

STUDY 6

1 Samuel 16 - 17

The LORD's choice

Just for starters

As a child did you ever make a bold claim? How close was it to the truth?

Enter the shepherd boy

Read 1 Samuel 16

Samuel's regard for Saul

When the elders of Israel asked for a king Samuel was grieved, for the people had rejected his sons and the LORD (1 Sam 8.1-9). However, when Saul was chosen as king, Samuel was just as impressed by his appearance as the rest of the people (10.24). Samuel was particularly fond of Saul; not only did he clearly specify Saul's duties as king (10.25), but when the LORD rejected Saul, Samuel took it hard. He cried to the LORD all night (15.11), and even went along with Saul when he sought the people's approval (15.30-31), thus keeping Saul's rejection from public knowledge. We can understand, therefore, why Samuel feels dejected at the beginning of chapter 16.

1. What was Samuel's purpose in going to Bethlehem? Why was he afraid? (16.1-5)
2. Why does the LORD rebuke Samuel? (16.6-7)
3. How does David compare with Saul? (16.10-13, see also 13.14; 15.28)

'After God's own heart'

The LORD gave Saul to the people of Israel as the king they were looking for. In 1 Sam 13.14, however, Samuel contrasts Saul with the man who was to succeed him. David is the king whom the LORD is looking for. The phrase 'a man after God's own heart' almost sounds like David can take all the credit for his own choice. However, the original Hebrew phrase implies that David is a man of God's heart's liking. In other words, when the LORD chooses David, he does not go along with popular choice, but with his own personal preference.

Think it through

4. What is the role of God's Spirit in 16.13-14? How is this significant?

The Boy Wonder

Read 1 Samuel 17.1-58

Field of Blood

At the beginning of chapter 17, the Philistines and the Israelites have come head to head on their common border. The fact that the Philistines are still a problem reflects poorly on Saul's leadership. The two nations confront each other at a place called Ephes Dammim, which literally means 'field of blood'—a very suggestive name.

Investigate

5. Who is the logical choice to fight Goliath? Why? (1 Sam 10.23-24; 17.4-7)

6. What action does Saul take in response to the situation? (17.25, 38-39)

7. What action does David take in response to the situation? (17.32, 39-40, 48-51)

Think it through

8. What motivates Saul's actions throughout this episode? How would you characterise him? (17.11, 25, 38; see also 15.30)

9. What motivates David's actions throughout this episode? How would you characterise him? (17.26, 37, 45-47)

10. Compare the two 'baggage incidents' in 10.22-24 and 17.22. What do these tell us about Saul and David?

The Good Shepherd

The LORD chose David while he was a shepherd looking after his father's sheep. David's commitment to the flock is shown by the lengths he went to in order to protect it—he even fought off lions and bears. No ordinary shepherd would have gone to such lengths.

Interestingly, the leaders of Israel, especially the kings, are called 'shepherds' of God's people throughout the Old Testament. The state of the 'flock' depended on how well they shepherded them (see Ezek 34). In the New Testament, Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd (John 10.11). But he goes one better than David. Not only does Jesus defend the flock, but he even lays down his life for his sheep.

Investigate

11. What is threatening about David's appearance before Goliath? (17.41-44)

12. What is threatening about David's words to Goliath? (17.45-47)

13. What is the outcome of this duel? (17.50)

Think it through

14. What should the Israelites learn from David's victory?

Someone to emulate?

For centuries Christians have been called on to emulate David and his bold faith against Goliath—to show confidence in God in the face of such terrible circumstances. However, while Christians should certainly display faith in God in any situation, this misses the point of the David and Goliath story.

David is the LORD's anointed. God had chosen him for the express purpose of saving God's people from the hands of their enemies. This is not an example that any Christian can live up to. Every Christian is a helpless sinner who, on their own, is unable to help themselves, let alone defeat their enemies—the world, sin and the death.

Jesus, however, fits the bill perfectly. He is the one whom God anointed to save his people (Matt 1.21); he is the one who has bravely overcome the world (John 16.33), all sin (Heb 4.15) and death (2 Tim 1.10), granting victory to his otherwise helpless people. If anything, Christians are called on to emulate the Israelites sitting on the hill—watching and enjoying the spoils of the victory (cf. 1 John 5.5). As such, David is not necessarily the example for all Christians to follow; rather, he is a Christ-figure. Through David's actions, we come to understand and appreciate exactly who Jesus (a descendant of David) is and what he has done.

15. When we face life's challenges, our response can be quite extreme, from feeble passivity to commando-like control freak. In light of your last personal struggle, where do you sit on this spectrum? What can you learn from the Israelites' response to David's victory (17.52-53)?