
“The God Who Sees”

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

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AT A GLANCE

In 1 Samuel 16:1–13, we meet David for the first time—young, overlooked, and still smelling like sheep. But God saw what no one else could. While others looked at outward appearance, God looked at the heart. This message explores how God sees our story from beginning to end, chooses the least expected for His greatest work, and ultimately provides a King after His own heart. It's a glimpse of David's anointing—and a preview of the True Shepherd who would one day lay down His life for His sheep.

INTRODUCTION: GOD SEES DIFFERENTLY

In today's passage, the Hebrew root *ra'ab* appears nine times—translated as “see,” “look,” “provide,” and “appearance.” These vision words stand in contrast to God's repeated declaration in verses 8, 9, and 10: “The Lord has not chosen this one.” In other words, God doesn't just see—He sees differently. He sees with purpose. He provides what we cannot perceive. He has seen His king and provided him.

Even richer is *ra'ab*'s connection to *ro-eb*—the Hebrew word for “shepherd.” When God sends Samuel to see the one He sees, He is guiding him to the shepherd He has chosen—a young man fresh from the pasture.

This first glimpse of David echoes in his final story, where in 2 Samuel 24:17 he calls Israel his “sheep.” From beginning to end, David is a shepherd—not just of animals, but of hearts. David was a man after God's own heart, chosen to reflect the heart of the true Shepherd for His people.

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

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 provided for myself a king among his sons.” ² And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears 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 And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.” ⁴ Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?” ⁵ And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. ⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD's anointed is before him.” ⁷ 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.” ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” ⁹ Then

Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.”¹³ 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.

THE LORD REBUKES SAMUEL AND SENDS HIM OUT

Verse 1 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 provided for myself a king among his sons.”

God didn’t mince words. He rebuked Samuel for pouting – move on. Saul may have been licking his wounds a little. He had a heart for God and for Israel and hated to see things go down like they did. Perhaps he was wondering, “Is this how it’s all going to end?”

But God didn’t bring Israel this far to let them go down like that. When God tore the kingdom from Saul, He anointed another king. If Saul was Israel’s king, David was God’s king.

Verses 2-3 And Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears 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 And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you.”

Samuel knew that if Saul found out what he was doing, he’d be risking his life. It’s encouraging to me that Samuel asked the pertinent questions.

This did not represent a lack of faith. It indicated real relationship. Samuel asked a legitimate question and the Lord provided Samuel a legitimate cover.

God Sees Beneath the Surface (vv. 4–7)

Verse 4 Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, “Do you come peaceably?”

Perhaps they had heard about what he did to King Agag!

Verse 5 And he said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

Samuel was under no obligation to disclose everything the Lord intended him to do in Bethlehem. He had in fact come to offer sacrifice, even if it was the secondary reason for his being there.

Verses 6-7 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before him.”⁷ 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.” (*ra’ah* x 7)

Eliab was probably tall, strong, and confident. But appearances can be deceiving. The “obvious” guy is not always the one the Lord would have. The Lord is not impressed with stature, appearance, performance, or achievement. He **looks on the heart**.

Ironically, Samuel, the “seer,” failed to see as God saw.

THE UNINVITED GUEST OF HONOR

Verses 8-10 Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.”¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen these.”

Imagine the despair as they came to the 5th, 6th, and 7th of his sons.

Verse 11 Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” Samuel must have been thinking, “What is going on? Lord, I know you’ve sent me here. You told me you provided a king.”

Once again we see in Samuel an example of faith. He could have grown desperate when the last son passed by and said, “Ok, you must be the guy.” But Samuel didn’t give in to fear of failure or embarrassment. Instead, he asked, **Are all your sons here?**

Verse 11 continues **And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.”** What a great contrast between Saul and David. Saul is a powerful leader on everyone’s mind; David is a boy, the youngest of Jesse’s 8 sons; not even invited to the dinner, yet soon to be the guest of honor! Insignificant to man’s plan, yet instrumental to God’s.

And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here.” You can sense the anticipation!

FROM THAT DAY FORWARD

Verses 12-13 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.”¹³ 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.

Unlike all the others who consecrated themselves for the sacrifice by bathing and changing clothes, David came in straight from the pastures, smelling like the sheep – as a shepherd should.

David **was anointed** and was filled with the Spirit **from that day forward**. With the external rite of anointing comes the internal filling of the Holy Spirit. The Lord both chose David for the task and equipped him to accomplish it. What an introduction of David! And what a revelation of El Roi’s perspective!

This story is Samuel’s and David’s, granted. However, what does it reveal about God and man? Because the author wasn’t just chronicling history. He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to reveal something to people hundreds, and indeed thousands, of years later.

GOD SEES BEYOND OUR DISAPPOINTMENTS (VV. 1–3)

Verse 1 **How long will you grieve over Saul?...Fill your horn with oil and go...I have provided for myself a king among his sons.** God had already chosen a king, yet Samuel had a part to play. He couldn’t do that wallowing on his couch, he had to make preparations and move.

Faithfulness looks like moving when God moves, not dwelling on past disappointments. There’s a time to mourn and a time to move. This requires a little discernment and a lot of grit.

It also requires that while we wait, we’re ready; not just sitting around for God to drop something in our laps. If you’re in a time of disappointment and failed expectations, what preparations do you need to make to be ready for the next opportunity?

We shouldn’t rush ahead of God, but neither should we sit wallowing in self-pity. What does preparation look like for you?

2. GOD SEES BENEATH THE SURFACE (VV. 4–7)

Verse 7 “man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” David is set in contrast not only against Saul, but also his seven brothers. And it’s not some immutable characteristic like appearance that makes him the better man. It’s that he was a man after God’s own heart.

Man tends to assign value to someone based on appearance or achievement, but God sees beneath the surface. He values character over charm and sees what many overlook.

Which begs the question: “What does it mean to be a man after God’s own heart?” Shouldn’t every man and woman desire to be a man or woman after God’s own heart?

Are you a man or woman after God’s own heart?

3. GOD SEES BEHIND THE SCENES (VV. 8–11)

Verse 11 Then Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” David wasn’t even invited to the lineup. He was forgotten, but God knew exactly where he was. David was content to be behind the scenes doing the dirty work. But he did not escape God’s notice. God sees the unseen, the forgotten, and the overlooked.

You don’t have to have the world’s attention to enjoy God’s. He sees you, whether the world does or not.

4. GOD SEES BEGINNING TO END. (VV. 12–13)

When David stepped into the room, he was still a shepherd. But God saw more than that moment—He saw the whole story from start to finish. David’s anointing was not random; it was part of a plan that took David from pasture to palace.

We often judge by what we see now, but God sees your whole life at once. Trust Him when life makes no sense—He already knows how the story ends and His council will stand!

CHRIST CONNECTION: THE KING NO ONE EXPECTED

Just as David wasn’t the son anyone expected to be king, Jesus was not the Messiah people were looking for. He wasn’t impressive by earthly standards—no form or majesty that we should desire Him (Isaiah 53:2). He was born in the little town of Bethlehem, like David—humble & hidden. While the world sought a warrior on a throne, God sent a shepherd on a cross.

When the anointing oil saturated David’s scalp and face and hair and filled the pores, it worked its way into David’s skin. His anointing was symbolic of his being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit who rushed upon David is the Holy Spirit who enters into our lives, fills us, and saturates us with His presence. He marks us as His chosen ones and He empowers us to live lives for His glory!

David wasn’t neat and tidy when he showed up to the sacrificial meal. He didn’t clean himself up with soap and water. Instead, he was consecrated by the Holy Spirit. Beloved, we do not clean ourselves up to come to God. We come as we are and He makes us clean. We’re covered not with anointing oil, but with the precious blood of Christ.