

A SHEPHERD BOY IS MADE KING



YOU probably remember my story of the young man Joseph who was sold into slavery in Egypt and later became a ruler. Well, this story is about a young man who took care of sheep for his father and later became a great king to rule over the children of Israel. His name was David. He became the successor to King Saul. The Prophet Samuel, who appointed Saul to be the first king of the Hebrews, also appointed David, who was their second king. King Saul was a good king in the beginning of his reign, but he didn't remain faithful to God. He became proud and did many things which were displeasing to God. After awhile, when King Saul continued doing wrong, God spoke to the Prophet Samuel and told him to appoint a new king to rule over the Israelites. Samuel felt very badly about this, for he loved Saul, and was very sorry indeed that Saul did not continue to do what God wanted him to do. God told Samuel that he had selected a new king from among the sons of a man named Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. He asked the prophet to go up to Bethlehem and get acquainted with Jesse and his sons, and assured the prophet that it would then be made

known to him which of the sons was to be the new king. Samuel was always willing to do what God wanted him to do, so he went to Bethlehem and there found Jesse and his sons. It was a fine family of boys. They were all healthy and good looking, and the very first one that Samuel saw was such an ideal young man that the prophet was sure he must be the one God had chosen to be the king. But God told Samuel that he was not the one.

Then Samuel asked to see the other sons, and Jesse, the father, had them all appear before the prophet, one after the other. But as Samuel looked at each of these fine boys God told him that none of them was the right one. Samuel began to wonder what God wanted him to do, and when Jesse did not bring another of his sons before him Samuel asked if he had seen them all. Then Jesse said, "No, there really is another son, but he is out in the field taking care of the sheep." The father said this as though his youngest son was not important, and that it didn't make much difference whether or not Samuel saw him.

But Samuel was very wise because he always did as God wanted him to do, so he asked Jesse to send for the boy who was caring for the sheep. He explained that God looks at us differently than we look at each other. A person may be all dressed up and look very fine to us, yet he might not be doing the things that are pleasing to God. God can read our thoughts, you know, and we should always remember that. We might think things that are wrong, and even say and do things that are wrong, and keep our parents or our playmates from knowing about them, but God knows.

God knew why he didn't want any of the sons of Jesse whom Samuel had already seen to be Israel's new king, so Jesse sent for the voting shepherd boy whose name was David. As soon as Samuel saw him God told the prophet that this was the one to be appointed king. So Samuel anointed David to be the king of the Israelites.

Do you know what the word "anointed" means? It means that Samuel poured a very special, sweet-smelling oil on David's head. That was called anointing. When Samuel poured the oil on David's

head it meant that David was the one whom God had chosen for king. People in those days knew what that meant, so there was no question in their minds about it.

But King Saul was still living, and it wouldn't be well to have two kings at the same time, so David did not attempt to become king right away. He conducted himself very wisely while he was waiting for the time to come when he would begin his duties as king.

Meanwhile King Saul continued to disobey God. He had a very bad temper, and sometimes he would become so angry that he would lose control of himself. That was very bad, wasn't it? His friends learned that one of the best things to help Saul when he became so terribly upset was to let him hear beautiful music.

Now the shepherd boy David was a wonderful musician. He could play the harp very melodiously. King Saul was told about David and he consented to have him bring his harp and play a few selections. Right away it did Saul a great deal of good, and he was so pleased that he gave David a very important position in his army—he made him his armor bearer.

At that time the army of the Philistines was causing the Israelites a great deal of trouble. When Saul first began his reign as king in Israel God helped him to defeat the Philistines and to drive them back into their own country. But now that God was no longer helping the king, he had not been so successful in battle and the Philistines had again become a real menace.

Saul's army was out in the field preparing for a battle with the Philistines and three of David's brothers were in the army. David's father sent him to his brothers with supplies of food and to find out how they were getting along with the battle. Just as he arrived on the battlefield one of the Philistine soldiers ran out where he could be seen and defied the entire army of the Israelites.



And they were really frightened, for this Philistine soldier was a giant named Goliath. Probably some of you have seen giants at the circus. Well, this giant was probably larger than any giant you have ever seen. He was well protected with a heavy metal armor, and he carried a huge sword. He really did look fierce and dangerous! But David was not afraid!

Of course David had not been sent into the battlefield to fight. He didn't want to disobey any of the rules of King Saul, but he kept thinking that if he was only given a chance he could deal with that giant, and he told some of them what he thought about this defiant enemy.

Saul learned about this, so he sent for David. Having played the harp so expertly for Saul, he knew that David was no ordinary person, but one who knew what he was talking about. David told Saul that he felt sure he could destroy this giant, and asked permission to go back onto the battlefield and do so.

King Saul was very much surprised at David's courage and assurance, but advised him against trying it. He told David that he was too young and too small to fight against that mighty giant. But David pleaded with the king. He told Saul that on one occasion while caring for his father's sheep a mighty lion had attacked the sheep, and that he had killed the lion. He told Saul, also, that one time he had killed a big bear which had tried to steal one of his father's sheep.

Of course David wasn't bragging. It is not nice to brag about what we can do. But, you see, David loved God, and he knew that God would help him to kill the giant because he knew that God loved the Israelites and wanted them to be delivered from the Philistines. Well, Saul was impressed with David's courage and earnestness, and told him he could go and try. I suppose Saul thought it wouldn't make much difference if David was killed. So David started back to the battlefield.

First, though, Saul wanted David to put on his armor for protection. David tried it on, but it didn't fit very well, and he wasn't used to wearing armor, so he told Saul he thought he would be better off without it. What he did do was to get himself a slingshot, and several nice smooth stones. He knew how to use a slingshot. Lots of country boys do, even now.

So David, upon reaching the battlefield, challenged the giant to show himself. The giant did, and when he saw that young lad, who was small and didn't look very strong, he was terribly angry. He was insulted that such a youth, without sword or armor, should even think of fighting against him. Yes, that giant just fumed away against David and the Israelites. He told David that he would tear him apart and give his flesh to the dogs.



But David was calm. He told the giant he was not afraid of his threats, because he knew that God would help him. He said that Israel had a God who could really fight for them, and that he would now help him fight this mighty giant. Then David watched his chance, and with that little slingshot hurled a small stone at the giant.

The very first stone hit the giant in the forehead. Well, that was the end of the giant. This mighty giant was the champion fighter of the whole Philistine army and when the Philistines learned that he had been killed by David they all became afraid and ran away. Thus God helped David to deliver the Israelites from the oppressions of their enemies.

Although David had been chosen by God to be the king of Israel in the place of Saul, yet he was patiently waiting for God's time to make him king. Meanwhile he remained loyal to Saul; and after having killed the giant he reported the matter to him. At first Saul

was very much pleased and he took David into his palace and made him a member of the family.

King Saul had a son whose name was Jonathan, and he and David became close friends. They were very good friends, and loved each other dearly. This was a good thing for David because later King Saul turned against him and would have killed him if Jonathan had not interfered.

The reason King Saul turned against David was that he became jealous of him. Yes, Saul became jealous of David just as Cain became jealous of Abel, and as the eleven brothers of Joseph became jealous of him. Jealousy is a terrible thing. Jealousy takes away your own happiness and leads you to do injury to others. In the case of King Saul, his jealousy became so terrible that he would have killed David if he had been able to do so. But God helped David. He helped him by giving him Jonathan to be a very good and trusted friend; and he helped and protected him in other ways.

You probably wonder why King Saul should have been jealous of David. The reason was that the people loved David so much because he had slain the giant, and had delivered them from the army of the Philistines. Saul's jealousy started when he was leading his army on a victory march from the place where the Philistines had been defeated. David was evidently in the parade with Saul, and as they marched through the streets the women came out of the houses and shouted praises to Saul and to David.

But they praised David more than they praised Saul. They said that Saul had killed thousands, but that David had killed tens of thousands. It really meant that they thought David was a much better soldier and leader than Saul. King Saul heard this and became jealous. He probably thought that sooner or later the people would want to make David king over Israel instead of himself. But even so, he should not have been jealous.

Neither should we be jealous when some friends of ours get along better than we do. Saul should have been happy and joined with the people in praising David; but jealous people don't do things like that. Instead of being happy about David's victory over the giant,

Saul became an enemy of David, and he remained an enemy of David for the rest of his life.

The Bible tells us that David behaved wisely, which means that he obeyed King Saul and did everything he could to please him. David knew that God had chosen him to be king, but he was willing to wait for God's time to come in this matter. He remained in Saul's palace and served him as long as he could. Once while David was playing the harp for Saul, the king suddenly became angry and threw a big knife at him. David jumped out of the way of the knife and thus escaped being killed.

Finally Saul became so determined to kill David that he found it necessary to leave the palace altogether. Jonathan advised David that this would be the wisest thing to do, and he helped David make plans to escape.

This was very hard for both Jonathan and David because they had become such bosom friends. True friends, however, will always give advice that is best for those whom they love, even though it may not be the best for themselves. It was best for David to leave the service of King Saul, but it was hard for Jonathan to see him go.

Their parting, however, was very sweet. They asked God to watch between them and to guide and protect them. That was really wonderful; for, after all, God is the very best Friend any of us can have! And God will be our Friend if we love him and try to do the things which please him.

After David and Jonathan had parted and Saul learned that David had escaped, Saul was very angry, and for the remainder of his life he did all he could to find David and to kill him. But God was with David, and protected him. David tried to be like God, so he was very kind toward Saul. He didn't hate Saul and try to kill him. Once while Saul and his soldiers were hunting for David they spent the night sleeping at the entrance of a cave in the side of a mountain. David and his friends were hiding in this cave, and while Saul was sleeping David could have had his friends go out and kill him, but he refused to do it. He allowed Saul to finish his sleep and move on unharmed. That is one reason God loved David so much.

Finally Saul died, and then it was time for David to be made king of Israel. Not all the people knew David, and some of them wanted another king, so again David waited patiently for God to show the people who their real king was to be. David, the shepherd boy, thought of himself as being one of God's sheep, and he put his trust in God, just as sheep put their trust in their shepherd. He knew that God wanted him to be the king, and that God would make him king when the right time came. So he waited for God, and finally he became the beloved king of all the Hebrew people.

QUESTIONS

- Who was David, and why did Samuel anoint him to be king of Israel before King Saul died?
- How did David kill the Philistine giant, and why did this cause King Saul to be jealous of David?
- For how long prior to his own death did King Saul seek to destroy David?