

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

**Telling the Old Testament
Story of God**



SESSION 7

Period of the United Monarchy in Ancient Israel

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Period of the United Monarchy in Ancient Israel

SESSION OVERVIEW

The United Monarchy in Ancient Israel

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

INTRODUCTION

In this session, we turn our attention to the early years of monarchy, or kingship, in ancient Israel (i.e., the period of the united monarchy) and look at the significant events in the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon.

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- describe the difference between a king like the nations and God's desire regarding the character of kingship for Israel.
- identify the factors that led to the tragic downfall of Saul's kingship in God's eyes.
- understand the significance of the covenant with David (Davidic Covenant) and its implications for the coming Messiah.
- recognize the difference between Saul's response to his sin and David's response to sin in his life.
- list the accomplishments described in the Bible that portray the grandeur of Solomon's kingdom.

THE UNITED MONARCHY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

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KINGSHIP FOR ISRAEL

First Samuel 8 describes the people of Israel demanding a king. They specifically request a king like all the other nations. Israel wanted the prestige and position they saw in other nations. Having a king like all the nations was one thing they felt would advance them upon the world scene. Samuel warned the people what it would really be like to have a king like all the nations. He described what the custom of kings was (1 Sam. 8:11-18). He warned them the king would take their children, their servants, and even themselves to be his own servants. The king would also take their fields and their livestock and use them for his own purposes. Nevertheless, the people insisted: "No, but there shall be a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles" (8:19-20).

God gives in to the people's demands and grants them a king. However, God does not establish a kingship like all the nations. God begins to establish kingship in Israel in a unique way. God's plan was to create a kingship for Israel that was not like all the nations. So what does it mean to have a king among the people of God? What does it mean to be a king in Israel?

Following is a description of how God goes about establishing a unique kingship for His people:

- God agrees and tells Samuel, "Yes, appoint them a King." Samuel announces they will have a king and then sends every man to his city (1 Sam. 8:22). Notably there is no big parade, no coronation ceremony, and no celebration banquet. Instead there is just an announcement and everyone is sent home.
- Later, God instructs Samuel to anoint the man named Saul to be king of Israel. This anointing is done in secret. No one is around except Saul and Samuel alone; even the servant is sent ahead so he does not participate in the anointing (1 Sam. 9:27-10:1). What may also be considered unusual is that Saul is described as being "from the smallest tribe, and the least family" (1 Sam. 9:21). Surely, the first king of Israel should come from a more important background than that. After the anointing, Saul is sent home. At this point, there has been an announcement that Israel will have a king, a king has been secretly anointed, and everyone has been sent home. Where is the tickertape parade? When is the coronation? How about a celebration ball? When do we build the palace?

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- Finally, there is a public choosing of the king (1 Sam. 10:17-25). The king is determined by lot, and of course the lot falls on Saul (already secretly anointed earlier). Surely now there will be a great celebration and coronation ceremony like all the nations. Yet, Samuel again sends all the people away, each one to his house. No pomp and circumstance, no crowning, no festival, no mention of big throne or castle. What kind of a kingship is this?
- Nothing appears to be any different in Israel. Then, 1 Samuel 11 describes a crisis. The Ammonites attack the town of Jabesh-gilead. The people of Jabesh-gilead negotiate a deal in which they agree to become slaves to the Ammonite leader Nahash, if he will only spare their lives. Nahash agrees to the deal if first he gouges out the right eyeball of all the people of Jabesh-gilead. The people of Jabesh-gilead agree, but first request that they be given seven days to search for someone who might come and rescue them. Obviously, Nahash is arrogant and confident in himself, because he allows the people of Jabesh-gilead to have their seven days to look for a savior. When word gets to Saul in the heart of Israel, something unusual occurs. It must be kept in mind that Saul is surely not expected to do anything for this crisis. After all, Jabesh-gilead is way up north, and it is on the other side of the Jordan (wrong side of the tracks). Some might consider them as not really being a part of Israel, and certainly not worth risking war over.

In addition, the Ammonites are organized, experienced, and strong in war. At the same time, Saul has just been newly elected, he has no organized military, no palace, no stock of weapons; he is just the leader of a loose confederation of tribes. In fact, when word about the crisis reaches Saul, he is not sitting on a golden throne in a magnificent palace; but rather, is out in the field behind a plow. In the midst of this backward circumstance the awesome plan of God is revealed. The Bible says, "The Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily."

Saul quickly (in a rather unusual manner) gathers up an army and leads Israel to rescue the people of Jabesh-gilead. With no resources (at least nothing like what the kings like all the nations had), Saul risked his life and position to follow the Spirit of God and bring about a successful rescue. It becomes a great day of salvation.

It is precisely at this point that God's idea of kingship in Israel is revealed. Saul proclaims in 1 Sam. 11:13, "the Lord has accomplished deliverance in Israel!" The reason there were no coronations, celebrations, or parades before this was so there would be no distraction from God (i.e., no undue attention to the human position of kingship). This is because God's plan for kingship in Israel is this:

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- the king in Israel is to be ruled by the Spirit of God
- the king in Israel is to be a servant of God
- the real King of Israel is still the Lord God himself

Only after the above truths are experienced was there a celebration of kingship, and even then it was done in the context of sacrifices before the Lord (1 Sam. 11:14-15).

THE TRAGEDY OF SAUL

In a series of four events, it becomes apparent that Saul begins to rely on himself and neglects his dependence on the Spirit of God. Saul does not rebel intentionally against the Lord. However, the stress and pressure of kingship seem to push Saul into a panic. In addition, the power and prestige of the position of king seem to be too much for Saul's fragile ego to handle. The telling events are as follows:

Event 1: In a desperate situation against the Philistines, Saul makes the priestly sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel, the proper priest. Saul's desperate action implies his confidence is in the ritual itself; as if performing the ritual will guarantee victory. Saul is looking at the ritual as being something like magic.

Event 2: Later, while Jonathan boldly provokes the enemy with trust in the Lord, Saul is confusedly consulting the word of the Lord through one of the priests. Hearing the commotion Jonathan has started, Saul tells the priest to withdraw his hand, thus ending the communication with God. This act represents dramatically Saul's tragic falling away from his relationship with God, through lack of communication with (listening to) God.

Event 3: Still later, Saul puts a curse of fasting on all the people of Israel until he shouts, "I have avenged myself on my enemies." Notice the quote focuses selfishly on Saul and his own desire for vengeance, rather than on God's will. As a result of Saul's command (and Jonathan's subsequent breaking of Saul's command), the people rush upon the spoil of the battle and greedily eat sheep and oxen with the blood in them, thus sinning against the Lord.

Event 4: As if with a last chance to demonstrate his obedience to God, Saul is given a direct order from God, and he disobeys the order. In 1 Samuel 15, Samuel confronts Saul with his disobedience.

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Consider the following outline, which describes Saul's attempt to cover up his sin:

- Saul, acting ignorant of his sin, has set up a monument for himself.
- Saul greets Samuel saying, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have carried out the command of the Lord."
- Samuel confronts him with the spoil that was saved (against God's command).
- Saul feebly explains that the best of the spoil was saved to sacrifice to God.
- Samuel and Saul argue. One can sense Saul getting frantic and desperate.
- Samuel again presses: "Why did you not obey?"
- Saul cries out again, "I did obey . . . but the people took some of the choicest spoil to sacrifice to God!" (Saul passes blame to the people)
- Samuel responds with the famous words: "To obey is better than sacrifice."

This confrontation ends with Samuel's painful statement, "God has rejected you from being the King." Now Saul desperately tries another approach: insincere confession. He says, "I sinned, because I feared the people, now pardon me and return with me." Samuel replied, "No, I will not return with you, for you rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you." In panicked desperation, Saul grabs hold of Samuel's robe and it tears as he goes. In a dramatic moment, Samuel proclaims, "The Lord has torn the Kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to your neighbor who is better than you."

Even when the loss sinks in, all Saul has left is his concern for saving face before the people. Saul pleads, "I have sinned, but please honor me now before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and go back with me, that I may worship the Lord your God." Saving face would have been a concern with any man of Saul's day, especially a man in a place of leadership. It seems, however, that God expects more of His king.

KING DAVID: FOUNDING OF A DYNASTY

David, the son of Jesse, is anointed as the new king by Samuel. This is done while Saul is still the acting king. In fact David does not actually take the position of king for many years. During those years of waiting to become king, David demonstrates great loyalty to God, loyalty to Saul as God's currently anointed king, and trust in God's timing and plan. One example of David's loyalty and trust can be seen in his refusal to kill Saul and take the throne by force.

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David rises in popularity within Saul's court. David defeats the giant Goliath and becomes a very capable military leader under Saul. David becomes so popular that Saul becomes jealous and feels insecure because of David's great ability and popularity.

As a result, Saul attempts to kill David. David then must go into hiding, and Saul begins to chase him in an attempt to kill him as a rebel. In the midst of this chase, in which Saul's army seeks to hunt down David and the band of strong men gathered around him, David has at least two opportunities to kill Saul and take over the throne (1 Sam 24 and 26). In each case, David does not allow his men to harm Saul. David proclaims his loyalty to Saul as God's anointed. This demonstrates David's trust in God's timing and plan.

When David finally does become king, he wishes to build a house for the Lord (i.e., the Temple). God does not allow David to build the Temple; instead, God makes a covenant with David in which God promises to build the house of David (i.e., a dynasty from his family). Second Samuel 7 contains the account of the Davidic covenant. In this covenant, God promises a descendant of David will always reign upon the throne of Israel. This promise becomes a foundational component of the promise of a Messiah. The Messiah is the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. Thus, the Messiah must trace His lineage to David. The last king to rule on the throne of Israel is the Messiah, Jesus the Christ (Christ meaning God's anointed), and He still reigns today.

The words of Jesus Christ imply that all believers become the children of Abraham. Thus, Jesus as the Messiah is not only a descendant of David who is identified as King of the Jews but also the King of kings who reigns in all the earth.

Like Saul before him, David also falls into sin. Second Samuel 11 describes David's sin of adultery and murder. David, however, responds to his sin much differently than Saul. Recall that Saul was insincere in his confessions and maintained a focus on his own pride and position.

David, however, confesses sincerely and accepts the judgments of God against him. David responds with prayer and fasting (1 Sam. 12:15-16). Further expressions of David's sincere repentance are reflected in the Psalms (see Ps. 32 and 51). This is an important lesson regarding one's relationship with God. Sincere repentance and submission to the will of God lead to forgiveness and restoration.

A review of some of David's significant actions as king sets the stage for understanding the glory Israel achieved under her next king. Following is a list of some of the more important accomplishments of King David:

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- David strategically located the political capital of the united monarchy in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was a neutral site, neither controlled by the Northern or the Southern tribes at the time. Jerusalem was centrally located and easily defensible.
- David also designated Jerusalem as the religious center of Israel. He brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. This served as a unifying factor for the tribes of Israel.
- David conquered all the surrounding enemies of Israel and set the stage for one of the greatest periods of Israel's prosperity.

THE GLORY OF SOLOMON

Solomon inherited the benefits of David's achievements. The nation was basically united through its political and religious center in Jerusalem. The nation was also generally at peace with all of its neighbors.

The glory of Solomon's kingdom is reflected in the following list of Solomon's own accomplishments:

- Building projects: Temple, palace, chariot cities (1 Kings 9:15, 17-19)
- Alliances: Marriage alliance with Egypt; covenant of peace with Hiram of Tyre
- Wisdom, riches, and honor: 1 Kings 3:5, 9-13
- Great wealth: 1 Kings 4:20-28, 10:16-27
- Devotion to God: 1 Kings 3:3-4, 8:56-61

The later downfall of Solomon's glory can be attributed to two major factors. First, in order to accomplish such great building projects, Solomon made use of forced labor and heavy taxation upon his own people. This resulted in great discontent among his subjects.

The second factor is just as significant to Solomon's downfall. Against God's instruction, Solomon married many foreign women and was influenced by their pagan and idolatrous worship of false gods (1 Kings 11:4-8).

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - Describe the difference between a “king like the nations” and God’s desire regarding the character of kingship for Israel?
 - Identify the factors that led to the downfall of Saul’s kingship in God’s eyes?
 - Understand the significance of the Davidic covenant and its implications for the one who will be God’s Messiah?
 - Recognize the difference between Saul’s response to his sin and David’s response to sin in his life?
2. Read 1 Kings 3-11. Make a chart that summarizes the life of Solomon. Include four columns in the chart as follows:
 - Evidence of the wealth and accomplishments of Solomon.
 - Evidence of Solomon’s actions that would have pleased God
 - Evidence of Solomon’s actions that have displeased God
 - Evidence of Solomon’s actions that would have displeased the people of Israel.

Upon evaluating the findings in your chart, how you would explain the downfall of Solomon’s kingdom (i.e., the split of the kingdom after Solomon’s death)?
3. Journal your reflections and insights from this session and from your reading and study. Include a discussion on: When you are confronted with sin in your life, is your response like Saul’s or like David’s response? Think about the time David was running from Saul. Does God cause bad things to happen to good people? Why or why not? If not, how can you explain what happened to David?

EXAM



NOTES

1. Having a king like all the nations was one thing Israel felt would advance them upon the world scene.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. God grants Israel a king, establishing a kingship like all the nations.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. King Saul is _____.
 - A. from a wealthy aristocratic family
 - B. a business owner in Israel
 - C. from the smallest tribe
 - D. all of the above
4. Which of the following is part of the choosing of the first king, Saul?
 - A. secret anointing
 - B. public choosing of the king determined by lot
 - C. great celebration and coronation ceremony
 - D. A and B
5. Which of the following is NOT part of God's plan for the kingship of Israel?
 - A. The king in Israel is to be ruled by the Spirit of God
 - B. The king in Israel is to be a servant of God
 - C. The king in Israel is to have a palace adjacent to the temple.
 - D. The real King of Israel is the Lord God himself
6. After his tragic fall from power, Saul's main concern seems to have been _____.
 - A. the welfare of his family
 - B. saving face
 - C. the welfare of the people of Israel
 - D. all of the above
7. David, the son of Jesse, is publicly anointed as the new king by Saul.
 - A. True
 - B. False

NOTES

8. While waiting to become king, David displays _____.
 - A. great loyalty to God
 - B. loyalty to Saul as God's currently anointed king
 - C. trust in God's timing and plan
 - D. all of the above
9. David has at least two opportunities to kill Saul and take over the throne, but refuses to let his men harm Saul.
 - A. True
 - B. False
10. Unlike Saul before him, David avoids the temptation of sin.
 - A. True
 - B. False
11. In the Davidic covenant God promises _____.
 - A. peace in the land
 - B. a descendant of David will always reign upon the throne of Israel
 - C. there will be peace in David's family
 - D. David can build the Temple
12. When Solomon became king, he had to unite the nation and continue the battles with the surrounding nations.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Why was there no celebration or action to set up the kingship (palace, throne, etc.) when Saul was initially anointed and publicly selected to be king?
2. Why did a celebration of kingship finally take place after the defeat of the Ammonites? Was it simply because of the excitement over victory in battle?
3. How does God's concept of kingship for Israel differ from kingship like the nations?
4. In light of the successful start Saul experienced as king, what went wrong? What led to his failure?
5. How would you describe Saul: rebellious, evil, prideful, insecure, arrogant, or inexperienced? Illustrate your view with examples from the stories about Saul as king.
6. Would you characterize the life of Saul the king as wicked, sad, tragic, unfair, just (what he deserved), or in some other way?
7. Think about the difference between Saul's response to sin and David's response to sin (i.e., the difference between how Saul repents and how David repents). What does this teach us regarding the dynamics of sin, repentance, and our relationship to God?
8. What is the importance of God's covenant with David? Has it been fulfilled?
9. What made Solomon's kingdom so grand? What biblical examples can you give to support your answer?