

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: This week we are looking at the period of David's life in which he was in exile due to King Saul's efforts to kill him. The title of this lesson: *An Emissary in Exile*. What we witness during this period of David's life is not only the faithfulness of God, but also the raw humanity of the king after God's own heart. It should be assuring to us that David, as important of a figure as he is in salvation history, is not exempt from failure and bad decisions.

Part One: *David on the Run* – Shortly after David slew Goliath, a new song topped the popular music charts within ancient Israel. This song was popular among all the young ladies and went like this: *"Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands."*¹ It is important to note, that David made no effort to taken the throne from Saul, even though he undoubtedly would have had adequate public support to do so. Instead, he waited for God to fulfill his will in his own timing. We saw last week that there was a covenantal relationship between Jonathan and David, and that this covenant served as a bond stronger than death itself that preserved the life of David on several occasions. God in his providence, provided David a bosom companion that would be more faithful to the kingdom of God than to the kingdom of his earthly father. This becomes an admirable part of the story that should not be overlooked as we progress through chapters 19 through 23.

On four different occasions, Saul attempts to take David's life. The first occasion was mitigated by Jonathan and is recorded in chapter 19 verses 1 through 6. Here Jonathan reasons with Saul and reminds him that David took his life into his own hands, and was used of God to defeat Goliath. He reminds Saul that the deeds of David have actually brought good to Saul, and not harm. Saul is aware of the fact that David is the person whom Samuel referenced. He is certain early on that David is the one whom God has chosen to replace him. For this reason, he sees David as a threat and becomes hyper-vigilant and overly paranoid. He seeks to validate his own right to the throne, and build his own kingdom instead of God's. This should not be a surprise to the reader, since such was Saul's mode of operating even before he was rejected as king. Jonathan reminds his father that slaying David would be spilling innocent blood, and his speech is momentarily successful at thwarting Saul's murderous plans.

However, no sooner did David relax and breathe easy when another war arose between the people of Israel and the Philistines (19:8). The texts states that David, *"...went out and fought with the Philistines and struck them with a great blow."* Obviously, David was not alone in this escapade, but Saul only had eyes (albeit, jealous eyes) for him. When David returns from battle and sits in the house of Saul as his

¹ 1 Samuel 18:7

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harpist, the text conveys the familiar theme of the harmful (evil) spirit from God troubling Saul. We read, *"Then a harmful spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand. And David was playing the lyre. And Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he eluded Saul, so that he struck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night"* (19:9-10). One might wonder what business Saul had holding a spear in his hand while he was sitting in his house. Why not use his desire for bloodshed on the battlefield where it could do some good, fighting the enemies of the Lord? What is obvious to the reader is the relationship between the evil spirit from the Lord that troubles Saul and the presence of David. At first, we are told (16:14-21) that the evil spirit troubled him outside of the presence of David, which is why David was sent for to begin with. He had developed a reputation for being, *"... skillful in playing, and a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence..."* (16:18), and was therefore subscribed into the service of the king. It now seems that the very sight of David causes Saul to be troubled. Such trouble is due to the perceived realization on the part of Saul that he was the neighbor that would take his throne.

David fled from the presence of Saul and went to his own house. Saul, however, was relentless and sends messengers to David's house to watch him and kill him in the morning (19:11). Michal, David's wife and Saul's daughter, warns David and convinces him to flee from the back window. When the king's men come in the morning to take David, she lies and tells them that he is sick. This is soon exposed as a decoy and offers David an ample amount of time to run and hide. David runs to Ramah and stays with the prophet Samuel, who is helpless in defending the runaway. Saul makes three attempts to retrieve David from Ramah by sending a delegation, but each time, the delegation is overcome by the Spirit of God among the company of the prophets and succumb to prophesying with them. Finally, he himself goes to Ramah, but has a similar experience, which apparently allows sufficient time for David to escape back to Jonathan. His conversation with Jonathan is along the lines of submission. David does not doubt Saul's intentions, but Jonathan, who has been ignorant of Saul's recent attempts to take David's life, is convinced that Saul does not wish to kill David. He is certain that he would know of it if he were. This leads to an experiment: at the feast of the new moon, David, who would ordinarily be seated at the table of the king, would fail to attend. If Saul inquires into David's whereabouts and remains calm when given the purported reason for his absence (to return to Bethlehem and enjoy the meal with his family), then all is well, and David will chuck it up to Saul's bad temper and return to the king's service. If Saul is agitated and speaks ill of David's absence, then harm is certainly determined by the king.

Jonathan agrees to the experiment, and soon realizes that Saul does indeed intend to kill David, and even attempts to kill Jonathan because he seeks to defend David. The text states, *"Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established'"* (20:30-31). Thankfully, Jonathan cared more for God's kingdom than he did his own.

Before we leave the discussion of this experiment, we should jump forward to the tear-filled moment when Jonathan and David, embrace and part ways realizing that Saul has turned a new corner in his infatuation with his own kingdom and rejection of God's. Jonathan's parting words to David are telling, because they demonstrate the powerful bond of a covenantal relationship. Jonathan tells David, *"Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever'"* (20:42).

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So, David flees and accepts the lifestyle of an exile, a vagabond, a rightful heir of the throne of Israel who is labeled an outcast by those in power and authority. After making a brief stop in Nob (albeit, long enough to have been spotted by Doeg the Edomite), he retrieves the sword of Goliath and flees to Gath. Why David immediately flees into enemy territory, we do not know. After all, they would recognize him (as they do) and know him to be the famed hero of Israel, the slayer of Goliath (whose sword he now wears), and the defender of the glory of the Lord. To prevent Achish from detaining him and possibly doing him harm, he pretends to be insane, and is eventually let go. He escapes to the cave of Adullam, where his lifestyle as an emissary in exile begins to evolve. According to the text, *"...everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them, and there were with him about four hundred men"* (22:1-2).

Meanwhile, Saul is engaging in a new level of neurotic and atrocious behavior. He hears from Doeg the Edomite that Ahimelech, the high priest, has fed David and armed him with Goliath's sword. Saul summons Ahimelech and the entire village of Nob (the family and extended family of Eli from earlier in the book of Samuel) to his presence at Gibeah where he proceeds to slay in cold blood the priests of the Lord for giving aid to his avowed enemy. Although such behavior is grievous, we see that God is continuing to use Saul in spite of the fact that he is ignorant of it to make good his prophetic word concerning the annihilation of the house of Eli.

After this tragic incident, Saul continues to exert his time and resources in the pursuit of David. David is hiding in the wilderness of Ziph, and *"...Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand."* It is here that Jonathan, ever the faithful companion, is able to find David and comes to him and, *"...strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, 'Do not fear for the hand of Saul, my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this'"* (23:16). Whether Jonathan was planning to surrender the kingdom to David upon the death of his father (and thereby show a willingness to do something his father should have done, but did not) or whether Jonathan knew that God would arrange for the overthrow of the throne by some other means, it remains true that he was echoing the promise of God to David, and thereby was being used to providentially strengthen the hand of his covenant brother.

The Ziphites then betray David, and let Saul know where he is hiding. From there, Saul pursues David to the wilderness of Maon, tightly closing in upon him. Right when it would seem Saul would prevail, a messenger comes to the camp of King Saul and informs him that the Philistines have attacked and are entering the land. Saul leaves pursuing David and David flees to Engedi.

Part Two: Vengeance Belongs to the Lord – After the skirmish with the Philistines, Saul continues pursuing David into the wilderness of Engedi. Saul enters a cave to use the restroom and it just so happens that the cave he enters is where David and his jolly band of men are staying. His men, ever loyal to their leader, say to him, *"Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you'"* (24:4a). There is no written record that God ever made such a promise to David, but it would have sounded like a tantalizing word that was circumstantially validated. After all, here was the man that had proven he would spare no expense to seek out and kill David, relieving himself at the feet of the man whom God had already declared (albeit though the private anointing), to be king in Israel. Surely, the quick and sudden death of Saul was God's will, he could make the transition to the throne and not risk Jonathan being killed in the process. Minimum effort, minimum loss, and maximum reward, correct? Instead of killing Saul, David stoops to cut the bottom corner of Saul's robe, and immediately his heart "struck" him. He knew that

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the tempting voice of his servants, which seemed to be providentially supported through circumstance, was not the will of the Lord. Afterwards, "... he said to his men, *'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed'*" (24:7). When Saul leaves the cave, David exits behind him and bows with his face to the ground. He says to Saul, *"Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold David seeks your harm?' Behold this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today in my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my Lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut of the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you'"* (24:9-12).

After the incident at Engedi, Saul leaves momentarily and David and his men remain in the stronghold. It is notable that David refused to kill Saul even though he was given the opportunity, because he highly regarded the anointing of the Lord that was upon him. David would soon learn the same lesson concerning a man named Nabal as he learned concerning Saul: vengeance belongs to the Lord. Nabal lived in Maon and was a very wealthy man. Apparently he had benefitted from the unsolicited protection David and his men provided from local raiders when Nabal's shepherds were tending their flocks while in Carmel. David sent a delegation of men to Nabal asking for food for his soldiers, a small reasonable token of appreciation for the protection David and his men had provided. Nabal not only refused to provide the food, but also insulted David and his men. Consequently, David marched to Carmel with the intent of slaying every one that breathed. He was prevented from doing so by Abigail, Nabal's wise and winsome wife. She winsomely beseeched David, *"Now, then my lord, as the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the Lord has restrained you from bloodguilt and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. Please forgive the trespass of your servant. And David said to Abigail, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from avenging myself with my own hand'"* (25:26; 28; 32).

We are not to mistake the difference between Nabal and Saul. Nabal refused to give David what was rightfully his (his flocks) even though it was the right thing to do, and Saul likewise refused to give David what was rightfully his (the throne), even though it was the right thing to do. However, Saul was the anointed of the Lord, a fact that David repeatedly makes whenever someone encourages him to raise his hand against Saul. Nabal was a foolish sheep herder. The principle that establishes a similarity between the two is the lesson that vengeance belongs to the Lord, he will execute justice, in his time and in his way. Now, one can argue that David might be the chosen method with which God would exact vengeance against both Saul and Nabal; however, in both cases, innocent blood would be shed that would cause the anointed of the Lord (David) to incur bloodguilt. We see that those whom God uses as instruments of judgment (Saul in the above scenario of slaying the descendants of Eli, and Nebuchadnezzar in the days of the Babylonian captivity), will also be judged, because no human judge is sinless and only a sinless one can rightfully exact judgement without incurring guilt. This makes the sacrificial death of one of David's future descendants (Jesus Christ) all the more meaningful since he is the only man truly qualified to judge and is unjustly put to death, not for his own sins, but for the sins of the elect. In other words, he was judged undeservedly so that those who do deserve judgment might receive favor.

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Part Three: Forbidden Places – After yet another relentless pursuit on the part of Saul, and another golden opportunity for David to kill him (26:6-12) ² David eventually loses heart and, in a moment of weakness declares, “*Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand*” (27:1). So, David, the destroyer of ten thousand Philistines, went with his men to Achish, the king of Gath and sought refuge in the camp of the enemy. Achish, who had formerly been wary of David, now accepted him and considered him a defector from the Israelite crown. David requested towns in the south of Judah in which he could live and put up a front that he was a faithful subject of Gath while secretly protecting the heritage of the Lord. He participated in many raids, which required the utter destruction of the parties launching the raids, something that according to Dale Ralph Davis, was an unprecedented level of cruelty.³ We are witnessing what appears to be a new low for David, and the author of the book of Samuel, true to biblical form, does not attempt to omit it.

David, who had repeatedly been reminded by Jonathan, Abigail, and God himself that he will not die at the hand of Saul but will ultimately gain the victory, in a weak moment questions all he has been told. Instead, he believes he will perish at the hand of Saul, and decides to seek refuge in the land of the enemy. It would almost seem that David had an irresistible desire to live among these people whom he had formerly been so vigilant to destroy. After all, he went to Gath first during his period of exile (21:12) and only left because he was afraid of King Achish. That fear has now subsided, and he is living the dual life of attempted loyalty to the enemy, and calculated loyalty to the people of God. In other words, he is in a forbidden place both spiritually and physically, and but for the grace of God it will cost him the kingdom. It is only a matter of time before the Philistines launch an attack against Israel, and ask David to join them.

The worse that could happen, does happen and he is asked to join Achish in the campaign against Israel (28:1). We do not know the motives of David’s heart, but we do know that God stepped in and saved him from himself. Had he accompanied the Philistines into battle against the people of God, even if for the sake of turning on them and fighting against them, it would have been difficult to convince Israel of his true loyalty. Doubtlessly, he would have appeared to be an opportunist, a mercenary who would work for the winning party without discrimination. When one pauses long enough to ponder what might have been, not only in David’s life, but also our own, the possibilities are intoxicating. Thankfully, there is a sovereign and merciful God who graciously intervenes and saves us from utter ruin and irretrievable loss.

When the Philistine lords hear that David and his men are intending to accompany them into battle they are adamantly opposed to it. Their reply is, “*Send the man (David) back that he may return to the place that you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’*” (29:4-5). David was off the hook, but he would return to his

² One should note the irony that David was given the opportunity on more than one occasion to do to Saul, what Saul sought so feverishly but was never able to obtain the chance to do to him. This should inform the reader of God’s providential protection, as well as the flip side – if God fights against you, you are never safe regardless how large and technologically superior your army.

³ Davis, Dale Ralph. 1 Samuel: *Looking on the Heart*. Pg. 281
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community (Ziklag) only to discover that the enemy, whom Saul refused to utterly destroy, had been there before him. His home and wives and children as well as the homes, wives and children of all his men awaited their deliverance. From the lowest point yet, David hits rock bottom.

While David is returning to an incinerated village, King Saul is having his own encounter with forbidden places. Our text reads, *“When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, he was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly. And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets. Then Saul said to his servants, ‘Seek out for me a woman, who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her.’ And his servants said to him, ‘Behold there is a medium at En-dor”* (28:5-7). Saul journeys with his men to seek the woman. She is initially reticent to grant their request because Saul had decreed that all the sorcerers and necromancers be killed and put out of the land when Samuel was still living, in accordance with the law of God (Exodus 22:18). She did well to fear, since there was a logical possibility that this were a trick and she too would be slain. However, eventually she is persuaded and grants their request.

Saul requested that she divine up for him Samuel, the prophet. As soon as she sees him, she screams because she immediately recognizes that the one making the request is none other than the king himself. However, Saul assures her that she will not die and encourages her to share with him what she sees and hears. Allow me to pause and say that although this account is not prescriptive, meaning it does not state things that should happen, but rather things that did happen, we should not find it too difficult to believe that the spirit conjured up was indeed that of the deceased prophet. There seems to be little disagreement among the commentaries consulted that this was in all actuality the spirit of the prophet Samuel. It is possible that God allowed the spirit of Samuel to rise momentarily from death to speak to Saul. At least this would appear to be what actually happened. The words of Samuel are not comforting. He states, *“Why then do you ask me, since the Lord has turned from you and has become your enemy? The Lord has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me”* (28:16-19).

So, Saul who maintained such a tight grip on his kingdom while living was given the sure word from the deceased prophet that his kingdom was about to fall. He and his sons (heirs and descendants) would die, and the armies of Israel would be defeated before the Philistines. What torture this must have been to know that all you spent the last few years of your life seeking to accomplish – the removal of David as a threat to the throne and the establishment of your dynasty and legacy – was all for nothing. You will die within twenty-four hours and the man you hate (David) will occupy the throne. One can't help but think of the foolish rich man in Luke chapter 12 who labored all for the sake of selfishly harboring all that God had given him. To this man God said, *“Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”* (Luke 12:20).

Saul's clock had run out, God's kingdom would now pass to the emissary in exile, the king after God's own heart who at this very moment was fighting the Amalekites. The neglect of one generation has a way of plaguing the generation that follows, but God's kingdom marches onward and upward!