

1 Samuel 16:1-5

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1sam/1sam-16/1-samuel-161-5/>

Samuel travels to Bethlehem to anoint a son of Jesse as king over Israel

Samuel had mentored *Saul* since he anointed him the first *king over Israel* (1 Samuel 10:1). *Samuel* was rooting for *Saul* to learn to humble himself before *the Lord* and to obey His voice. But after his egregious disobedience in the Amalekite incident (1 Samuel 15) *the LORD said to Samuel*, “How long will you grieve over *Saul*, since I have rejected him from being king over *Israel*?”

Saul had disobeyed the voice of the *Lord* by not completely slaughtering the Amalekites and their livestock. Rather, he wished to look honorable in the eyes of the people, heeding their voice instead of the voice of the *Lord*, and allowing the Israelites to keep the best of the livestock alive. *Saul* also disobeyed God by sparing the life of *king Agag* (1 Samuel 15:9). *Saul* attempted to justify his disobedience, but *Samuel* rebuked him saying,

“Because you have *rejected* the word of the LORD, He has also *rejected* you from being king.”
(1 Samuel 15:22-23)

God had *Samuel* anoint *Saul as king over Israel* because of the desire of the people of *Israel* to be like all the other nations around them, for all other nations were each governed by a human *king*. God gave *Israel* over to their request, seeing that they had rejected Him as their *king*; so He gave them a *king* whom they chose (1 Samuel 8:7, 1 Samuel 12:13). Now that *Saul* has been *rejected from being king over Israel*, God says to *Samuel*, “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.”

Saul rejected following God’s ways, and instead followed what seemed good in the eyes of the people. Therefore, God *rejected him from being king over Israel*. So now God tells *Samuel* to *fill your horn with oil to anoint a new king*. *Samuel* will anoint *David* just as *Samuel* had anointed *Saul* (1 Samuel 10:1). The new *king* would be a son of *Jesse the Bethlehemite*. However, in this case, the new *king* will not take possession of the throne for many years.

David’s first anointing is largely a spiritual one. *David* was anointed a second time, when he took possession of the throne, after the death of *Saul* (2 Samuel 1:7). *Jesus* was also anointed to preach the gospel to the poor during His first advent (Luke 4:18). And it is likely that *Jesus* will be anointed again, this time as king, when He returns to sit on the throne of *David* in *Jerusalem* for 1000 years.

To *anoint* someone is to pour *oil* on their body, usually the head, to signify that the person is set apart for God’s purpose. The first occurrence of someone being anointed in the Bible is *Aaron* the high priest (Exodus 29:7). The word for *anoint* in Hebrew is “mashach” which is where the

English word “messiah” comes from. “Mashach” directly translates to “christos” in Greek, from which the English word “Christ” is derived. Jesus the Christ is Jesus the Anointed One.

God tells *Samuel* that He has selected this *king* from Bethlehem *for Myself*. *Israel rejected* God from ruling over them, being self-governing, under the covenant of the law, but God did not reject *Israel*. The new *king* would be a *king* that was for God because *Israel* is still His people. This is true even today, as Paul says in the book of Romans: “God has not *rejected* His people whom He foreknew” (Romans 11:2).

God works all things together for the good of His people who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). Despite their rejection of Him as *king*, *He* intends to work for their good by creating the Davidic dynasty that will eventually see the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David who will redeem the world and sit on the throne of David forever (1 Chronicles 22:10).

But Samuel, fearing for his life, *said* to God, “*How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me.*” *Saul* had heard *Samuel* tell him the LORD had *rejected him as king over Israel*. So *Samuel* reasons that if *Saul* heard that he was anointing another *king*, *Saul* would *kill him* (and likely whomever he anointed).

But *the LORD replied*, “*Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’*” God seems to agree with *Samuel’s* concern. God then provides a cover for *Samuel*, to deflect the potential envy of *Saul*, by telling *Samuel* to perform a *sacrifice*, as would be in keeping with his normal duties. It seems that throughout this episode, the people involved will interpret *Samuel’s* anointing of David as being a spiritual anointing and not necessarily an anointing to the throne.

In those days there was no temple and the tabernacle of Yahweh in Shiloh had been forsaken during the reign of *Saul* (1 Chronicles 13:3). During that time *Samuel* the prophet would travel to the high places in *Israel* to *sacrifice* and worship Yahweh. When David later became *king*, he moved the tabernacle of Yahweh to the high place at Gibeon (1 Chronicles 16:39). After the temple was built by David’s son Solomon, worshipping in the high places was considered idolatry. Despite this, it persisted until the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah (2 Kings 18:4).

Accordingly, a *sacrifice* would have been a large feast that consisted of certain parts of an animal being burnt on an altar as an offering of ascent, and the rest of the animal being roasted and consumed by the people, in festive style.

Then God tells *Samuel*, when he does the *sacrifice*, that *You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do*. God does not disclose to *Samuel* who he is to *anoint* as *king*. This will set up an object lesson, regarding judging based on the heart, rather than based on appearance. God then says, “*and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you.*” God will *designate* someone for *Samuel* to *anoint* but will not tell *Samuel* their identity in advance.

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?” The elders of the city would be the city’s leadership. The word *city* might evoke the wrong image; *Bethlehem* was more of a small

village. The word translated *city* can apply to any gathering of people, regardless of size (as in 1 Samuel 8:22). *The elders came trembling* when they saw *Samuel*. This tells us that *Samuel* was a familiar figure. It also shows us the immense respect they had for him. Perhaps they feared that *Samuel* was coming to them to pronounce judgement upon them.

The root of the word translated *peace* in their question “*Do you come in peace?*” is “shalom” which is a broad Jewish concept that includes harmonious relations. The *elders* of *Bethlehem* appear to be wondering whether *Samuel* is coming against them for some reason. It could be that news had spread of the schism between Samuel and Saul, so there might have been heightened sensitivity to Samuel’s presence.

Samuel allays their fears. *He said, “In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.” Samuel* tells the *elders*, “*Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.*” This instruction would make *Samuel*’s visit consistent with his normal duties. *He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.* This is likely added because *Samuel*’s primary reason for going to Bethlehem is to visit *Jesse and his sons*. Consecration to Yahweh consisted of washing one’s body and one’s garments as well as abstaining from sexual intercourse (Exodus 19:14-15).

Biblical Text

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.