

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 explored in depth the period of David's exile from his homeland. We witnessed both the tenacious desire of Saul to kill David, pursuing him even after David spared his life in the wilderness. We also discussed the decline and death of the king after Israel's own heart - King Saul. This week we turn our attention to the *Sure Mercies of David*. We will witness the faithfulness of God in the life of David as well as God's covenantal faithfulness to his people, Israel.

Part One: *The Death of Saul* – The final chapter of 1 Samuel relayed the events of the last day of Saul and his sons. One might wonder why it was necessary for Jonathan to be slain along with his father, since everything we are told about Jonathan indicates that he was a man that followed God and was faithful to the Kingdom of God even at the expense of his own. We do not know the mind of God, and are only able to understand what God chooses to reveal to us.

With Saul's death on the top of Mt. Gilboa, it is a very dark day for the people of Israel and for the kingdom of God. The leadership of Saul was divinely sanctioned, a truth with which David was very much aware, even though God had rejected him as king. We saw how God used Saul to perform his prophetic word to the house of Eli through the annihilation of the village of Nob, even though Saul was oblivious of the way in which he was being used. Such an action undoubtedly brought further judgment on the king. It is impossible to read the account of Saul's last day and not feel some remorse for him. The fact that he was willing to engage the Philistines in battle, even though he knew the outcome of the battle would not be a favorable one, indicates resolve and bravery and is perhaps the final demonstration of God's mercy to the king and his sons. Saul, a king who had long exhausted his royal treasury with the relentless pursuit of David, his divinely appointed replacement, was finally using his last ounce of strength to fight the enemies of God.

We read of the account of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31:2-5, "*And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and mistreat me.'* But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore, Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him." When the death of Saul was known by the people of God, the inhabitants of the towns in the valley forsook their dwellings and sought refuge in more fortified cities of Israel. When the Philistines discovered that Saul had been slain, they took his body and the bodies of his sons, stripped him of his royal garments and sent a word throughout all the

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land of the Philistines that Saul and the people of God had been subdued. The scripture states, "... they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols..." (31:9). The spiritual significance for the Philistines as well as the people of God should not be unappreciated. For the uncircumcised Philistines, the victory over the people of Israel was the same as victory over Israel's God. Remember the association between the people of God and the glory of the Lord that we mentioned when looking at 1 Samuel 17. To defy the armies of Israel was the same as defying God. Thus, it appeared that the Kingdom of God had been defeated. However, God had prepared for himself a king, who would rise to the throne and assume the position rightfully promised to him.

Part Two: The Long Awaited Day – After the death of Saul, David sought guidance from the Lord (2:1) as to whether or not he should go up to any of the cities of Judah. God gave David specific instructions to go up to Hebron. While David was there, all Judah came to him and publicly anointed him to be king. This anointing was not a selection, that had already been done in 1 Samuel chapter 16. Instead, this anointing was a confirmation, all Judah publicly affirming something that was already determined. However, the remainder of Israel did not recognize the kingship of David. The other tribes, under the leadership of Abner the commander of Saul's army made Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, king.

Ish-bosheth reigned for a period of two years. As an adversary to the throne of David, he symbolized the old regime intent on securing his own kingdom instead of seeking God's kingdom. It apparently took some time for Abner to gather enough support from among the remaining ten tribes to make Ish-bosheth king, because his kingship lasted for only two years, and was immediately followed by David being anointed as king over all Israel. David reigned in Hebron for seven and one half years, so at least four and one half years after the death of Saul, Abner was investing his loyalty in a kingdom diametrically opposed to the rule of God in the land. When Abner finally does agree to support David, and breaks ties with the house of Saul it is due to a perceived advantageous opportunity instead of a change of heart and desire to pursue God's kingdom.

Finally, Ish-bosheth is dethroned by two traitorous men who kill him while he sleeps in the middle of the day. When they run to David with the head of the deceased king in their hands thinking such an action will secure them favor in David's sight, they quickly learn that David has no patience for such cowardly and unjust actions. He has them slain for the death of Saul's last remaining son.

Afterwards, all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "... Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the Lord said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel'" (5:2). Since God was the true king of his people, and his anointed was to be his representative, it cannot go without saying that a return to the leadership of David was also a return to God and a rejection of David's leadership was a refusal to submit to God's work in the earth. In David, and his ascension to the throne we see clearly a return of the people of God to the kingdom of God: God's active rule is once again being demonstrated in the lives of his children.

Part Three: The True King of the Kingdom – After David was anointed king of all Israel (a period of at least seven years after the death of Saul), David purposed to bring the ark of the covenant up out of the land of Keriath-Jearim where it had been since the days of Eli, to Jerusalem where the new capital of the kingdom had been established. In the days of David, Keriath-Jearim was also known as Baalah-Judah. According to 1 Chronicles 13:3, the ark was not something sought after in the days of Saul. This

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statement is meaningful. Saul sought for the establishment of his own kingdom instead of the kingdom of God, a fact that no doubt was a determining factor in the ark of God's presence not being sought after. David gathered all Israel together and went to Baalah-Judah.

David made one fatal mistake when he initially sought to bring up the ark, a mistake that could have easily been avoided if he had paid closer attention to the law of God, or simply remembered the history surrounding why the ark was in the village of Keriath-Jearim to begin with. He presumed upon the mercy of God, and learned that God was serious about how things that have been consecrated should be handled. He originally placed the ark of God upon an ox-drawn cart, which was driven by two men, Uzzah and Ahio. 1 Chronicles 13:8 declares, *"And David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets."* However, when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, the oxen stumbled and the ark became unsettled. Uzzah put for his hand to steady the ark and, *"... the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark, and he died there before the Lord"* (1 Chronicles 13:10).

Uzzah's death disturbed David, and he was afraid of God. He said, *"... How can the ark of God come to me?"* (2 Samuel 6:9). Instead of bringing the ark to Jerusalem, he placed it in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. After a period of time passed, David learned two things: 1) the proper method of transporting the ark, and 2) the Lord had blessed the house of Obed-Edom because of the presence of the ark. He pitched a tent for the ark of God in Jerusalem, and declared to all Israel, *"No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, for the Lord has chosen them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister to him forever"* (1 Chronicles 15:2). He then instructs the heads of the house of the Levites, *"... Consecrate yourselves, you and your brothers, so that you may bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place that I have prepared for it. Because you did not carry it the first time, the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule"* (15:12-13).

Before we depart from this passage, two quick notes should be made. First, some people might observe the enthusiasm in worship that David and all Israel expressed at the time of their first attempt to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem and ask, shouldn't this account for something? After all, the sincerity among God's people is not in the least bit questionable, might not God honor their sincerity and simply send them a prophetic warning? Was the death of such an "innocent" man truly necessary? The lesson learned by David (as well as his predecessor before him), is that obedience is better than sacrifice. In other words, God is not impressed with our enthusiasm or even our sincerity in worship. What he requires is obedience in worship. Secondly, I believe that R.C. Sproul in his series of lectures on the *Holiness of God* is correct to point out that this account is really a lesson in the demonstration of the holiness of God. If we do not believe the it would have been worse for the hand of sinful man to touch the ark of God's presence than for the ark to be marred in the mud of the earth that God himself created, then we have an over-exalted view of ourselves and a lack of appreciation for the holiness of God. This concept of consecration and desecration is consistent with what we learned in the book of Leviticus about ritual purity and holiness.

So, to conclude with a practical application, the account of the death of Uzzah says much to the church in all ages about how we should approach worship of the one true God. We cannot worship him any way that we please, or even in a manner that we are most comfortable. We dare not worship him in any other way than what is commanded in scripture.

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Part Four: The Sure Mercies of David – The title of this lesson, the Sure Mercies of David, comes from the KJV rendering of Isaiah 55:3, which reads, “*Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.*” The term, “sure mercies of David” or “my steadfast, sure love for David” as it is rendered in the ESV, is the English way of translating the Hebrew phrase: הַנְּאֻמֹתַי לְדָוִד הַנְּאֻמֹתַי. Literally, this statement means *the faithful grace of David*. Key for our purposes is the term hesed. This term was introduced in the class *Before the King*, particularly in the Book of Ruth. Hesed usually refers to covenant love or mercy as it is recorded throughout scripture. The faithful hesed of David, is really God’s hesed that is faithfully demonstrated to David by means of the covenant. Next week we will explore the nature and terms of this covenant in detail. For now, we will briefly reference the manner in which the “faithful hesed” is revealed in David’s life.

You will recall that God instructed Samuel to, “... *go to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons*” (16:1). David was a king that God provided for himself. Such language is reminiscent of another provision in scripture. In Genesis chapter 22, we read of God commanding Abraham to take his son, his only son Isaac to the top of Mt Moriah and offer him there as a sacrifice. When Abraham obeyed, the Lord stopped him before he slew his son and provided for himself a sacrifice: a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham took the ram, offered it up as a sacrifice, and named the place, “The Lord Will Provide” or Jehovah Yireh. The covenantal promise to Abraham entailed a four-part blessing: 1) seed, 2) a great name, 3) a blessing to the nations, and 4) a land of promise. When God cuts a covenant with David, at least three of the blessings mentioned above are repeated: 1) his covenant is an everlasting covenant with the seed and offspring of David.¹ 2) God promises to make David a name like the great men of the earth. 3) God will plant his people in their land and they shall never be uprooted from it.

The Davidic covenant will be explored in detail next week. For now, suffice to say that the sure mercies of David (or faithful hesed), is the onward march of God’s kingdom promises seeking fulfillment in the most mundane detail of David’s life from the time of his exile until his inauguration over the entire nation of Israel.

¹ Since the lineage of the house of David is lost to the contemporary world we have no reason to believe that this prophecy was not specifically made to Christ and he alone. According to Paul (Galatians 3:15), the true seed promised to Abraham was Christ. It stands to reason that Christ would be the seed in question in the Davidic covenant as well.