

Paradise to Promised Land

A Bible study about the history of the Old Testament

Entering the Promised Land – Early Monarchy

Most Americans are unfamiliar with the ideas of monarchy, and quite frankly, most Israelites were unfamiliar with the ideas of monarchy before the birth of Samuel in about 1100 BC, but by the reign of Solomon (approx. 970 AD) there had been three great kings in Israel.

- **How would our life and government be different if we instituted a king in the United States?**

1 Samuel: Major Events in the Text

1st Samuel can largely be seen as a story about King David with two prelude stories – one about Samuel himself and one about Israel's first king, Saul.

- **Samuel** – The story begins with the story of Hannah, Samuel's mother. As a sort of foreshadowing of things to come, the first story is a story of the reversal of fortunes. Samuel's mother Hannah is a beloved and faithful mother who has no position. However, God promises Hannah to be the mother of a great religious reformer: Samuel. Samuel then goes on to take over the priestly position of his adoptive father, Eli.
- **Saul** – The story of Saul begins with a conversation between the people of Israel and Samuel. The people insist upon a king, Samuel refuses at first, knowing that this is not God's plan. God allows Israel to have a king and shows him Saul to be anointed king. Saul seems like an obvious choice, and begins his reign with success, but soon his own pride takes him over.
- **David** – As Saul is reigning, God instructs Samuel to choose a new king. This king is not the obvious choice in many ways, but it is shown that God has selected him regardless. 1 Samuel ends with the death of Samuel and the end of David's "outlaw days" running from Saul as Saul is wounded in battle and commits suicide.

The idea of a "1st and 2nd" Samuel is not an inherent part of the text. Samuel was one continuous story but was often separated into two scrolls due to its length. That said, there are some natural endings that happen at the end of 1st Samuel.

- **Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13**
- **How does this story show the "reversal of fortunes" theme in 1 Samuel?**

2 Samuel: Major Events in the Text

Much like the story of Saul, the story of David is marked by a rise and a fall, although David's rise and fall is not as disastrous as Saul's.

- **David's Rise to the Throne** - The first half of 2nd Samuel is largely the story of David's rise to the throne. As Saul is dead, David proceeds to take the throne of Israel but not without problems. He has to deal with Saul's remaining son Ishbosheth and a civil war of sorts. Quelling Saul's family uprising, David then turns to making a capital city of Jerusalem and begins wars against neighboring states that have been problematic for Israel.
- **David's Troubles** – The last half of 2nd Samuel is a story of David's world falling apart. Not only does David himself begin to commit egregious sins such as killing a general in order to marry his

wife, but several uprisings come against David. Nonetheless, in the midst of all of this failure, at the end of David's life, he still makes a good confession of God. As a final note of this, David conducts a census that God sees as sinful (likely because David is seeking to rely on himself rather than God). God punishes David and the nation with a plague, but David repents and offers a sacrifice which spares the nation.

David's story is not one of a heroic king who does no wrong as much as it is a story of a heroic God who sustains a king who is willing to repent.

- **Read 2 Samuel 23:1-7**
- **How do David's last words tell us about who he is as God's king?**

1 Chronicles: Major Events in the Text

When you begin to read the Chronicles in the Bible, you may have a sense of déjà vu as the stories of 1 Chronicles are normally the same stories as are found in 1st and 2nd Samuel (and Kings for that matter). As Chronicles seems to treat both David and Saul more deferentially, some scholars have felt that Chronicles is merely a less critical view (and thusly contradictory) story of the monarchy. This perhaps misses the point of what Chronicles is written in order to do. Chronicles was written later in Israel's history, likely after or during the return of exiles to Jerusalem. 1st Chronicles also essentially treats the stories of Saul and David as a prelude to the story of Solomon and the later kings of Israel. It also focuses on a specific promise that God gives to David of an enduring dynasty of kingdom.

- **Read 1st Chronicles 17:1-15**
- **How might this story be comforting to people who are returning to a destroyed or rebuilt Jerusalem?**

Historical Connections: Early Monarchy

- **Recent Reversal** – Up until the early 1990's, modern scholarship was likely to say that the stories of Saul and David with fictitious mythological heroes. In 1993, the discovery of the "Tel Dan" fragments – fragments of letters from an Aramean king who mentions a "King David" and a "House of David" which is "King over Israel." While this does not give much specific information about who this King David is, it shows that he was not a fictitious character and actually was a ruler over the people of Israel.
- **Jerusalem Question** – One of the notable things about David's rise to power was his moving of the capital to Jerusalem. The archeological evidence in terms of buildings here is inconclusive, which makes some sense as often rubble is cleared away in new building projects and Jerusalem itself was an often besieged and conquered city after David. Pottery evidence however points to an Israelite presence in Jerusalem around the Late Bronze and Early Iron ages which would seem to point to at least an Israelite presence in the city while not being conclusive about the city being the capital.
- **Davidic Empire** – Another interesting aspect of David's reign is his expansion of the Israelite empire beyond the frame of what was traditionally considered Judah. While there is no exact proof pointing to such an empire, it is plausible. The time of David's empire is known to have been a time of a "Great Power Eclipse" throughout upper Mesopotamia in which many empires were rising and falling. David's Israelite empire could have been one of these.