

Understanding the Old Testament 7

The Period of the United Kingdom 1050 BC –930 BC

The period of the kings begins with the last Judge, Samuel, anointing Saul as king. This begins the period of the United Kingdom. It will only stay united during the reign of the first three kings. This was Israel's golden age. Though it only covers 120 years, it is one of the most important time periods in the Old Testament. A large portion of the Old Testament was written in this period. The Temple was built as well. It was the focal point of the nation for centuries.

Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. He was a tall humble man that God had chosen at the people's insistence for a king. Saul began building an army. He was successful against the Ammonites. Then he gathered his forces to fight the Philistines. Samuel told him to wait until he came to offer a sacrifice. Saul waited and waited and finally got anxious and offered the sacrifice himself. Then Samuel showed up. Oops. He told Saul that because of his foolish actions his kingdom would not endure.

Saul was given a second chance. Samuel told Saul the Amalekites were under a curse and everything should be destroyed. After the battle, Samuel met Saul and asked why he had kept the sheep and cattle. Saul said the men had insisted on keeping them for a sacrifice. *22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."*
1 Samuel 15:22-23 (NIV)

Samuel was directed to go and anoint a new king. He went to the house of Jesse, the grandson of Ruth, the Moabite. God had him anoint Jesse's youngest son, David. David was from the tribe of Judah, fulfilling the prophecy of Jacob to Judah. In the meantime, Saul was troubled by a tormenting spirit. Someone suggested a harpist to soothe him. They called for David, the shepherd boy who had a reputation for playing well. Imagine that! The rivalry with Saul and David began after David killed the Philistine giant, Goliath. Jealousy only fueled Saul's problems with troubling spirits.

David continued to play the harp for Saul, but Saul attempted to kill him twice with a javelin. Eventually David had to flee and Saul and his army pursued David. A band of discontents gathered around David. Eventually Saul was defeated by the Philistines and fell on his own sword.

David took the throne over Judah (the largest tribe) and soon the other tribes came under his leadership as well. He was characterized by the description, "a man after God's own heart". He committed some grievous sins, and experienced an attempted coup by one of his sons. Toward the end of his life, he prepared

the plans for the Temple of God. It was during this time that God promised that his lineage would reign forever. Read 1Chronicles 17:1-15 This can only be fulfilled at the Second Coming of Jesus, the Son of David.

David conquered Jerusalem and made it his capital. It was there that he knew the temple must be built. The place the Lord showed him was the same place that Abraham offered up Isaac. He collected an enormous sum of money for the Temple and drew up the plans, but he could not build it. The Lord told him that since he was a man of war, his son would build it. Again we have one of those double meanings. Solomon would build the Temple, but Jesus, born through Mary from the line of David, would build the Temple of living stones.

David wrote many of the psalms, some of which are prophetic of the coming Messiah. Psalm 22 is an amazing account of the crucifixion written 1000 years before it took place. David invented a number of instruments and instituted round the clock praise to God. The book of psalms is actually five books. The psalms are an honest look at life in its many circumstances. Psalm 51 is David's song of repentance after committing adultery and murder. David's life is full of lessons for us and his songs teach us how to restore our relationship with God. Psalms are a comfort to us in hard times. They were the songs of Israel. Some of them were composed by other authors such as Moses, Asaph, and Ezra.

Solomon succeeded his father, David. He began his reign with a sacrifice. The Lord asked him what he desired. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule. God promised him not only wisdom, but riches and power. He built the Temple his father had planned and provided for. The empire David had built was extensive and as a result Solomon had few threats. It was a glorious time for Israel. Solomon wrote much of the book of Proverbs (sayings of wisdom) and all of Ecclesiastes (a study in the vanity of worldly pursuits) and Song of Songs (a love poem that pictures Christ and the church).

During his reign he married the princesses of many foreign powers. That was his downfall. He allowed them to build places to worship their gods and even worshipped with them. He chose to disobey several of the instructions God gave through Moses. If Israel chose a king, he was to not take many wives, and he was to always carry a copy of the Law to read regularly. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 Obviously he was not the one God was referring to in the prophecy from Nathan.

What can we learn from Saul's humble beginning and sad end?

What was the key element in David's life?

What does the Scripture of this period have to do with the Messiah?

Remember that Samuel was concerned about the nation wanting a king. Were his fears well founded? Why?