

The Story (9) – Young David

By Ashby Camp

Copyright © 2015 by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

I. Introduction

A. After a significant Philistine victory over Israel at Aphek (1 Samuel 4), which seems to have included destruction of the tabernacle at Shiloh (Jer. 7:12-15; Ps. 78:60), the people demanded a king. The first Israelite king, King Saul, was anointed king by the prophet Samuel (1 Samuel 10) around 1051 B.C. He was probably around 30 to 40 years old at the time.

B. Saul promptly defeated the Ammonites who were attacking Jabesh-gilead. That victory was followed by a very public affirmation at Gilgal of Saul's kingship (1 Samuel 11).

C. Later (1 Samuel 13) when Saul was doing battle with the Philistines he violated the Lord's command by offering a burnt offering rather than waiting for Samuel to arrive because he thought he needed to do so to keep his troops from abandoning him. Samuel rebuked him and told him his kingdom would now not continue, meaning he would have no dynasty; his descendants would not follow him on the throne.

D. In 1 Samuel 15 God rejected *Saul*, not just his descendants, from being king because Saul disobeyed him by keeping sheep and oxen from the defeated Amalekites and sparing their king from the death penalty. The die was cast at that point; Saul was finished as king.

E. Though he would continue for some years as the *de facto* king, his total reign being 40 years (Acts 13:21), he was removed as the ruler through a violent death around 1011 B.C. Philistine archers wounded him so severely that he fell on his sword deliberately (when his armor bearer refused to finish him off) in the hope of accelerating his death so as avoid being brutalized by the approaching Philistines.

F. 1 Chronicles 10:13 states: *So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance.* Speaking through the medium at Endor (1 Sam. 28:17-18), Samuel made clear that Saul's imminent death was the removal of his kingship promised in 1 Samuel 15 for sparing the Amalekites.

II. From David's Birth to His Anointing

A. David was born in Bethlehem around 1041 B.C. (being 30 when he came to the throne of Judah around 1011 B.C. – 2 Sam. 5:4), when Saul already had been ruling for about ten years. He was the youngest of Jesse's eight sons (one of whom presumably died after 1 Sam. 16:10, while young and without children, and thus was not counted in the reckoning of 1 Chron. 2:13-15).

B. After the prophet Samuel informed king Saul that God had taken the kingship from him, God instructed Samuel to go to Bethlehem to anoint as the next king one of the sons of Jesse. When Samuel saw Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, he assumed from his appearance that he was the one to be anointed, but God told Samuel in 1 Sam. 16:7: *"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."*

C. After Jesse's seven older sons came before Samuel and the Lord did not choose any of them, Samuel asked if all his sons were present. Jesse said the youngest was not present – he was out tending the sheep – and Samuel told him to send for him. God tells Samuel that David is the one, and Samuel anoints him with oil in the midst of his brothers. When he did so, the texts says (16:13) the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward.

D. Though David is described in 1 Sam. 16:12 as handsome with a healthy looking complexion, God had already made clear that his focus was the heart. Samuel had earlier said to King Saul: "But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people because you have not kept the Lord's command" (1 Sam. 13:14; see also, Acts 13:22).

E. David at this point is old enough to be able to tend the flocks on his own, but he is quite young since he is still described as a youth some time later when he confronts Goliath (1 Sam. 17:33, 42). Perhaps he was 12-14 years old when he is anointed and maybe 15-19 years old when he met Goliath. This would put the anointing at around 1028 B.C., when Saul had been reigning some 23 years.

III. From David's Anointing to the Philistine Exile

A. The judgment on Saul's disobedience that is reflected in the anointing of David as the next king continued with the departure of God's Spirit from Saul and the infliction on him of some kind of mental torment. This seems to be part of God's plan to acquaint David with life in the royal court in preparation for the role he would later fill.

B. David was known to be skilled in playing a stringed instrument called a lyre, and so he was sought out by Saul's servants to be a kind of therapist to soothe Saul's distress when the spirit afflicted him. David at that time had resumed his duties as a shepherd (1 Sam. 16:19). (The servant's description of David in 16:18 as a "man of war" may have been an embellished characterization based on David's family being known to produce men of war.)

C. David entered into Saul's service, and it served God's purpose for the spirit to cease tormenting Saul when David played. Saul loved David, and David became his armor bearer, someone who carried additional weapons for him.

D. In the next scene, 1 Samuel 17, David is back in Bethlehem tending Jesse's sheep (17:15). Something apparently happened that led to David's return, but we are not told anything about it. Maybe Saul felt well enough for long enough, as may be suggested by 1 Sam. 16:23b, that he no longer considered David's musical services necessary. That would make him more

amenable to allowing David to return if Jesse had requested it, perhaps because something had created an unusual need for David's help in the family.

E. Some three to five years after David left King Saul's court (he is still a youth) and returned to shepherding, the Philistines and Israelites were squared off at the Valley of Elah near Azekah. I suspect it was during these years of shepherding that David had killed both lions and bears in defense of his sheep (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Remember that the Spirit of the Lord had rushed on him in conjunction with his earlier anointing.

F. David's three oldest brothers were in Saul's army, and Jesse sent David to deliver some food for them. While there, David went up front to the battle lines and saw Goliath, this psychotic giant, step out from the Philistine side and shout his usual defiance.

1. The Israelites ran from Goliath in fear, and David, still a teenager, saw this as a disgrace on Israel. He asked, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam. 17:26).

2. This got back to Saul, who sent for David. When David told Saul he would fight Goliath, Saul said, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are but a youth, and he has been a fighting man from his youth." David told him that he had protected his sheep from a lion and a bear and said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Sam. 17:37). Now *that's* faith.

3. David went against Goliath with only a sling and five smooth stones. When Goliath saw he was only a youth, he was insulted. He said, "Come here, and I'll give your flesh to the birds of the air and beasts of the field!" David responded, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head" (1 Sam. 17:45-46). And, of course, that's precisely what he did.

4. As 17:55-58 indicate, Saul had forgotten who David's father was, perhaps because of the years that had elapsed, the multitude of people who were associated with the royal court, and the mental problems he had been experiencing. In any event, he was interested in that information because he had promised his daughter to the man who defeated Goliath and also had promised tax breaks for that person's father (17:25).

G. After this, David and Saul's son Jonathan, who was significantly older than David, became devoted friends. Saul again brought David into his court (18:2), but when the people began praising David more than they praised Saul, he became jealous of David.

H. During a spirit-induced bout of mental torment, David was playing the lyre, and Saul twice tried to kill him with his spear. Saul feared David because he knew the Lord was with him, so he made him a commander of a thousand troops to keep him away from him. But David had great success in that role, and his popularity increased even more.

I. Saul then plotted to have David killed by naming as the bride price for his daughter Michal a hundred Philistine foreskins. He hoped David would be killed in the attempt to collect them, but instead David brought him 200 foreskins. Saul gave Michal to David as a wife, but he was now even more opposed to David.

J. Saul instructed Jonathan and his servants to kill David. At Jonathan's request, David went into hiding and then returned when it seemed Jonathan had talked Saul out of harming him. But that did not last long. Saul again tried to pin David to the wall with a spear, which caused David to flee into the night. His wife Michal helped him in that escape.

K. David fled to the prophet Samuel and lived with him in Ramah (near Gibeah). When Saul sent men to capture him there, the Spirit of God fell on each of the detachments, and finally on Saul himself, preventing them from achieving their goal.

L. David fled from Ramah and managed to meet with Jonathan privately. Jonathan told him he would try to secure his safe return. That did not work, so David and Jonathan had to part company for good.

M. While on the run, David told Ahimelech, the priest in the town of Nob, that he was on secret business for the king, and for that reason Ahimelech gave him holy bread to eat and supplied him with Goliath's sword. Saul's chief herdsman, Doeg the Edomite, saw the priest helping David and reported that to Saul.

N. David fled from Nob to the Philistine city of Gath, but when the servants of Achish king of Gath reminded him that David was a renowned military man in Israel, David became afraid. (There is evidence that "Achish" was an official name or title for Philistine kings rather than a personal name, something like Pharaoh.) So much so that he pretended to be insane by scratching on the doors of the gate and drooling into his beard. The king was convinced David was a harmless nut and sent him away.

O. David then went to the cave of Adullam, where some four hundred debtors, fugitives, and political malcontents, gathered around him, and he became their commander. He then went to Mizpeh in Moab and left his parents in the protection of the king. Recall from our study of Ruth that David has roots in Moab. Moreover, Saul had already made war on Moab, so they probably figured that the rift between Saul and David might work to their advantage.

P. Saul summoned all the priests of Nob and then ordered Doeg the Edomite to slaughter them (when his guards refused to do so). Only Abiathar escaped and fled to David. While on the run, David's band, with assurances of victory from the Lord, defeated the Philistines who were attacking Keilah. Saul decided to attack David while he was in Keilah, but David and his men fled when David learned from the Lord that the people of Keilah would hand him over to Saul.

Q. Saul pursued David and his little men throughout the countryside. At one point, Saul went into a cave to go to the bathroom, but David and his men were hiding there. David very stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe that he had removed, and then after Saul left David went

out and explained to Saul how he had spared him. And for a time, Saul gave up the hunt and went home.

R. In 1 Samuel 25, Samuel dies. David is spared from taking revenge on an insulting and ungrateful man named Nabal by the wisdom and tact of Nabal's wife, Abigail. About ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal dead, and David ended up taking Abigail as a wife (and also Ahinoam of Jezreel). It is noted in 25:44 that Saul had given David's wife Michal to a man named Palti.

S. Saul was once again moved to pursue David, and David and his men once again spared Saul's life. David and Abishai crept into Saul's camp, aided by a deep sleep the Lord had brought on Saul and his men, and took the spear and jar of water that were next to Saul's head. They then went to the top of a hill and let it be known they could have killed Saul but did not. Saul was again moved to call off his pursuit of David.

IV. From the Philistine Exile to Saul's Death

A. By now David knew this respite would be temporary, that Saul at a deep level was intent on his death. So David and his 600 men went to Achish Ben-Maoch, king of Gath, as seeming deserters, and when Saul learned that David was in Gath he no longer pursued him. Like the Moabites, the Philistine king no doubt saw a possible advantage in the Saul-David split. (If "Achish" is indeed an official name or title then Achish *Ben-Maoch* need not be the same person as Achish in chapter 21 who sent David away as a nut case.)

B. David was given the town of Ziklag on the Philistine frontier, and from there he made raids on the Amelekites, the Geshurites, and the Girzites. He would bring the spoil to Achish, but he told him it came from raids on Judah, which reinforced the notion that David was fully at odds with his own people.

C. The Philistines gathered at Shunem for war against Israel, and Israel's forces under Saul were camped at Gilboa. Saul was afraid, and the Lord would not answer any of his inquiries.

1. So he disguised himself and went to a woman at Endor who was believed to be able to consult the dead. God gave the woman a vision of Samuel rising up from the ground, and when she described him to Saul he knew it was Samuel and bowed in homage. Samuel let him know that he and his sons would die the next day and Israel would be defeated by the Philistines. This was the promised removal of him from the kingship as punishment for his disobedience in sparing the Amelekites in 1 Samuel 15.

2. Prior to moving from their staging area at Aphek to their position at Shunem, we are told in 1 Samuel 29 that other Philistine leaders overruled Achish and refused to allow David and his men to join them. They suspected that David would turn on them during the battle. So David did not battle against his own people.

3. The Philistines did indeed rout Israel the day after Samuel delivered his message through the medium, and Saul and his three sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua were killed on Mount Gilboa. As I said earlier, Philistine archers wounded Saul so severely he deliberately fell on his sword in the hope of accelerating his death so as avoid being brutalized by his captors.

D. David returned to Ziklag after having been sent back by the Philistine commanders, this being before the battle between Israel and the Philistines was engaged, and found that the Amelekites had burned the town and carried off the inhabitants, including his wives. With assurance from the Lord, David and his men then pursued the Amelekites, destroyed them, and recovered their people and possessions. They also took spoils from the defeated Amelekites, part of which David distributed to certain towns in Judah saying, "Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the Lord" (30:26).

E. On the third day after David returned to Ziklag after defeating the Amelekites, an Amelekite arrived with news of Israel's defeat by the Philistines and the death of Saul and his sons. He claimed that he, at Saul's request, had delivered the final blow, but it seems likely based on 1 Samuel 31 that he came upon Saul's body before the Philistines arrived and took his crown and armband. In any event, David had him killed for having the audacity to kill the Lord's anointed. Remember how David had refused to do so despite the fact Saul was bent on killing him.

F. When the Philistines got to Saul's body on Mount Gilboa, they cut off his head, stripped off his armor, and sent messengers throughout Philistia spreading the news. They fastened the bodies of Saul and his sons to the wall of Beth-shan, and when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of it they went at night and removed their bodies to Jabesh and burned them there.

G. David composed a lament for Saul and Jonathan, and we will pick up next week with 2 Samuel 2 where David is anointed at Hebron as king over the house of Judah.