

The Age of Kings: 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles

The Age of Kings: What can history, even biblical history, possibly reveal to us about God? What was God up to in the reign of King David and his son Solomon? Why did God destroy ancient Jerusalem and send them into exile for seventy years? What relevance can the age of Old Testament kings possibly have in the life of a twenty-first century believer? Why did God speak prophetically to his people during this period of time? These questions and more will be considered in this class. We will explore together God's redemptive historical work revealed in the pages of scripture and see how the mission of the people of God both then and now has always been the same.

The objective of this class is: to gain an appreciation for the period of the northern & southern monarchies in the OT, and understand the relationship between the redemptive work of God and the events that unfolded during this specific time in history. Careful attention will be given to both the Davidic Covenant as well as the decline and exile of the people of God.

Introduction: Last week we witnessed the climactic hinge that is arguably the most critical moment in the period of the age of kings. God's *hesed* or covenantal faithfulness as shown to David in the cutting of the Davidic covenant allows one to peer behind the curtain and catch a glimpse of what God is up to in this period of ancient Israelite history. We observe the events of the recent past (the period of the Judges and the reign of King Saul) as well as look forward to the Davidic dynasty until the Babylonian captivity, and moan with a desire for the coming of the Son of David who will reign in righteousness over all the earth forever. This week we have such a longing renewed, not by looking across vast spans of time, but observing the events that unfold in the life of David himself. We witness the frailty of the human heart, and are instructed to have a healthy appreciation for our own tendency to wander, our own fickleness to pursue lesser things. The first advent of the King of Kings, the true Son of David does not remove the pitfall of failing from before the believer as anyone honest with themselves will agree. Rather, we are soberly aware that apart from constant reliance on the enabling grace of God shed forth in the person of Christ, we will all weave an intricate web of self-deception and sin that will lead to our utter ruin. The account we read this week is a warning to all of us, that we need grace for every hour as much as the hour we first believed.

Part One: *An Overextended Reach* – It might seem a bit surprising to some that shortly after God's gracious covenant cut with David we would read about the king doing the very thing he despised in others. Chapter 11 of 2 Samuel begins, "*In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle...*" The problem is evident from the beginning: David, the king, did not go out to battle. Instead, he remained at home in the comfort of his palace while Joab fought the battle for him. This becomes apparent (and somewhat embarrassing) later when the royal city of Rabbah is captured, Joab feels compelled to warn the king that if he does not come at once to finish the battle, he will do so and call it after his own name (2 Samuel 12:26-28). This might have been overlooked; however, what David was doing with his time is enough to make one's draw drop. According to 2 Samuel (this account is not relayed in 1 Chronicles), David saw a young lady named Bathsheba bathing on the roof and his eyes and heart were filled with lustful desire. He sends for her and she comes to the palace where he surrenders to his lust. The text is somewhat ironic in that it references Bathsheba's devotion to the ceremonial law of God while thumbing her nose (and the king's nose) at the moral law of God. 2 Samuel 11:4 reveals that she had been bathing herself because she was unclean, and had been purified of her uncleanness.

As if the lustful desire was not enough, David has the audacity to inquire after the young lady. He was informed of the woman's name and that she was the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. The Hittites were not

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part of the covenant community; in fact, they were members of the Canaanite tribes remaining in the land following the initial conquest under Joshua and the elders. For this reason, David may have felt justified in sinning with her against her husband. However, every indication suggests that her husband, though a Hittite, was a worshipper of God, since one of his reasons for not returning home to lie with his wife while the battle against the Ammonites still raged was that the ark of God dwelt in a tent (11:11). Therefore, even though he was a Hittite ethnically, it is likely that he was part of the household of faith. Regardless, the sin would have been equally as heinous in the eyes of God whether he was a believer or not.

Needless to say, David lay with Bathsheba and committed adultery. Whether he lay with her once or multiple times, we do not know. However, she became pregnant. When David realized that Bathsheba was pregnant, he immediately saw the problem this created. With her husband away at war, it would be obvious to all that the child was not his. It would not take long for the word to leak out that the child belonged to David. In order to prevent a possible scandal, David invited Uriah home from the front thinking that he would lie with his wife while on furlough and this would explain everything. No one would be any wiser. David's son would be raised oblivious of his connection with the throne or even his relationship among the people of Israel. The problem was that Uriah had more integrity than David imagined. Uriah refused to go home and demand his conjugal right though given two different occasions to do so. David added insult to injury. In an attempt to cover his sin, he sought to dig the hole even deeper. He sent a sealed note to Joab via the hand of Uriah instructing him to set Uriah at the forefront of the hottest battle and pull back from him so that he would die at the hand of the enemy. It all made perfect sense to David: Uriah would die in battle (not unreasonable) and he would take his widow as his wife. The child's birth would then have a perfectly logical explanation. No eyebrows would be raised, and all Israel would be none the wiser. There was one problem with his perfect plan: God saw all!

After Uriah's death, the king is visited by Nathan the prophet. Nathan begins his rebuke subtly with a story. The end result is that David passes judgment (a rather extreme judgment as well) on himself. Had the parable shared by the prophet been a true account of something that really happened, the law prescribed full restitution (even adding a fourfold increase), but not death. David's sentence was, "...As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die..." (12:5-6). Then comes the punch line: "*Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'*" (12:7).

David's response to his own self judgment was one of confession. 2 Samuel 12:13 states, "...*David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord'*". You can contrast this reaction to that of Saul when he sinned (15:24-25). Saul confessed that he had sinned, but then asked pardon from Samuel, not God. David knew against whom he had sinned (Psalms 51:4) and was contrite before him. Saul, who continually referred to the Lord as the God of Samuel as opposed to his own, mistook his sin to be against Samuel and cared more for saving face than saving grace. Note also the difference between the two when there was a known refutation on the part of God from the throne: Saul sought his replacement so that he might kill him, David willingly abdicated and fled to the wilderness where once again he cast himself upon the mercy of God (2 Samuel 15:13-17).

Part Two: Rot in the Cupboard – The judgment of God pronounced against David by the prophet Nathan was, "... *Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me...*" (12:10). We see this literally fulfilled in the following chapters of Samuel. First, we witness the rape of Tamar the king's daughter by Amnon, the king's son. Then, we witness David's weakened zeal for

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righteousness. Instead of expelling his son, or killing his son (in light of the punishment prescribed in the Mosaic law), David does nothing. Absalom takes matters into his own hands and kills his brother in cold blood after two years of hate-filled murderous planning. The reason Absalom waited for two years, we do not know. Perhaps he was giving his father ample time to do something about it. When David failed to do so, he seeks his own form of vindication. He invited Amnon and all the king's sons to a sheep shearing. Then, when Amnon was good and drunk, he instructed his servant to kill him. This broke up the party and made David fear the worse: that Absalom had annihilated all the royal seed. However, what Absalom did next was unforgivable.

After some years had passed, the relationship between David and Absalom continued to worsen. It could be the fact that Absalom was royal from two blood lines (both David in Israel as well as Aramea through his mother, Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, the King of Geshur, 1 Chronicles 3:2) or that he was simply ambitious. Regardless of the reason, he convinced enough of the royal court and persuaded enough supporters in Israel to attempt an overthrow of his father's throne. One of the first things he did when arriving in Jerusalem, the city conquered and now vacated by his father, David, was inadvertently fulfill the prophecy of Nathan to David immediately following his sin with Bathsheba. Nathan declared, "... I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun" (12:13). Absalom, at the encouragement of Ahithophel, did this to all of David's concubines that remained in the city. It would have been apparent to anyone witnessing the events or reading this narrative, that sin will surely expose you.

Absalom was ultimately unsuccessful at detaching the kingdom from his father. He would meet destiny on the field of battle at the hand of Joab, the leader of David's army. However, David would learn once more that he was a vassal to the true king of heaven.

Before we move on from this open display of the rot of sin we will do well to take note of God's grace shining brightly amidst the sinfulness of man. You will recall that Bathsheba was pregnant with David's child at the time of Uriah's murder. She lost that child, but the one born after him would be named Solomon, or *peaceable*. How gracious of God, that the prodigy of David's wife obtained in sin would be the one who would display on a micro level the covenantal promise of God. It would be Solomon that would build the temple of the Lord, the house of worship until the carrying away into Babylon.

Part Three: An Instrument in the Hands of God? – One might think that the debacle with Bathsheba, Uriah, and resulting consequences of sin and judgment would be enough to instruct David and create a vigilant guard against willful disobedience. However, 2 Samuel chapter 24 informs us of another action that David committed in sin, which God in his sovereign providence used to discipline his people. 2 Samuel 24:1-2 states, "*Again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, 'Go number Israel and Judah.'* So the king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, '*Go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba, and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.*'" You will note that the author of Samuel, unlike the author of 1 Chronicles who chooses not to mention David's previous failure with Bathsheba, begins this narrative with the word, "again" connecting the sin that is about to be described with the sin that preceded it. The corresponding passage in 1 Chronicles reads a bit differently, "*Then Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and the commanders of the army, 'Go, number Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, and bring me a report, that I may know their number'*"

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(1 Chronicles 21:1-2). So, which was it? Did God incite David or did Satan? If God, then why were the people of God judged with three-day's worth of pestilence for an action that God led David to commit. If Satan, then why does the same account in Samuel state that God incited David? In order for us to answer these questions, we must interpret the texts alongside each other and observe the greater context of the passage.

What we know about the relationship between God's covenant king (David) and his covenant people is that the judgment as well as the blessings of the former are often suffered by the latter. This means that God often chooses to judge Israel and Judah as a whole because of the failure on the part of the king to lead them in the way of righteousness. In order to understand this, we must appreciate the role of the covenant mediator in the life of God's covenant community. We witnessed the role that Abraham played as mediator of the Abrahamic covenant. His entire household was blessed because of his faithful obedience. Likewise, Moses was used of God to lead Israel through the wilderness. When Israel sinned, it was Moses who took on the mediatorial role and asked God to remove his name out of the book of life in lieu of destroying the people. By so doing, he preemptively played the role of the Covenant mediator willing to bear judgment on behalf of the people. With the Davidic dynasty we witness now and will continue to observe throughout this class how the actions of the King were both a reflection of the spiritual state of God's people as well as a determining factor in the spiritual state of God's people. God's promise to chastise David's descendants with the rod of men was pragmatically felt by the people over whom they ruled as well as the king himself. So, for God to judge David, we would expect the people of Israel to be the recipients of such judgment in the same manner as we would expect the actions of a king who is also a covenant mediator to be the catalyst of judgment against a disobedient and spiritually lethargic people. Therefore, both accounts (that which is provided in the book of Samuel as well as the one provided in the book of 1 Chronicles) are equally true. God used Satan to incite David to sin so that judgment could be rendered. To struggle with this biblical truth, suggests a proclivity on the part of modern man to question God's sovereign activity in the affairs of men to the extent that he is willing and capable of using such secondary causes as Satan himself to bring about his will. These secondary causes can in themselves be attributed to God's divine providence.

Now, the contextual question relates to why judgment was being dealt to the people of God. According to both texts, (1 Chronicles 21:7 and 2 Samuel 24:15), the pestilence was a result of David's transgression, and was pronounced by David himself. 2 Samuel relates that David felt remorse before the judgment of God was executed against Israel. 1 Chronicles 21:7 states that God was displeased and judged Israel, then David was repentant. In either case, the judgement was brought about by David's actions. The broader question when listening to the text is, why? Why did God use Satan to incite David to number Israel?

Both Samuel and Chronicles reveal that the Davidic covenant is made after David's expressed longing to build a house for the Lord (2 Samuel 7:1-3; 1 Chronicles 17:1-2). From that point forward, it becomes apparent that one of David's sons will be chosen to build the temple of God instead of his father, David. However, one thing remained uncertain: the location of the temple. God had promised in Deuteronomy 16:6 that there would be a place where God would choose to establish his name. This place would be the site of gathered worship. Until this point in the life of God's people, no definitive place had been chosen. Shiloh, Gilgal, and Gibeon were places of residence for the tabernacle of God, possibly because they were locations of significant redemptive acts in the life of God's people (Shiloh and Gilgal) or former sites of pagan shrines (Gibeon). Whatever the reason, the tabernacle had been pitched there,

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but the ark was with David in Jerusalem. God used the context of this act of judgment to reveal the location of the final resting place of the ark of his presence in the midst of his covenant community. One does not have to look hard to find here a spiritual principle that reoccurs throughout scripture: before redemption comes judgment. Think for instance of the destruction of the earth prior to the Noahic covenant. Think of the ten plagues preceding the exodus event, and of course the ultimate judgment – the substitutionary death of Christ (Christ bearing judgment on behalf of the elect) to secure our ultimate redemption. It was at the close of the three days of pestilence that the location of the temple to be constructed by David's son Solomon was revealed.

Part Four: A True Vassal – Richard Pratt is correct, I believe, when he indicates that the author of the book of Chronicles noted how David discovered the location of the temple (1 Chronicles 21:1-22:1), how David's wars established security and provided material for the temple (18:1-20:8), and finally how David prepared for the temple (22:2-5).¹ In fact, chapters 23 through 27 and chapter 29 are concerned with the administrative preparations for the temple as well as an admonishment for the elders of Israel to add to David's contributions for the temple's construction. It is notable that the book(s), which begins with the account of a mother dying in childbirth naming her son Ichabod (the glory has departed) ends with the tale of David's covenant son Solomon being equipped by his dying father to build a building that will house God's glory amidst the people of God. We see in the last days of David, not only a display of generosity as he cares more for the advancement of the kingdom of God than his own net worth (contrast this with his predecessor, Saul), but also a glimpse of God's providential hand in the life of this shepherd king.

The message becomes clear: every battle David fought, every victory of his life, every conquest rendered was for the sake of a bigger goal. Yes, God loved David, and yes God covenantally blessed David, but this blessing, not unlike the covenantal blessings of all other covenants of scripture, was not for David's sake, but for the glory of God and the good of his people. So, at the end of his life he is blessed with the divine perspective to witness how being a man of war subdued all possible enemies making it possible for Solomon's attention to be exclusively devoted to the construction of the temple of God. All the conquests amassing great wealth in the coffer of the king were simply a means of gathering resources stewarded by David for the construction of the temple. Even David's sin, that mark against an otherwise perfect reign was used of God to be the vehicle through which the son of promise (Solomon) would be born, the one destined to construct the temple of God. From the last years of David, we are given with some certainty a glimpse into the reality of the Davidic reign: David was truly a vassal king, a representative of the one true king of Israel.

Conclusion: As we conclude our lesson today as well as our journey through the life of King David, we are left in awe at the wonder working goodness of God. The centrifugal force that drives the Age of Kings is the promise of an eternal Davidic dynasty. This promise is central to engendering hope for the coming Messianic age and offers a window into understanding the historical redemptive plan of God.

¹ Pratt, Richard L. *1 & 2 Chronicles: A Mentor Commentary*. Pg. 227