

Study 6: Son of David

Introduction. God started the work of restoring man to friendship by choosing one man, Abraham, whose family was to be the keeper of the flame of faith down through the ages. Gradually, under the influence of God's activity, the little band of wanderers became a united people bound to God by vows of fidelity. But to preserve this group as a people of God, they had to have a place to call home, a land of their own. And to keep this land in the face of repeated invasions, they needed a strong central government and a powerful army. In the books of Samuel and Kings, we will see how this strong government came to be and at what price the people gained security in their new homeland.

Other than the obvious historical themes, there are some others that run through these books:

† **The People of God.** Already in this small Middle Eastern kingdom, we see the primitive outlines of the Church, the People of God, whom He redeemed with His own blood.

† **All Authority Comes from God.** A strong central government meant taxes, levies for armies, and on occasion, terrible despotism and corruption. The kings would often imitate the tyrannical policies of neighboring princes, forgetting that the king of Israel is merely God's representative and that God is the only true ruler in Israel. The two books of Samuel reflect both sides of this story:

1. The king, God's visible representative, is a sacred person, the one from whose line would one day come the looked-for Messiah.
2. And yet, some of these same kings are corrupt and vicious dictators, who lead the people into idolatry and the eventual misery of exile far away from the Promised Land.

† **David, the man and the king.** There are many ways of approaching King David. He was a military leader, statesman, adventurer, poet...and sinner. Perhaps the best approach is to see him as a saint in the making; but, in doing so, you might have to readjust your idea of sanctity.

David quickly becomes almost larger than life. Sometimes he seems like the depraved oriental potentates we encounter in the pages of the *Arabian Nights*, and then we are surprised to find the saintly composer of sacred songs. But we must always remember that God's grace works in an infinite number of ways. When God works with men and women, He takes them as He finds them, with all of their faults and weaknesses. This, of course, only shows us the power of His grace. For example, who would ever think the licentious young man that Augustine once was would become a bishop and saintly Father of the Church? But nothing is impossible with God.

The individual's growth in holiness is more often a gradual process with many setbacks along the way. As someone once said, "No one is a Saint until the moment of death; and if he isn't then, he never will be."

I've selected these particular readings to point out David's growth in sanctity, and to highlight the interplay between God's grace and our cooperation with it or our resistance to it.

Reading. Now open your Bible and read: 1 Samuel 13-28 and 2 Samuel 1-8; 11-12; 22

[You are urged to read all of Samuel and Kings, probably the most interesting reading in the entire Bible.]

Background. With the close of the era of the Judges, ancient Israel faced a situation similar to that faced by our own country after the Revolutionary War. When that war ended the states formed a loose federation that gave no real power to a token federal government. This was eventually deemed impractical and dangerous for we were menaced by jealous European states anxious to carve out a slice of the new continent for themselves, not to mention an England that wanted to regain her lost colonies.

The Jews had managed fairly well with a loose federation of tribes when their only opponents were the petty Canaanite princes. But the situation changed with the arrival of the Philistines and their lightning invasion of the coastal regions, and called for more drastic measures.

The Philistines and Israelites, with their different racial origins, languages, religions and cultures, were natural enemies. By most worldly standards – e.g., culture and military prowess – the Philistines were superior. In physical stature they towered over the short, stocky sons of Israel. But their greatest hold over the Jews was their jealously guarded secret of metal working and their prowess as charioteers. In other words, the Philistines were a formidable enemy.

The Philistines were also expert mariners, daring adventurers and great seafarers who roamed far and wide on ships throughout the known world. They occupied a place in the ancient world not unlike that held by England during Elizabethan times, or the Norsemen in the Middle Ages.

After establishing the heart of their maritime empire on the island of Crete, they attempted an unsuccessful invasion of Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Rameses III (1195 – 1164 B.C.). Defeated by the Egyptians, they turned their attention to the less challenging target of the coast of Canaan. Here they succeeded and gradually moved inland. During the period of the Judges, they managed to establish dominion over the Israelites, who would never be completely free of Philistine pressure until the days of Roman Empire. The Philistines disappeared from the world stage when their country was absorbed into the Roman Province of Syria under General Pompey in the 1st century B.C. And it's interesting to note that their name is the root of the modern word, *Palestine*.

Key Passages. Highlight these key passages in your Bible by writing key words in the margins.

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| † 1 Sam 13:1-18 <i>Saul rejected.</i> | † 2 Sam 1:17-27 <i>David mourns.</i> |
| † 1 Sam 16:1-13 <i>David chosen.</i> | † 2 Sam 6:1-23 <i>David dances.</i> |
| † 1 Sam 18:1-20:42 <i>Saul vs. David.</i> | † 2 Sam 11:1-12:25 <i>David sins.</i> |
| † 1 Sam 26:1-25 <i>Saul spared.</i> | † 2 Sam 22:1-51 <i>David sings.</i> |
| † 1 Sam 28:3-25 <i>Saul and the witch.</i> | |

Some Highpoints.

- † 1 Sam 16-17. Some scholars believe there are a *pair of sources* for some of the events of David's life, as illustrated by the double account of the introduction of David to public life, as described in these chapters. The sacred author apparently selected from various sources when composing the book and wasn't too concerned about the differences among them. He included both accounts, even though they didn't agree in every detail, probably because both were preserved and both were interesting. By the way, it's interesting to note that the division of Samuel and Kings into four books is really artificial and the books are really a single work.
- † 2 Sam 1:17-27. *David's lament for Saul and Jonathan* is among the masterpieces of ancient literature. It reflects a depth of human feeling that does credit to the great heart of David. Perhaps, in some way, it explains the words God uses to describe the young David, "A man after my own heart."
- † 2 Sam 5:1-16. *The capture of Jerusalem* was a highpoint of David's career. Jerusalem was the ideal spot for the new capital since its location made a perfect anchor for uniting the northern and southern factions of the kingdom. And bringing the Ark to Jerusalem made it the country's religious center as well. From that day, Jerusalem became a sacred symbol of all that the Jews hoped for in the messianic era, and it remains so today. It's no accident that the Church and the heavenly kingdom are spoken of as the New Jerusalem in the New Testament and the liturgy.

- † **2 Sam 7:5-16. *The Davidic Covenant*** was a milestone in the history of God's plan for man's redemption. Not only is the old Mosaic Covenant renewed, but now the kingship, despite its recent origin, will share in the Covenant. The work of Moses is completed in David, and his dynasty will now collaborate in bringing God's plan to the fulfillment of Jesus Christ.
- † **2 Sam 11:1-12, 25.** The account of *Nathan's confronting of David* with his sin is another of those remarkably dramatic moments in ancient literature. And from this moment on, David is a changed man. His life becomes embroiled in a series of difficulties and sorrows which have terrible consequences for the future of his family and the whole of Israel.
- † **2 Sam 22:1-51.** David's hymn of thanksgiving (see also Psalm 17) was selected to give some idea of David's poetical gifts, but principally as a character portrait of the man himself. It forms a fitting conclusion to our study of the shepherd-king.

Old and New Testaments.

- † **Son of David.** Throughout the New Testament Our Lord is constantly described as the "Son of David." Despite the many infidelities of David's descendants (see 1 & 2 Kings), God is faithful to His promise, and Jesus comes to fulfill the kingdom of David.
- † **Kingdom of David – Kingdom of Christ.** But the true kingdom of Christ is very different from the earthly kingdom of David. As Jesus said to Pontius Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world" (Jn 18:36). The full manifestation of Christ's kingdom will come only at the end of time.
- † **Our Task.** Meanwhile, the Church and its members are dedicated to building up that kingdom. "Thy kingdom come" is our constant hope and prayer. St. Paul points this out clearly in his sermon to the Jews in the synagogue at Antioch (*Acts 13:16-42*), and St. John gives voice to every Christian's hope in the closing prayer of the last book of the Bible: "Come, Lord Jesus." (*Rev 22:16-21*)

Questions. David was a complex man, and yet he was specifically chosen by God not only to lead God's People but also to be the founder of the house -- the family -- into which the Messiah, Our Lord Jesus Christ, would be born. With this in mind, consider the following questions for our discussion:

1. What do you think of King David? How would you describe him? What are his strong and weak points?
2. Why was Saul rejected by God?
3. Compare David and Saul. (How do you think God would differentiate between them?)
4. Discuss David's psalm of thanksgiving in 2 Sam 22. Is this a Christian prayer?
5. What is the meaning of Michol's displeasure with David in 2 Sam 6?
6. What do you think of God's treatment of David after his sin with Bathsheba?