GOD'S PERFECT CHOICE

Just a quick summary of where we have been in the O.T. book of First Samuel the last few weeks. Samuel was God's appointed leader for the nation of Israel and he served well in that position for 40 years. He was a prophet, a priest and a judge. He was God's man and the nation experienced spiritual revival under his leadership. Well the people came to Samuel and demanded a king. They wanted to be like all the other nations around them. They no longer wanted God to be their King. They wanted a human king. So God told Samuel to give them what they wanted. Samuel warned the people about the consequences of their request for a king, but they insisted. So Samuel sought out a king. And God led him to Saul. Saul was an impressive man physically. He was tall and handsome and he looked like a king. And Saul started out well. At first we see several good attributes in Saul. He was humble, trusted God, generous, energized and inspired. He even prophesied for God at times. He showed himself to be a brave and capable warrior. He started off well – a strong leader and embraced by the people.

But in life it isn't just about how you start out. It's helpful to start off on the right foot. But what matters is how you progress thru life, the choices you make, your response to failure and disappointment, the opportunities you seize, the lives you impact, and how well you finish. It all matters. All [however many] years that God gives you on this earth. And over time (the first 20-30 years of Saul's reign) he began to decline spiritually. In last week's lesson we pointed out several of the wrong choices he made. He became full of himself. He became arrogant. He began to see himself as a hero and even built a monument to himself (1 Sam 15:12). He began to think that he knew better what to do than God did. HE was the king and HE was going to do things HIS way. In fact, he just decided to do his own thing and when confronted about it, he denied any wrongdoing and justified his actions. He argued with God. Finally God had enough. God told Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments” (1 Sam 15:11). Then later when Samuel finally confronts Saul he tells him: "You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel" (1 Sam 15:26).

Before we move forward into Chapter 16 let me ask you a question. Was Saul God's choice to be king over Israel? YES (10:24) and NO (12:13). Explain. It was not God's perfect will, but His permissive will. Given that, however, God did lead Samuel to Saul in 9:15-17.

So if Saul was God's choice back in Chapters 9 and 10, why is God now rejecting Saul as king? Disobedience. Saul's heart had turned away from following God. He (Saul) is in charge and not God. So God rejects Saul and leads Samuel to anoint a new king.

We know that the new king is going to be David because we've read this before. But as Chapter 16 opens Samuel is still quite upset about how Saul turned out and that God had rejected him. He hasn't really given much thought as to who the new king will be. Frankly, Samuel is afraid to proceed with finding a new king because of what Saul might do if he got wind of it. So Samuel is filled with a lot of different emotions. He really needs some direction from God.

READ 1 Samuel 16:1.

“Get over it, Samuel. It's time to move on!” And God directs Samuel where to go to find the new king. At this point Samuel has no idea who the new king is going to be, but God knows. God already has someone in mind… “For I have provided for myself a king…” The NASB says, “For I have selected a king.” The NIV says, “For I have chosen.” The Hebrew word used in this text is a complex word but at its root it means, “To see.” It isn't just that God knows who the new king is going to be. He is God's choice.

READ 1 Samuel 16:2-3.

Samuel is concerned about Saul and probably for good reason. But God is not. In fact, God doesn't even mention Saul. He tells Samuel, “You just go to Bethlehem on official business - take your anointing oil and a heifer and make a sacrifice to the Lord.” Totally legitimate, nothing deceitful. God is perfectly capable of protecting Samuel and the Lord's anointed from any harm. And we know that He does. God says, “You invite Jesse and his family to the sacrifice and I will show you who to anoint.”

And Samuel does as he is instructed… READ 1 Samuel 16:4

When I was studying this lesson I was amused by all the conjectures about why the elders would be fearful of Samuel. To me it is rather obvious if you read this in context. What just happened at the end of Chapter 15? What did Samuel do in verse 33? If a 90+ year old prophet of God hacked up a pagan king in public don't you think word would have spread about that? The elders of Bethlehem weren't sure why Samuel was coming to their town but in light of what happened to King Agag they wanted to make sure they weren't in some kind of trouble. So they ask Samuel, “Do you come in peace?”

READ 1 Samuel 16:5

Samuel tells them he comes in peace and that his purpose is to sacrifice to the Lord. He instructs the elders to sanctify themselves, spiritual preparation (ritual cleansing, putting on clean garments and so forth) for worship.

The parade of Jesse's sons is about to begin. One of these boys will be the one God chooses to be the new king…

READ 1 Samuel 16:6-7

Eliab is first to stand before Samuel. We find out in Chapter 17 that he is the oldest of Jesse's sons. And, like Saul, Eliab is probably very king-like in appearance. He's tall, handsome, and muscular and looks the part. But God makes it clear to Samuel that Eliab is not the one.

Verse 7 is one of the most quoted O.T. passages and it really is a great verse. We humans tend to look a lot at outward appearances and we far too often pass judgments about people from that. But God looks inside a person. When it says “the Lord looks on the heart” it means that God sees person's character. He sees the real person. He's not fooled. He can see right through hypocrisy and evil motives. He's God.

Matthew 6:1. God knows a person's true motives.

Mathew 7:15 Outward appearances can be deceiving.

Luke 16:15. God knows a man's heart.

So the presentation of Jesse's sons before Samuel continues from older to younger…

READ 1 Samuel 16:8-10

None of Jesse's 7 sons proves to be God's man. So what is a prophet to do? Samuel asks Jesse the obvious question…

READ 1 Samuel 16:11-13

The Lord tells Samuel, “Anoint him, for this is he.” “He's the one.” So Samuel anoints David as the new king in the presence of David's family. Notice that this is a private anointing. Not a whole lot of fanfare. This is actually the first of three times that David will be anointed (see 2 Samuel 2:4 and 5:3).

“And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.” In O.T. times the Holy Spirit would “come upon” and empower individuals temporarily to fulfill a purpose God had at that time. The Holy Spirit did not permanently indwell believers as He does today. So the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, comes upon David after he is anointed as the new king. David is around 12 years of age when this happens. This passage indicates that the Holy Spirit is “upon David from that day forward.” He took control of David and did not depart from him. David was empowered by the Holy Spirit for the work of ruling God's people just as Saul had been (10:10).

In the very next verse we see a stark contrast between David and Saul.

READ 1 Samuel 16:14-15. So just as quickly as the Holy Spirit comes upon David, He departs from Saul. This is very important to understand. It explains a lot about what transpires later between David and Saul. So one big difference between David and Saul moving forward is that David is being controlled by the Holy Spirit and Saul is not.

After the Holy Spirit leaves Saul, he is vulnerable to demonic attack. Verses 14, 15, 16 and 23 mention a “harmful spirit from the Lord” that terrorized or tormented Saul. The KJV, NASB, NIV all say, “An evil spirit from the Lord.” I believe that Saul comes under attack by Satan or one of his demons (an evil spirit). “From the Lord” means that God permits it. We know from reading the book of Job that Satan and his cohorts are not free to do whatever evil they want to do to God's people. They must get permission from God. In Saul's case God gives permission for demonic attack and I believe that this serves God's purpose as an instrument of judgment on Saul. And right off the bat Saul's servants notice it.

READ 1 Samuel 16:16-23

So, what do you think? Is it just a strange coincidence that David is the one who is selected by Saul's servants to come to the palace and play music to sooth Saul's tormented soul? No, I don't believe this is a coincidence. I see it as divinely directed, evidence of God's sovereignty at work. David is a shepherd…12-13 years old! What does he know about being a king? At this point, nothing. But as he gains access to the palace and to King Saul he slowly begins to learn. He becomes familiar with palace life and some of the things the king has to do from day to day. He observes and he learns. This is all a part of God's big plan getting David ready to rule. You could say that, unknown to Saul, David, the Lord's anointed, has been given a temporary apprenticeship position under King Saul.

Here is the timeline for David's future kingdom: David is anointed as king here in Chapter 16 (1029 B.C.) It will be another 18 years before David is anointed a second time and begins to rule the tribe of Judah from Hebron. During that time Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, reigns over the rest of the tribes of Israel (1011 B.C.). It is not until 1004 B.C. that David becomes king over a united Israel and moves the capital to Jerusalem.

So, from the time David is anointed by Samuel here in Chapter 16 to when he begins to rule Israel from Jerusalem is 25 years!

Application: Both David and Saul were God's choice as kings of Israel. Both started out OK, but only one finished well. God rejected Saul because of his disobedience and a heart removed further from God. David had his issues like Saul but what a difference in how the two men dealt with their sin. David is known as a man after God's own heart. Saul argued, David repented. Saul denied, David acknowledged. Saul bragged. David wept. My admonition to all of us (we are also God's choice, His elect) as we head down the home stretch of our life – finish well.

May we like the Apostle Paul be able to say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:7). Stay the course! Be faithful to whatever God has for you to do. Finish well!