

1 SAMUEL 16

16:1–3

The words the Lord used in verse 1 to call Samuel to go and anoint another king—“How long wilt thou mourn for Saul”—show that the prophet had not reconciled himself to Saul’s rejection, that he continued to mourn for him, and perhaps that he mourned for the children of Israel and was concerned about them.

The Lord instructed Samuel to take a horn of oil to anoint a new king. In the ancient Near East, horns were used as a convenient tool for carrying water. This narrative also indicated that horns were used to carry oil for consecration. In this capacity, there is a clear symbolic connection to the horns of the altar of the tabernacle. The original altar was made of wood and had four carved horns, one at each corner.¹ Before the altar was used to offer sacrifices to the Lord, it and the tabernacle were anointed with oil to consecrate them.²

This chapter, in which Samuel anoints a new king, begins the narrative that culminates in the anointing of the promised Messiah, a descendant of King David, centuries later.³ The new Israelite king, David, the

¹ See Exodus 27:1–2: “And thou shalt make an altar. . . . And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof.” See also Jeremiah 23:5: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth”; Jeremiah 30:9: “But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them”; Ezekiel 34:23–24: “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.”

² See Exodus 30:25–29: “And thou shalt make it an oil of holy ointment . . . : it shall be an holy anointing oil. And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, . . . and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels. . . . And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy.”

³ See Isaiah 11:1: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots”; Romans 15:12: “There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust”; 2 Nephi 21:10: “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his crest shall be glorious.”

son of Jesse became the symbol of anointed Israelite kingship for centuries to come, also symbolizing the coming Messiah and His authority.⁴

16:4

Samuel's reputation preceded him, and the town elders were afraid that he had come to condemn them. Preparing for this, the Lord had told Samuel to take a heifer with him to offer as a sacrifice, giving the prophet and Jesse's household an excuse to sit down together until the Lord could direct Samuel to find the next king.

16:7–11

When Saul had been chosen as the first king of Israel, the text made it clear that he was taller than all the other Israelites. In direct contrast, the Lord now instructed Samuel to ignore the outward signs. The Lord would pick David based on his desire to obey and serve the Lord. The new king wouldn't be the tallest of Jesse's sons, or even the firstborn son.

David, the youngest son, was left out of the initial gathering and sacrifice since he had responsibilities tending the sheep. This creates another symbol of family lineage that would point to the coming Messiah and the connection with the Savior as the good shepherd.

16:12

David was described having a "beautiful countenance" that was "goodly to look at" and "ruddy." These words are used as rhetorical devices to highlight the hero of the story. The word "countenance" is a euphemism for the face. The term "ruddy" could refer to David's hair. Red or light-colored hair was not unknown in the ancient Near East.⁵

16:13

As he had done with Saul before, Samuel anointed David with oil as the new king of Israel. Oil has been used since antiquity to designate the consecration of an object into the service of the Lord. In Moses's

⁴ See Isaiah 16:5: "And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness."

⁵ One example from one excavation in Seila, Egypt, says, "Of the 37 adults . . . [t]here were 4 redheads, 16 blondes, 12 with light or medium brown hair, and only 5 with dark brown or black hair. C. Wilfred Griggs, "Excavating a Christian Cemetery Near Selia, in the Fayum Region of Egypt," in *Excavations at Seila, Egypt*, ed. C Wilfred Griggs (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 84.

time, priests were anointed with oil to serve in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle and everything in it were anointed as well.⁶ Anointing with oil in the New Testament also indicated a blessing for the sick (see Mark 6:13, for example).

The note that “the Spirit of the LORD came upon David” in this verse may indicate that David began to prophesy as Saul had before him. More likely, it indicates that the Lord had qualified David as the king by giving him the wisdom he would need to become the leader of the Israelites.

16:14–15

Note the contrast between Saul’s evil spirit with the Spirit of the Lord that blessed David. Saul had rejected the Lord and, because of it, was cut off from God’s inspiration and wisdom. Because Saul rejected the Lord and followed his own counsel, the Lord removed his blessing and cursed him instead. Apparently, Saul’s character changed as well to the point that his servants saw and recognized the change.

16:16–23

Saul was troubled by his guilt, and he had changed enough mentally and physically that his servants looked for someone to help him. David had gained a reputation as a musician but also as a “mighty valiant man” (verse 18). In later chapters, the author of 1 Samuel recorded David’s skill when David killed a lion and a bear. David’s reputation would eventually lead to his confrontation with the Philistine champion Goliath.

David’s skill with music is implied with the many psalms that are attributed to him. We may infer that some of his psalms, such as Psalm 23 (alluding to David’s understanding of shepherding), were already composed by this time.

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⁶ See Exodus 29:7: “Then shalt thou take the anointing oil, and pour it upon his head, and anoint him”; Exodus 30:30: “And thou shalt anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister unto me in the priest’s office”; Exodus 30:26–29: “And thou shalt anoint the tabernacle of the congregation therewith, and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all his vessels, and the candlestick and his vessels, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering with all his vessels, and the laver and his foot. And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.”

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