16-22 June 2024 Changed and being changed

1 Samuel 15: 34 -16:13

# **New International Version**

**34**Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. **35**Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

### Samuel Anoints David

**16**The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

**2**But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

The Lord said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’ **3**Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

**4**Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

**5**Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

**6**When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed stands here before the Lord.”

**7**But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

**8**Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this one either.” **9**Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the Lord chosen this one.” **10**Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen these.” **11**So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

**12**So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

**13**So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

**Bible notes**

Israelite elders asked Samuel for a king. Saul was identified and anointed, but his kingship turned out to be unsatisfactory. The long saga of the books of Samuel and Kings has a single criterion for evaluating the success of kingship: is the king wholeheartedly committed to worshipping Israel’s one God, who is identified as his Father (Psalm 2:7)? Because Saul does not live up to this, especially over his treatment of the Amalekites after victory in battle (see chapter 15), God withdraws favour and the search for a new king is on.

Samuel, at home in Ramah near Bethlehem, mourns the end of his relationship with Saul, and God too is sorry. Saul’s shortcomings as leader grieve them both; the narrative does not address the wider theological questions about why God chose Saul and why this calling broke down. The pause to mark this sorrow is only brief, and the story moves on – change is urgently needed.

For Samuel, Bethlehem was just another insignificant place in Judea. Its fame arose from what he would do there: anoint David as king. Its resonance in Christian tradition also arises from this anointing – Jesus, Son of David, was born in David’s hometown. Samuel’s action changed human history in the short- and long-term. Samuel’s arrival in Bethlehem alarmed the elders – was he coming to challenge them? His reassurance was in line with God’s advice (v.2) but did not reveal the real purpose of his visit. It is not clear whether Jesse is one of the community’s leaders; in any case, his status is not relevant alongside the overwhelming reality of God’s choice. This is reiterated with the rejection of one son after another, all fine young men who might, in Samuel’s eyes, have been suitable. They shared a handsome appearance with Saul, but this was no longer relevant to God’s purposes.

The choice eventually fell on David, the last-born. He was still a boy (17:33; cf 3:1), and an eighth son in a society that recognised seven as the ‘perfect’ number. He had the menial task of keeping the sheep, though this also recalls the lifestyle of Abraham and Moses. This focus on his insignificance fits in a pattern of unexpected choices: why was Jacob chosen over his older brother, or Joseph over his brothers? Change for the better flows from God’s initiative, not human preference; and so David was anointed with oil and received the spirit of the Lord.

**Reflection**

Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.

Your mission, should you choose to accept it…’ was an invitation to embark on a high-risk mission, with minimal briefing. Perhaps God’s invitation to Samuel was similar: ‘Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you…’ This highlights the way God chooses to work with human beings to bring about change – it’s all about co-operation. But what if the person (in this case, Samuel) refuses? Samuel is reluctant, but God reassures him, then ‘Samuel did what the Lord commanded’. Might we sense a nudge from God to change, or to bring about change? How will we respond?

Questions for reflection

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

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**Questions**

* How have you changed in the past few years? Are any of these changes a result of your faith?
* Can you recall a testimony (perhaps your own) of someone whose life has been transformed due to their faith in Jesus?
* What small changes could you make this week that will make a positive impact on others?

##  Prayer

Adapt to your local context.

Samuel anointed David with oil. From that day on he was a changed man, powerfully filled with your Spirit. We thank you, Lord, that when we trust you, that can be our experience too.
When we are prepared to change, you change us.
‘Changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before you,
lost in wonder, love and praise.’
**Amen.**

 **A prayer to end the Bible study**

Thank you, Lord, that you love us and you can change us:
help us to trust you this week.
Thank you, Lord, that you love this world and you can change it:
help us to work with you this week.
**Amen.**