

1 SAMUEL—WEEK 11

NEXT!



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

Saul's sin puts an end to his dynasty, though he's still king for the moment.

But Samuel anoints David as king. Then the LORD sends a bad spirit to torment Saul, and, coincidentally, David's playing of the lyre is the "cure" for Saul's torment. Thus, an unexpected bond forms.

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We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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1 1 Samuel 15:10–19 (ESV)

The word of the LORD came to Samuel: “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.”

Saul failing to follow the LORD’s command to destroy everything of the Amalekites is bad, but his arguing with Samuel about it, instead of falling down in repentance, is worse.

Saul’s lack of repentance goes hand in hand with his disobedience. He has the wrong perspective on who he is, who God is, and what Samuel’s role is in this.

That’s a fatal error. He definitely shouldn’t be the king of Israel.

Such a wrong perspective is a fatal error in us too.

But it’s different; it’s fixable. Christians learn. Christians grow. Our faith evolves.

This is where doctrine matters. Many churches are great at making new Christians, but that’s all they ever are. They never lose that new Christian excitement, but they never learn the difficult truths.

A correct understanding of God should be taught, but there’s a catch. God is complicated; new Christians must be eased into the full truth. Tough doctrines (e.g., God’s eternal decree) are not for beginners.

I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, — 1 Corinthians 3:2 (ESV)

Christian education needs to be structured so that students don’t end up in the wrong class.

2 1 Samuel 15:22–33 (ESV)

And Samuel said,

*“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?*

*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.*

*For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.”*

Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD.” And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.” As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God.” So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

Samuel crushes Saul’s claim that he “*obeyed the voice of the LORD*” by declaring his rebellion to be as evil as divination. At last Saul repents, but it sounds more like he’s sorry that he got caught rather than real repentance. So Samuel repeats, “*the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.*”

As Samuel turns to leave, Saul clings to him, tearing his robe. Samuel snaps at Saul, but then something strange happens. Saul asks only for honor so he can bow before the LORD, and Samuel relents.

Saul still only really cares about his own dignity, but Samuel grants him that.

There’s a curious parallel between this section of scripture and the fall. Just as God’s death sentence on Adam wasn’t immediately executed, so the end of Saul’s reign will come later. Both are declarations of the ultimate outcome, not of the moment.

Saul’s dynasty is done, but Saul is not.

3 1 Samuel 15:34–16:5

Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house at Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless Samuel mourned for Saul, and the LORD regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel.

Now the LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.”

And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.”

But the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ Then invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; you shall anoint for Me the one I name to you.”

So Samuel did what the LORD said, and went to Bethlehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, “Do you come peaceably?”

And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons, and invited them to the sacrifice.

Why is Samuel grieving over Saul? Nothing is his fault. God told him to anoint Saul. God caused the lot to fall to Saul so that the people declared him king. Samuel did exactly what the LORD commanded him to do. So why is he grieving?

Who wouldn't? It's sad. Just as a teacher will grieve over a student who, through no fault of the teacher's, flunks out, so Samuel grieves over what might have been.

And Saul is more than just any old student; he's Samuel's main “project”. Samuel has a lot invested in Saul—and Israel (which needs a good king).

So, he's heartbroken.

This is an important part of being a Christian. Our heart needs to be in the things we do for the Lord.

This isn't easy. It's a sacrifice. We lay our hearts on the altar and run the risk that we'll be hurt.

This is in stark contrast to the secular methods for helping people. Psychology texts mention the value of insulating oneself from a “case”. Volunteers are sometimes similarly trained. It protects them.

But it makes them less effective. Christians who do “bolder” ministry, like prison ministry or helping severely hurt people, can be far more effective than secular counselors because of their heart.

You can't fake this. They can tell.

4 1 Samuel 16:6–13 (ESV)

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.” Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him, for this is he.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Jesse and David’s brothers have to be in shock. David isn’t paraded in front of Samuel because he’s “obviously” not the guy. He’s just a dumb shepherd. His big brothers have presumably been picking on him for years.

Then Samuel, who has a rock-solid reputation as a prophet of the LORD, anoints David. They can’t write this off as a mistake; prophets don’t make mistakes. (One wrong pronouncement by a “prophet” proves he’s a fake. That’s pretty much a capital offense.)

Then *Samuel rose up and went to Ramah*. He just walks away, leaving everyone with their mouths hanging open—and David with *the Spirit of the LORD*.

That spirit might come in handy right away. Just imagine his brothers asking him, “What was that?”

This kind of thing happens to us a lot. God has a way of dropping truth bombs without explanation, leaving us wondering, “What was that?” This seems to be part of His teaching style.

The big mistake in such situations is to forget God. When we’re taken by surprise by some turn of events, we’re consumed by dealing with what’s happening. That can distract us from our relationship with the One from whom all blessings flow. We underrecognize His hand in things.

But if we can keep our wits about us, and see things with clear eyes, we might glean something useful.

Still, this might take a while. Our eyes may not clear until the dust has settled. That can even take years.

However, the quicker this happens, the better. We should remind ourselves often, especially when things are calm, that God is running the show. With practice, one can be more mindful of God—to see God’s hand in all things

Be a student of life.

5 1 Samuel 16:14–23 (NIV)

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

Saul’s attendants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the lyre. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better.”

So Saul said to his attendants, “Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.”

One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.”

Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, “Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.” So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul.

David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, “Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him.”

Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

The Hebrew word that’s translated as “evil” (רָעָה, ra-ah) is translated as “harmful” in the ESV and “distressing” in the NKJV. They’re using the context to refine the meaning; “evil” is more literal.

But ra-ah just means “bad”—the opposite of good. When food spoils, it’s ra-ah. The NIV’s translation highlights the fact that God sent the spirit to torment Saul.

God didn’t just “allow” the spirit to torment Saul; it was “from” Him. This shoots down the notion that God isn’t directly involved in any unpleasanties.

He has higher purposes.

And those higher purposes come crashing through in the next few paragraphs. David’s skill playing the lyre leads to an awesome plot twist. It’s just the ticket for treating Saul’s torment.

And notice this little tidbit. *Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.*

David’s music didn’t just make Saul feel better; it actually chased the “bad” spirit away. That’s not because bad spirits can’t stand music. It’s by design—God’s design.

And so, Saul, clueless as ever, forms a bond with his successor.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Which Christian doctrine is most difficult for you?
2. When have you been slow to recognize an error?
3. When have you put your heart into a "project"?
4. When have you been slow to recognize the hand of God in something?
5. Have you discovered God's design in something long after it was over?

Items for prayer: