

A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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SESSION SIX KINGDOM UNITED

1. Saul

Reading: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 9:1-6, 16-17, 10:1, 24; 14:47-48; 15:7-9, 26; 16:1, 28:4, 5, 7-20

2. The Rise of David

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:10-12, 21-22, 17:2-4, 8-10, 32, 37, 39-40, 45, 49, 18:6-9; 25:1-3, 14, 23-24, 28, 36-42; 31:1-6

3. The Fall of David

Reading: 2 Samuel 1:17-20; 2:1-4, 5:1-4; 7:1-4, 11b-16, 11:2-5, 14-17, 26-27, 12:18, 24a-b

4. Solomon

Reading: 1 Kings 1:32-34, 38-40; 2:1-4, 10-12; 3:1, 5-14; 4:20-21, 25; 5:5; 6:14-16, 19; 8:22-23, 26-27, 29-30; 9:1-7; 10:1-3, 6, 9; 11:1-3, 9-13

Discussion questions:

Were the Israelites wrong to demand a king?

What makes David a suitable king for Israel?

1. Saul

Reading: 1 Samuel 8:1-9; 9:1-6, 16-17, 10:1, 24; 14:47-48; 15:7-9, 26; 16:1, 28:4, 5, 7-20

The four books that we know as 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings were just two books in the original Hebrew and were regarded as former prophets whose purpose was to give a history of the Kingdom of God. From the earliest days it was recognised that ultimately God himself was the true King of Israel (Exodus 15:18; Numbers 23:21; Deuteronomy 33:5). He alone possessed absolute power and authority (Exodus 15:6, 11; Judges 5:3-5; cf. also Judges 8:22-23).

The sons of Samuel, the last of the judges, did not emulate their father. Consequently, the elders of the people wanted an earthly king like the surrounding nations had (1 Samuel 8:5), not least because they thought he would be a military leader. Asking for a king was effectively rejecting God but, nevertheless, God allowed the people's request. The first king, the people's choice (1 Samuel 12:13), was Saul, an impressive, tall, young man from the tribe of Benjamin. God allowed Samuel to anoint Saul to be king. The people acclaimed Saul as king, shouting, "Long live the king!"

Saul fought valiantly and was successful in battle, subduing Israel's enemies. Victory over the Amalekites was secured by a fight that was carried out with all the remorselessness common to tribal warfare but Saul also disobeyed God, offering sacrifice rather than trusting him, and this would ultimately result in his losing the kingdom. He believed in outward sacrifice but did not have faith, obedience and love reflecting the character of Israel at the time. Saul's family would not be established on the throne of Israel. Instead, Samuel was commanded to anoint a new king that God had chosen to succeed Saul, a son of Jesse from the town of Bethlehem in Judah, four miles south-west of Jerusalem. Samuel secretly anointed David, someone after God's own heart, to be king.

Rivalry between Saul and David was an important dimension to the reign of Saul. Whether Saul ever knew that David had been secretly anointed by Samuel or not, he soon recognised the former shepherd-boy as his rival and inevitable successor. Saul was jealous of David and, unable to believe that David would remain loyal to him, made several attempts to get rid of him. Despite the fact that David had not taken the opportunity to assassinate him, Saul became increasingly desperate until, in the end, fearful of the strength of his Philistine enemies, he consulted a medium. In the Bible such practices are condemned as a pagan abomination to be avoided by the people of God. Saul, himself, had previously cut off all Israel's mediums and spiritists from Israel but thinking that Samuel, though dead, could still speak a prophetic word, Saul hoped that he could be stirred into speaking.

The story of the Witch of Endor is an interesting and yet difficult one. Was this woman able to raise up Samuel (which could lead to the conclusion that Satan had some power over the godly dead) or was her witchcraft simply delusion? Did the witch see Samuel or was what she saw an apparition or a product of her own imagination? Was Samuel resuscitated or was this a demon impersonating Samuel? Or did God, himself, intervene and raise Samuel?

No hard and fast answers can be given to these questions. Christians need have no fear of Satan, demons or the occult but that is not the same as saying that we should trivialise them or dismiss them. The ancient church father, Gregory of Nazianzus, was content to conclude that Samuel was raised, *or so it seems*. Despite his efforts at disguise, Saul was recognised and, in any event, the information that he received was hardly what he wanted to hear. In the séance, the woman saw a spirit coming out of the ground. Saul, unable to see the "spirit" for himself wanted to know what he looked like (1 Samuel 28:14). When the medium described him as "an old man wearing a robe," Saul was convinced that the apparition was Samuel, wearing the robe of a prophet. The reality is that Saul was only seeking to consult a man of God who had died because of his disobedience to the God of the living. Samuel's words were undoubtedly the last thing that Saul wanted to hear. Saul had found it difficult to obey God and now the worst was confirmed, the kingdom of Israel would be torn away from him and would be given to his bitterest rival, David.

2. The Rise of David

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:10-12, 21-22, 17:2-4, 8-10, 32, 37, 39-40, 45, 49, 18:6-9; 25:1-3, 14, 23-24, 28, 36-42; 31:1-6

In Bethlehem with the family of Jesse, Samuel was apparently eager to get on with anointing Israel's next king but none of the seven sons of Jesse that passed before Samuel was to be the Lord's anointed. Only the smallest son was missing and at Jesse's request he was brought in from the fields. Although the youngest of Jesse's sons, David was a fine man with handsome features, and Samuel anointed him king, anointing with oil symbolising anointing with the Holy Spirit. With this, Samuel departed to his home in Ramah and no longer played an active role in the books that bear his name. As a young musician, David entered the service of King Saul. At first, Saul liked David personally and was pleased with him.

After he had been anointed to be king, David was called upon to be a military leader for Israel in their conflict with the Philistines. The story of David and Goliath is an example of an attempt at representative warfare through a contest of champions. Such a practice was not uncommon in ancient times. Goliath, the Philistine champion, was a giant of a man and his appearance and armour are described at length. Saul and his troops were dismayed by Goliath's challenge.

When David reached the battle lines to bring supplies for his older brothers, no champion had been found in Israel to face the Philistine giant but David was so outraged that such a man should defy the armies of the living God that, in righteous indignation, he offered to fight Goliath himself, knowing that the Lord was on his side (1 Samuel 17:45). His experience as a shepherd equipped him for this task. Though others had run away from lions and bears, David had not. He was a brave and courageous shepherd who would now deliver Israel from a much more dangerous predator.

Armed only with his shepherd's staff, sling and spherical stones in his shepherd's bag, David went out to face the Philistine's champion but he did not face Goliath alone, for he realised that the battle was the Lord's. With a sling and a stone and not a sword, David overcame Goliath.

David returned to the Israelite camp as champion. Victory celebrations were led by women with dancing, singing and tambourines, but when their song acclaimed David as a better warrior and champion than Saul, not surprisingly, Saul became jealous and eventually plotted to kill David. Although David could have killed Saul he would not lay his hand on the Lord's anointed.

After the death of Samuel, David and his men moved down to the desert of Maon. The contrast between the foolish Nabal and his wife, the intelligent and beautiful Abigail, could not be clearer. While Nabal was intent on treating David and his men disrespectfully, Abigail responded with a gift, speedily meeting David's needs and showing him great respect. Abigail's bravery in riding into a company of 400 hundred men bent on violence should not be missed. Nabal's name means 'fool' and he lived up to it, an indication of the importance of names in the Bible, but Abigail showed great diplomacy, something that would suit her to be David's wife after the death of her husband.

The threat of the Philistines was an ever present danger throughout the reign of Saul but the account of Saul's death stands in contrast to the story of David and Goliath. Saul, critically wounded by the Philistine archers and afraid of being tortured by Philistine captors, fell on his own sword, killing himself. On the one hand, Saul died on a battlefield, doing the job he had been anointed and elected to do and leading the army of Israel against its enemies. On the other hand, Saul was defeated by the Philistines, who wounded him beyond hope of recovery. The death of Saul's sons on the same day indicates that Saul has not founded a lasting dynasty. Instead the throne will pass to his rival, David, a king under whom Israel will prosper.

3. The Fall of David

Reading: 2 Samuel 1:17-20; 2:1-4, 5:1-4; 7:1-4, 11b-16, 11:2-5, 14-17, 26-27, 12:18, 24a-b

When David heard that Saul and Saul's son, his great friend, Jonathan, had died he wrote a powerful lament, 'How the mighty have fallen' (2 Samuel 1:19). David diligently enquired of the LORD where his family should settle and obediently moved to Hebron. Here, the private anointing of David was repeated in public and David became king over Judah (2 Samuel 2:4), which until then had been a province of Israel. Later, David was anointed as king over all Israel.

The people regard David as their own flesh and blood but, more than that, during Saul's reign David has been Israel's best army officer and has led Israel in its military campaigns. This was just the kind of king that the people wanted and while Saul had fulfilled some of their expectations, David would do so beyond their expectations. More than this, the elders believed that the Lord had chosen David as 'shepherd' and 'ruler' as well as king. The title 'shepherd' is a significant one. While God himself was called a 'shepherd' the name had not previously been applied to any man. It is the shepherd's task to lead, feed, and know his flock. David is effectively, the shepherd-king. The kingdom established under King David was a truly united kingdom and all the tribes came under his rule. David chose Jerusalem, the stronghold of Zion, to be his royal residence.

Militarily, David completed what Joshua had started. Settled in his royal palace, David decided that the time had finally come for him to do what any self-respecting king worthy of the name should do: build a house for his God. Until then, the ark of the covenant, the throne for the symbolic presence of God, had been housed in a tent. However, if a house were to be built for God, as a symbol of his presence among his people, God himself would decide the time, the place and the builder. Through Nathan the prophet, God promised to David's descendants a 'house' or 'dynasty', a throne and a kingdom that would last for ever. This will be a father-son relationship, including covenant-love that would never be taken away. The promises God makes to David strongly echo the promises made to Abraham. Nevertheless, although the Davidic king would enjoy a unique relationship with God, being his 'son', he would also be brought under the Lord's fatherly discipline.

At the beginning of his reign David could do no wrong but in time David failed to live up to God's expectations. One spring, when his army had marched off to war and David by rights should have been with them, David stayed in Jerusalem. Taking an early evening walk around the roof of his palace, David noticed a beautiful woman bathing. Despite the warnings of the commandments and the scriptures, David's eyes led him into sin and he sent messengers to get the woman, even though he knew that she was married to one of his loyal warriors. David's adultery with Bathsheba had immediate and long-term consequences. The immediate consequences were Bathsheba's conceiving a child and David's plotting to have her husband killed, something he eventually achieved by putting him on the frontline in battle. After the death of Uriah, Bathsheba and David were married but the child that was born to them died.

David's household descended into chaos. In time, Bathsheba gave birth to another son, Jedidiah, who when he succeeded to the throne took the name Solomon but before that his older brother, Absalom, plotted and schemed to secure the throne from his father, raising an army and confronting his father's forces at Gilead and losing a great battle in the forests of Ephraim. Among those who perished was Absalom himself. Despite Absalom's treachery, David mourned the death of his son.

David's personal failings show that no man is really fit to be King of Israel, yet David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). His outstanding military successes and reign were marred by his sin but he honestly repented and sought forgiveness. He knew how to cry out to God, 'Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your unfailing love' (Psalm 51:1), and he knew the joy of salvation, 'Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven whose sins are covered' (Psalm 32:1).

4. Solomon

Reading: 1 Kings 1:32-34, 38-40; 2:1-4, 10-12; 3:1, 5-14; 4:20-21, 25; 5:5; 6:14-16, 19; 8:22-23, 26-27, 29-30; 9:1-7; 10:1-3, 6, 9; 11:1-3, 9-13

When King David was old, he commanded that his son be anointed king. Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon king. David probably knew from the time of Solomon's birth that he would be his successor and so gave him special instruction in order to prepare him for kingship. Solomon's three older brothers, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah were spiritually and morally deficient but Solomon had a heart prepared by God and he responded willingly to his father's instructions. Solomon inherited not only a great kingdom, considerable wealth and prestige but also a love for God and his Word. In words reminiscent of God's command to Joshua, David told Solomon to live in accordance with God's Word both personally and as a leader of God's people. He must be strong and show himself to be a man. After making all the necessary preparations for a successful reign for his son, David died after reigning for 40 years.

To seal a political alliance with Egypt, Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter. The law did not forbid such a marriage (only marriage with Canaanites was forbidden). In any event, it seems the Egyptian princess renounced foreign gods, choosing to worship the God of Israel. Later, God appeared to Solomon in a dream saying that he had not only received the sacrifices but was also prepared to do great things for Solomon and his people. In response, Solomon asked for a wise and discerning heart to govern God's people justly, the wisdom that God alone could give and God blessed him not only with this but also with riches and honour. That said, if Solomon wanted to enjoy God's fullest blessing he would have to walk in God's will.

The territory conquered by his father, David, remained subject to Solomon throughout his reign. Solomon reigned peacefully and was able to focus his energies on the construction of the temple and other building projects. He also developed foreign trade and pursued wisdom and knowledge. The picture of each man sitting under his own vine and fig tree indicates peace and prosperity.

Firmly established on the throne, Solomon turned his attention to the building of the temple. Instructions on how the temple should be built were very detailed and no expense was spared, demonstrating in a practical way that, although God can not be enriched, nothing but the best is good enough for God. The Holy of Holies (NIV Most Holy Place) or inner sanctuary housed the ark of the covenant, a symbol of the presence of God. The top of the ark of the covenant (NIV atonement cover) is traditionally called 'the mercy seat'. Here the high priest sprinkled the blood of atonement. Consequently, everything is designed to express the splendour and holiness of the awesome presence of God.

The temple was dedicated with prayer, acknowledging the faithfulness of God in maintaining his covenant and love to his people. With his sovereign power God did everything that he promised. Nevertheless, Solomon understood that the temple was not really a home for God (no house could ever be adequate). God did not need the temple but the temple needed God if it were truly to be a place for sinful humanity to approach a holy God.

When God appeared to Solomon a second time it seems that Solomon was at a spiritual crossroads. God's covenant with the line of David was restated but his justice was also made plain. If Solomon or his heirs and the people of Israel were unfaithful, the destruction of the temple would be an object lesson in disobedience. The visit of the Queen of Sheba (present-day Yemen) is an indication that the fame of Solomon spread. Solomon was well-known as a faithful servant of the Lord who humbly attributed his wisdom and success to God. Nevertheless, notwithstanding Solomon's fervour and wisdom, little by little, he fell from grace. He started well and ended badly. First, because of his foreign wives, idolatry was allowed in his household. Eventually, Solomon shared in this idolatry. Although he never renounced the Lord his heart was not entirely devoted to the Lord either. It is a stark warning that ungodly relationships have consequences. For Solomon it was the disastrous division of the kingdom. After reigning for 40 years, Solomon died.