

1ST KINGS

Week 1, Intro

Having spent nearly two years in the Book of Samuel (1st and 2nd Samuel combined), it's time for us to step back and review what we've learned and at the same time set the stage for a study of the Book of Kings (1st and 2nd Kings). Remember that at one time these 4 books were but single enormous work, which was then divided into 2 books in Alexandria, Egypt around 2 centuries before the birth of Christ. Later still these 2 books were divided in half again, and this is the form we see it in today. That they were originally all 1 book explains just how connected and interlocking are the events described in them.

In fact Josephus (who lived from around the time of Jesus' crucifixion until well after Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans) says that in his day the Hebrew Bible consisted of only 24 books (our modern Bibles count 39 Old Testament books). And that Samuel and Kings were still one book each. Interestingly he also says that all of the Minor Prophets were contained in but 1 large book, Lamentations was not yet divided from Jeremiah, and Ruth was still a part of the Book of Judges.

From the 30,000 foot view we need to see Biblical Israel as the theocracy that it was. A theocracy is a form of government whereby a nation is ruled by that nation's god and the laws and regulations that particular deity sets down. Usually it is priests who administer the government on behalf of that god. Therefore the Bible regularly calls theocratic Israel the Kingdom of God.

Israel's history as a theocracy can, for the sake of study, be divided into 3 eras: the 1st being under the rule of prophets (this encompasses Moses to Samuel). The 2nd period was the era of the Kings (beginning with Saul and ending with the exile of Judah to Babylon). The 3rd period is when Israel was under the rule of High Priests (the time of Ezra up to and including Messiah's advent). So from a broad view we see the administration of God's justice system over His kingdom by means of prophet, then king, and finally High Priest. The purpose for the Lord causing this long cycle of Israel's development to evolve through these 3 different types of administration becomes obvious only in hindsight because only then can we look back and see that each of these administrations (in its own unique way) pointed directly towards Messiah.

Thus now we know that Messiah Yeshua, the Savior God/Man, is fully Prophet, King, and High Priest. And we know from later books of the New Testament (especially Revelation) that He will rule (administer justice) in every one of those capacities forever.

When we first entered the Book of Samuel we witnessed the closing of the 1st era (the era of the prophets who at the end of that era were called Judges, **Shophetim**) and the entry into the 2nd. Therefore Samuel was a transitional figure. He is not only the last prophet-Judge, but he is also the one whom God chose to usher in the administration of the kings by anointing the first king of Israel **Sha'ul** the Benjamite.

At the time of Samuel's birth (around 1070 BC) the priesthood in Israel is in a general state of decline, and even the High Priest Eli's sons are blatantly disobeying God's laws. The Wilderness Tabernacle is a ramshackle, and it appears that parts of it are even being used as housing for Eli. God declares that he will choose a new priest for Israel from outside Eli's family line (the line of Ithamar that is itself an unauthorized line for priests) and YHWH also begins delivering divine messages to Samuel as a young man. Samuel becomes a recognized prophet throughout Israel, delivering God's messages to the people.

Samuel operates mainly out of the south-central part of the Promised Land, and it is there that the dreaded Philistines are continually oppressing Israel. During one of the seemingly never-ending skirmishes with the Israelites the Philistines kill Eli's sons and capture the all-important Ark of the Covenant. Upon learning of this calamity the elderly Eli (who is sitting in a chair at the city gate) falls over, breaks his neck and dies. But it turns out that the Ark is more than the Philistines bargained for; they set it in the Temple to their chief god Dagon as a kind of victory offering, but their god idol falls over and breaks. The Ark is quickly removed from the temple but everywhere it is transferred in Philistia, the people are afflicted with grotesque diseases and death and finally out of desperation the Ark is returned to Israel in an unmanned oxcart (along with some valuable gifts as a kind of penance).

As Ark arrives in Beit Shemesh the local residents are overjoyed. However they seem to know nothing of God's Torah commandment not to look upon the Ark (that in times past had been properly hidden away in the Holy of Holies) and so many Hebrews die as a consequence. Like the Philistines they now want rid of it and called on some men from Kiryat Ye'arim to come and fetch it. The Ark is transported there and will remain stored away in a common building for decades. Samuel persuades Israel to set aside its worship of local pagan deities, and God helps Israel thwart Philistine oppression for many years, but inevitably it starts up again.

The Israelites demand that Samuel appoint a king for them primarily so that Israel can be more powerful and protect itself like other nations. Samuel is very concerned about this development, but God grants him permission to elect a king. Ironically, Yehoveh had been preparing Israel for a king all along (especially during the era of the Judges); even demonstrating that mankind must have a king to rule over them. And yet God notes that by asking for a king, the people have in a sense rejected God. Samuel warns the people that a monarchy brings certain drawbacks such as taxation, the conscription of armed forces, and the potential for tyranny, but the people pay no attention; they want what they want.

The problem with a king is not with the office but with the attitude of the office holder. Kings wanted personal power, wealth, and to be served, which is mankind's typical view of a king. But God's view of a king is as a shepherd, a provider, one who serves and saves. As we see all throughout the Bible, the Lord knows that it is the nature of fallen humans that we must go through a process to get to the glorious end that God has planned; this process is what we call history (or in Israel's case, redemption history). So the first part of this particular stage of the process is to give the people of Israel exactly what they want: a king after their own hearts and in their own image.

A man from the tribe of Benjamin named Saul appears before Samuel, inquiring about some lost donkeys. At God's instruction Samuel pours oil over Saul's head to anoint him as king. ***Sha'ul***, who is a head taller than the average man, visually pleases the Israelites as king and leads them in rescuing an Israelite outpost in the Trans-Jordan from invasion. Stepping down now as Israel's leader Samuel brings the era of the prophets to an official close. Samuel encourages the people that if they are obedient to God's Torah commands God will not punish them for requesting a king.

In no time at all Saul shows himself for who is really is and disobeys God. He tries to rush into battle by performing a ritual war sacrifice without a priest. Later, Samuel sends Saul to fight the Amalekites, instructing Saul to destroy them completely and leave nothing alive. Saul, however, spares the Amalekite ruler and the best portion of their flocks, disregarding the Law of Herem (the laws regarding Holy War spoils), hoping to present them as holy sacrifices to God. Samuel rebukes Saul for such folly, explaining that obedience to God's instructions is more important than any amount of religious sacrifice. He informs Saul that God will choose another man to be king of Israel. Saul pleads with Samuel, begging for forgiveness. Saul grabs for Samuel's cloak, but the cloth tears—a symbol of Saul's broken kingdom, revoked kingship, and abandonment by God.

God leads Samuel to the town of Bethlehem of Judah to choose a new king from Jesse's family. Samuel anoints Jesse's youngest son, David, a young shepherd, as the next King of Israel. King Saul has withdrawn completely from trust in God so God withdraws His Holy Spirit from Saul, cursing Saul with psychological distress in the form of an "evil spirit". Hoping to soothe what can only be described as the mentally ill Saul, the king's royal cabinet brings in David the shepherd (who is also an expert musician) as a harp-player for Saul during the king's emotional unrest.

The Philistines have by now regained their military strength and so again threaten to attack Israel, this time taunting Israel with their new hero, Goliath—a giant of a man about nine feet tall. Saul and the Israelites tremble in fear, but David, arriving to deliver food to his brothers, offers to fight the giant when no one else will. Refusing to accept King Saul's offer of his personal armor, David stands upon God's power to deliver and kills Goliath with a single stone expertly shot from his sling. The Philistines flee at the sight of their fallen champion and Saul returns home to the unwelcome sound of women singing praises to David and speaking of the battle as his victory and not Saul's.

The now wholly unstable Saul becomes homicidally paranoid of David, who only heaps more hot coals upon the King's head by becoming an intimate friend of Saul's son, Jonathan. After attempting to kill David with a spear, Saul sends David on a suicide mission to kill a hundred Philistine men and bring back their foreskins. David succeeds, and Saul grudgingly rewards David with his daughter Michal's hand in marriage. Saul orders his household to capture David, but, with the help of Michal and Jonathan, David escapes from Saul. But David is now a fugitive; and he builds an army of other disenfranchised Israelites who will wander in the desert wilderness for years.

Saul pursues David into the desert where David spares the king's life twice. Perhaps the most famous case was while Saul is relieving himself in a cave, David sneaks up behind him and cuts off a corner of Saul's robe, foregoing the opportunity to kill God's formerly "anointed" ruler. On another occasion at night, David and his men sneak into the king's tent and steal Saul's spear while he is sleeping. On both occasions, David announces his deed to Saul, and Saul expresses remorse both times, begging for David's mercy.

Still, Saul continues his pursuit, and David finally takes refuge with the Philistines, who show mercy to the great warrior and adversary of Israel's king.

Preparing to fight the Philistines, Saul is wracked with fear and consults a witch in the village of En-Dor, bidding the spirit medium to conjure up the dead spirit of Samuel. The apparition

angrily warns Saul that he and his sons will die fighting the Philistines, ensuring the demise of Saul's kingdom. David and his men head out to fight the Amalekites, and David succeeds in destroying the warring nation.

In the meantime, Saul leads Israel into a losing battle with the Philistines, and Saul's sons, including Jonathan, are killed. The wounded Saul commands his armor-bearer to kill him, but the frightened boy refuses, and Saul falls on his own sword. The 1st King of Israel is dead.

As we exit 1st Samuel and enter 2nd Samuel the way has now been cleared for David to assume the throne of the Kingdom of God. The idea of a royal monarchy ruling Israel is being displayed in its twofold possibilities: at its most negative and at its most positive. Saul embodied the royal idea of human desires while David represented the Scriptural idea of a human king submitting to the desires of his Heavenly Master.

David goes to Hebron, where his followers and the southern tribe of Judah (David's own tribe) anoint him as their king. Meanwhile, Saul's chief commander, Abner, garners the support of the northern tribes and appoints Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, as a puppet-king of Israel. A war ensues between the conflicting regimes, played out in a series of small hand-to-hand contests between Abner's men and the army of Joab, David's general.

The self-serving Abner defects to David's court knowing that David is destined to rule over the whole land. But Abner's support means that David now has 2 competing chief military commanders: his nephew Joab and the newly loyal Abner who convinces the northern tribes to recognize David's claim to the throne.

Joab, however, uses revenge for his brother's earlier death at Abner's hands as an excuse to rid himself of this rival, and he assassinates Abner. David's public censure of Joab and mourning for Abner wins Israel's respect, and the united tribes declare David king of northern and southern Israel. For the first time since Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River to claim Canaan, all Israel is under one leader (even if the sentiment is hardly unanimous among all the clans).

David needs a neutral site for a capital city and so conquers the Jebusite city of Jerusalem, a walled stronghold in the heart of Israel's territory. He calls it "The City of David" or "Zion." Growing in power, David quells the ever-present Philistine threat in a decisive military victory and follows up by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem from where it had rested in

Kiriath-Yearim for decades. In a raucous parade complete with shouting and music, David dances in a rather un-king-like manner in front of the Ark, all to the embarrassment of his wife (King Saul's daughter) Michal. David rebukes her, claiming that he will humiliate himself as much as he wants to because he thinks it is pleasing to God. Through David's prophet Nathan Yehoveh vows to give Israel rest from foreign opposition and promises that the kingdom of David will last forever. With Joab's services, David subdues the nations of the surrounding area, expanding Israel's borders while developing diplomatic relations with the neighboring kingdoms. In retrospect, we have just witnessed the pinnacle of David's reign and of his relationship with God. Now a terrible slide begins that will not end until his death bed.

One day the bored and self-satisfied David watches from the rooftop of his palace as a stunning woman bathes. He summons the young woman, Bathsheba, and has sex with her, and she becomes pregnant. Unable to hide his indiscretion, David arranges to have her husband, **Uriyah**, done away with on the battlefield. David marries Bathsheba, but Nathan the Prophet confronts the king about his horrific sins of adultery and murder. Nathan tells David about a wealthy man who steals a poor man's only prized sheep. Unaware that this is only a parable David is outraged by such selfishness and orders the man to be executed but then Nathan informs David that this is a parable and it is about him. Nathan says that God will bring calamity on David's household generation after generation. David repents for his wrongdoing, but, despite his fasting and praying, Bathsheba's son dies during childbirth. Afterward, David and Bathsheba have another son, Solomon.

David's older son Amnon (behaving like his father) falls in lust with his own half-sister Tamar and rapes her. The disengaged David does nothing. But Tamar's brother Absalom invites Amnon out to the country, where he and David's other sons murder Amnon in retribution. Absalom flees for three years but David, after mourning for Amnon, allows his son Absalom back to Jerusalem.

Absalom plots a conspiracy, forming an army and winning the hearts of the Israelite people through false displays of warmth and kindness. Supported by David's chief counselor and Bathsheba's grandfather Achitofel, Absalom goes to Hebron where his rebel followers pronounce him king. The shocked David flees from Jerusalem with his men, and the people of the countryside weep as he marches by barefoot, head covered, in a traditional sign of mourning. David meets a cast of characters as he leaves, and will meet a similar cast as he returns in a few months. One of these characters is **Tziva, Mephibosheth's** (Jonathan's lame son) estate steward. Tziva has brought gifts of provisions to David but David wonders why **Mephibosheth** didn't present them. **Tziva** lies and says that his master is actually rejoicing for this day because he thinks this means that the tribe of Benjamin (Mephibosheth's tribe) will now be restored to the throne.

Absalom enters Jerusalem with his army and in a display of dishonoring his father and usurping his authority has sex with David's concubines. Absalom's aides advise him to attack David immediately, but one of David's still loyal officials (Hushai) pretending to support Absalom, persuades Absalom to wait until a larger military force can be assembled. This delay gives David time to prepare and his forces kill twenty thousand of Absalom's followers in the forests of Ephraim. Riding away from the disaster, Absalom catches his head in the branches of a tree. Joab ignores David's instructions to treat Absalom gently and Absalom is killed. When David hears of Absalom's death, he weeps, screaming repeatedly, "O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

To the frustration of his officials, David shows mercy to all of Absalom's supporters who approach him for forgiveness, especially Absalom's commander Amasa. David sends messengers to the leaders of Judah, and the tribe welcomes him back to Jerusalem. The remaining tribes—Absalom's chief supporters—fear that David will be angry at them.

Yet another uprising ensues led by Sheva, a man from the northern tribal territories, but Joab traps these rebels in a walled city renowned for its wise council and the city's residents hand over the severed head of Sheva. Angered that David has shown mercy to Amasa, Joab deals with Amasa as he did with Abner and murders him one day while pretending to greet him in brotherly love.

David rebuilds his throne with continued acts of local diplomacy and with military victories over the Philistines. He composes a song (a Psalm) praising God as a loving and kind deliverer. David is now an elderly, frail, used-up and bitter man who has roamed far from the Lord.

And yet, God continues to accept him as the anointed leader of Israel because deep within David beats the heart of a man who trusts God. Because of David's actions Yehoveh will not allow David to build a Temple for Him, but He does allow David to buy the land in Jerusalem for the spot that the Creator has chosen for His earthly dwelling place; it is the threshing floor owned by Araunah the Jebusite, a gentile. It is the same place that Abraham bound Isaac for sacrifice, but was stopped at the last moment by the Lord.

As 2nd Samuel ends and the 1st chapter of 1st Book of Kings is before us, David is nearing his death and ready to hand the throne over to his successor, Solomon. But as with everything

else in David's life, this will not happen without its complications. We find that the book of 1st Kings begins with great uncertainty surrounding the throne, moves on to the glory of Solomon's kingdom, but ends in disgrace with a series of wicked kings. 2nd Kings will begin with chaos and end in calamity.

Together 1st and 2nd Kings covers a period of about 450 years (about 1015 B.C. to about 560 B.C.) These books are told from a prophetic viewpoint. That is the history of Israel in this era is written from the standpoint of a pivotal promise made by God to David that is contained in 2nd Samuel 7:12 – 16. There it says this:

12 When your days come to an end and you sleep with your ancestors, I will establish one of your descendants to succeed you, one of your own flesh and blood; and I will set up his rulership.

13 He will build a house for my name, and I will establish his royal throne forever.

14 I will be a father for him, and he will be a son for me. If he does something wrong, I will punish him with a rod and blows, just as everyone gets punished;

15 nevertheless, my grace will not leave him, as I took it away from Sha'ul, whom I removed from before you.

16 Thus your house and your kingdom will be made secure forever before you; your throne will be set up forever."

The point is that even though there is a great deal of historical fact throughout the Books of Samuel and Kings, we are not to regard these Scriptures as the mere accounts of men concerning the progress of a nation of people. To help make that argument George Winer, a German Protestant theologian who wrote in the early 1800's and he said the following:

"The history of the Old Testament was not regarded as an aggregate of facts, to be ascertained by diligent research and treated with literary ability, but as the manifestation of Jehovah in the events which occurred, for the understanding of which the influence of the Spirit of God was an essential condition".

The Old Testament is not secular history with religious overtones swirled in like a blob of

chocolate added to white batter in order to achieve a marble cake. It is not secular history at all, which is why the words spoken in the Old Testament were not spoken by authors but by prophets (those who brought God's inspired words to mankind). It is only in the modern era of literary and textual criticism that is seen as a valid means to dissect the Bible that its contents are now called "literature". Before the Enlightenment of the 1700's that sought to remove all spirituality and divine mystery from European society, the word use for the writings of the Bible was Scripture (as set apart from literature) and Scripture could only be provided by Prophets of God, not authors.

And thus although the Book of Kings makes no mention of the prophet whose words these are, the Hebrew Talmud claims that it was Jeremiah who set down the Book of Kings (but there is no firm proof of that). The book as we have it today is no doubt a compilation of previous works, because even the writings of the Book of Kings itself tell us so. Three works are mentioned as being the source of much that is written;

- 1) The Annals of Solomon. We find this mentioned in 1st Kings 11
- 2) The Annals of the Kings of Israel. We find mentioned in 1st Kings 14, 2nd Kings 15 (among others) for a total of 17 mentions.
- 3) The Annals of the Kings of Judah. We are told about this work in 1st Kings 14, 2nd Kings 24, and in other places for a total of 15 mentions.

This sort of thing ought not to bother us at all unless the sources for the 4 Gospels at the beginning of the New Testament also cause us discomfort. Each of the Gospels (especially the first 3) is but collections of information obtained from multiple sources by a person sent to investigate the life and claims of Yeshua of Nazareth. In fact there is no longer credible doubt that 2 of the Gospels took some bits of information directly from the 3rd of what scholars call the Synoptic Gospels. Even the Book of Revelation is largely a compilation of text taken from the prophetic books of the Old Testament, but with End Times events set down for us sequentially in the order that they are to occur (something that wasn't really known until John wrote his apocalypse).

Just as I described at the beginning that one way to look at the history of Israel from an overall perspective is as 3 administrations of God's justice with the first one being by prophets, the next by Kings, and finally by High Priests in Jesus' day so can we divide the Book of Kings into 3 eras for study purposes.

1) 1st Kings 1 – 11. The reign of Solomon.

2) 1st Kings 12 – 2nd Kings 17. The Israeli Civil War and the resultant divided monarchy of Judah and Israel.

3) 2nd Kings 18 to end. The destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel but the continuation of the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

So essentially the Book of Kings will take us from the era of Solomon all the way to the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and Israel's exile to Babylon. And we'll begin this fascinating journey next time.