

1 Samuel 17:55

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.

Analysis

And when Saul saw David go forth against the Philistine, he said unto Abner, the captain of the host, Abner, whose son is this youth? And Abner said, As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.

Saul's question 'whose son is this youth?' raises interpretive questions since David had previously served in his court (16:21-23). The Hebrew *na'ar* (youth/servant) emphasizes David's lowly status. Several explanations exist: Saul's inquiry concerns David's family for marriage eligibility per his promise (17:25), his unstable mental state caused forgetfulness, or the narrative presents a separate tradition. Regardless, the theological point remains clear - Saul asked about David's earthly lineage while heaven had already declared David's true identity as God's anointed. Abner's inability to identify David underscores how God elevates the obscure to confound the mighty.

Historical Context

Abner son of Ner was Saul's cousin and commander of Israel's army. His oath 'As thy soul liveth' was a standard ancient oath formula. Royal courts employed many servants, making individual recognition difficult. Saul's promise to reward

Goliath's slayer with his daughter made family background essential for determining eligibility.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. Why might God allow His chosen instruments to remain unknown to those in power until the appointed time?
2. How does the contrast between David's obscure origins and his divine anointing encourage those who feel overlooked?

Interlinear Text

וְיָדָה וְיָדָה	לְקַבֵּעַ אֶת	וְיָצַא	זֶה דֶּתֶת	שָׁא וְלָ	וְיָכֹא וְ	פְּלִשְׁתִּים
saw H7200	And when Saul H7586	H853	David H1732	go forth H3318	against H7125	the Philistine H6430
וְיָדָה וְיָדָה	פְּאַבְדָּל אֶת	שְׁרֵךְ	אֶבְנֵר רָא	אֶבְנֵר רָא	וְיָדָה וְ	זֶה מִ
he said H559	Abner H413	the captain H74	of the host H8269	whose son H6635	H1121	H4310 H2088
וְיָדָה וְיָדָה	נַפְשְׁךָ	לְךָ	אֶבְנֵר רָא	אֶבְנֵר רָא	וְיָדָה וְ	זֶה לְךָ
is this youth H5288	Abner H74	he said H559	Abner H74	liveth H2416	As thy soul H5315	O king H4428
וְיָדָה וְיָדָה						
I cannot H518	tell H3045					