unify the people of Israel, to finally possess the promised land, and to set them up in a way that they could better fulfill God's hope for them to be that "a light to the world."

How did it work out for God's hopes in David's reign? On the whole, pretty well! David, for the first time in Jewish history, truly unified the 12 tribes. He extended the borders of their territory to the greatest limits they possessed in history. They did know times of peace, but not prolonged.

As for the eternal reign of David's kingdom? 250 years after David's death the prophet Isaiah would say, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in a land of deep darkness, on them light has shined!...For a child has been born to us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders. And he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually and there shall be

endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom...The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this" (Isaiah 9). Familiar words.

Through Jesus (the root of Jesse, called the son of David) we have been unified, incorporated into his eternal kingdom, given the promise of peace. We too are called to have the good heart God wishes to see. We too are called to be a light to the world.