

God's Search for a Mediator

The Book of Samuel

^{1 Sam.2:18} Now Samuel was ministering before the LORD, as a boy wearing a linen ephod...And the boy Samuel grew before the LORD. ²² Now Eli was very old; and he heard all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting. ²³ He said to them, 'Why do you do such things, the evil things that I hear from all these people?' ²⁴ No, my sons; for the report is not good which I hear the LORD'S people circulating. ²⁵ If one man sins against another, God will mediate for him; but if a man sins against the LORD, who can intercede for him?' ... ²⁷ Then a man of God came to Eli and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD ...' ³⁴ This will be the sign to you which will come concerning your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas: on the same day both of them will die. ³⁵ But I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in My heart and in My soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before My anointed always.

^{16:1} Now the LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons.' ² But Samuel said, 'How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me.' And the LORD said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.' ³ You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you.' ⁴ So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, 'Do you come in peace?' ⁵ He said, 'In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶ When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, 'Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him.' ⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.' ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, 'The LORD has not chosen this one either.' ⁹ Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'The LORD has not chosen this one either.' ¹⁰ Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, 'The LORD has not chosen these.' ¹¹ And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are these all the children?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.' Then Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.' ¹² So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah. ¹⁴ Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. ¹⁵ Saul's servants then said to him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. ¹⁶ Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well.' ¹⁷ So Saul said to his servants, 'Provide for me now a man who can play well and bring him to me.' ¹⁸ Then one of the young men said, 'Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man; and the LORD is with him.' ¹⁹ So Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, 'Send me your son David who is with the flock.' ²⁰ Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread and a jug of wine and a young goat, and sent them to Saul by David his son. ²¹ Then David came to Saul and attended him; and Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor bearer. ²² Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David now stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight.' ²³ So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

Small Group Leader notes

1. Give context
 - a. Israel is searching for a king, but God is searching for a mediator, someone to represent him to the people; see 1 Samuel 2:18 – 35 to see how the house of Eli is going to fail, and how God will begin looking for another. Samuel will emerge, but his sons won't measure up either. Who will be after Samuel?
 - b. Samuel is now an old man. God has already declared to Samuel that he will find another king. Saul is middle-aged, and also knows that God will find another king.
2. Questions
 - a. An evil spirit from the LORD? (1) It may have been identified that way because of the effect that it had on Saul. (2) It may have been a genuinely evil spirit that was drawn to Saul like other evil spirits were apparently drawn to other human kings. In this case, it would be important to say that the spirit had a specific role – it was probably reminding Saul that he was no longer going to be king, and that explains why Saul was terrorized. (3) We nevertheless must see the overall story and how God was trying to heal Saul through David.
3. What was this like for Samuel?
 - a. Why does Samuel look at outward appearances first? Because leadership in every culture has certain 'nice' things associated with it: good looks, age, birth order, etc.
 - i. Illus: Every U.S. President has had better teeth than the other candidates.
 - ii. Samuel probably wondered, 'It makes sense for the eldest to be anointed king because everyone looks up to him anyway; if a younger one is selected to be king, what happens at family gatherings?'
 - b. But God was looking for someone with his heart, which is an invisible quality that eventually appears as character. What is that heart?
4. Here's what that heart isn't. Let's look at Saul. What was this like for Saul?
 - a. He knew he was not going to be king for much longer, because God had told him so (through Samuel). He was an insecure person, though, and was becoming increasingly paranoid, terrorized. He had wrapped his identity around his role as king, with power, and was terrified of losing it.
 - b. He was comforted by the Spirit of the LORD through David. Notice in v.14, the Spirit comes on David and in v.15 leaves Saul, perhaps at the same moment. So Saul had lost the anointing. But God is still trying to reach Saul, show him grace and mercy, though David.
 - c. God was also introducing him to David under the best possible conditions for Saul to accept David as his replacement. Saul had the choice to like David and be glad that David was his successor. Instead, Saul chooses to use David for his own ends.
5. What was it like for David?
 - a. He seems to have been disregarded by his family, as the youngest, and perhaps as the least of eight brothers.
 - i. Key lesson: To learn to receive your identity and worth from God and practice it, in spite of the fact that you're not recognized by people
 - b. Right after he's anointed to be king, he's called in to be a 'comforter' to a king who is increasingly paranoid.
 - i. David is the 'mediator' for God (not a disinterested third party, but an advocate for God appealing to Saul) who stands before the 'anointed' – Saul. This is a curious fulfillment of 2:25 and 2:35. God is developing David into this person. How appropriate that David would later become the Psalmist who, through his music and writings, helps many others come to God!
 - ii. Key lesson: Spiritual leadership is about learning to have God's heart for those who are difficult: a difficult supervisor, parent, friend, or even adversary. We have to learn to pray for someone, and develop God's heart for them, even if they don't like us.
 - iii. Reflection question: Who is it right now that is your 'Saul'?