

## **Biblical Theology: 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings**

**Biblical Theology** studies the Bible as a whole to help interpret and understand individual portions of it. In order to gain an accurate understanding of the Bible text *it is important to see any scripture passage in its overall context*. This clearly means the verse, several verses or chapter within the context of the whole scriptural book but it also means seeing that book within the ‘canon’ of scripture. If we do not do this we open ourselves to **two dangers**.

The first and most obvious is that *we might spiritualise the text inappropriately* (e.g. David fought Goliath and with the help of God he won. We all have Goliaths in our lives. What we have to do is identify them and then with the help of God defeat them.) The second and less obvious pitfall is that *we might develop a canon within a canon*. Put simply, this is the temptation not only not to preach or teach from the ‘more difficult’ or ‘less user-friendly’ parts of the Bible but also not even to make reference to them in our own preaching, teaching and preparation. Personally, I think we are right to spend much more time preaching/teaching on the cross from the gospels than dealing with the difficult or obscure passages from Leviticus – but if we, who are responsible for rightly handling the Word of Truth, have no idea of the contents of the more difficult and obscure parts of the Bible we will not be presenting Biblical Theology but rather the theology of our own selective knowledge and reading of the scriptures.

We come then to 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. In case we are already lost in the fog let’s remind ourselves where we are in **the much bigger picture of the Old Testament canon**. Having been blessed with an extremely healthy appetite, I find it helpful to think of the Old Testament as a substantial double-decker sandwich. There are three slices of bread and two lots of filling. The two lots of filling both begin with E – these are the Exodus and Exile. Now we have to describe the three slices of bread. The top slice is *Creation and Patriarchs*. The first lot of filling is the *Exodus*, the middle slice is the *Conquest, Judges and Kingdom*, the second lot of filling is the *Exile*. The third slice of bread is the *Return*.

We are on the middle slice. We have looked at the Conquest and the Judges and started to look at the era of **the Kingdom**. The era of the Kingdom can be divided into four parts, the *United Kingdom* (with its three kings, Saul, David and Solomon), the *Divided Kingdom* (with 10 tribes taking the name Israel in the north and two tribes in the south around Jerusalem taking the name Judah). The *northern kingdom of Israel* is basically *an unrighteous kingdom*, while the *southern kingdom of Judah* is an *inconsistent kingdom*.

### **The reign of David: 2 Samuel**

Like many Old Testament books, 1 Samuel ends with a death – the death of Saul. Saul was Israel’s first ‘earthly’ king but, because of his disobedience, his reign is not honoured by God and his family are not established on the throne. Instead, Saul is succeeded by David and 2 Samuel deals with his reign.

<i>David’s reign established at Jerusalem</i>	<i>2 Samuel 1-9</i>
<i>David’s weaknesses and failures</i>	<i>2 Samuel 10-20</i>
<i>Final reflections on David’s reign</i>	<i>2 Samuel 21-24</i>

## **David's reign established at Jerusalem 2 Samuel 1-9**

### ***A king by acclamation and anointing***

After the death of Saul, the tribe of Judah was the first to make David their king (2 Sam. 2:4). There was a war between the house of Saul and the house of David but after the assassination of the son of Saul, all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and anointed him as their king (2 Sam. 5:3).

### ***The city of David***

At this time David was ruling from Hebron, a city of Judah. His first action after becoming king over all Israel was to take the city of Jerusalem, a city which had not yet been taken over by Israelites (2 Sam. 5:6-9). Jerusalem did not, therefore, belong to any one tribe and became the royal city of all Israel, 'the city of David' (2 Sam. 5:9). David took up residence in the fortress of Zion and had a cedar palace built (2 Sam. 5:10).

### ***David's faith***

The sequence of events that led David to the throne in Jerusalem involved much human planning, scheming and action, but behind all that there was the purpose of God, which had been revealed to David long before (1 Sam. 16). David knew that ultimately it was the LORD who had established him as king, showing David to be a man of faith (2 Samuel 5:12).

### ***God's action***

God had not only placed David securely on the throne but also 'he had exalted his kingdom'. As a consequence David 'became more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him' (2 Sam. 5:10).

### ***God's purpose***

The purpose of God's dealings with David was 'for the sake of his people Israel'. In other words, God's action in bringing David to the throne was essentially part of his purpose to bless the seed of Abraham. David's reign had a very different start from that of Saul. This is further emphasised by his bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). The Ark of the Covenant was a substantial, gold-covered ceremonial box made of acacia wood. At various times it held the two tablets of the 10 commandments, a pot of manna, Aaron's rod, the written law, golden rats and models of the tumours that afflicted the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant was the focal point of the tabernacle (Ex. 25-27) and symbolised God's presence with his people. When David brought the Ark of the Covenant into the city it was a joyful recognition that his reign was the gift of God and that his reign was not absolute. His people were, first and foremost, God's people. The true king in Jerusalem was God and the city of David was the city of God.

### ***The promises to David (2 Samuel 7)***

David wanted to build a house for the Ark of the Covenant to match his palace. The prophet Nathan brought a word from God that deferred the building of a temple and, more importantly, promised David that the throne of his kingdom would be established for ever (2 Sam. 7:4-16). In

other words, God promised that he would fulfil his promise to Abraham by establishing the Davidic dynasty. Under his rule the people would dwell in a place where there would be peace and rest. David's son would later build the temple and God would deal with him as a father deals with his son. God will do it and it is for ever. From this point onward, God's purpose is shown to include an anointed king in the line of David. This is the origin of the idea of a Messiah (Hebrew 'anointed one'; Greek 'Christ'). The king at Jerusalem was to be blessed by the promises of God (Psalm 2) but none of the kings of ancient Israel ever lived up to these high expectations. The contrast of David the successful king and David the tragic man demonstrates that no man is fit to represent God in the way that Israel had hoped a king would.

***The sinfulness of David (2 Samuel 11-12)***

The sordid story of David and Bathsheba reveals David's unworthiness of God's gracious promises. Nathan the prophet confronts David in his sin. The horror of David's sin is even greater against the background of God's grace (2 Sam. 12:7-10). Although David's sin is forgiven (2 Sam. 12:13; Psalm 51), the further events show him to have fallen from the great heights promised. The trust, humility and genuine repentance shown by David are honoured by God's blessing but human sinfulness still robbed the people of God of the full experience of the promised blessing. The book of 2 Samuel ends with the death of David and the book of 1 Kings begins with his son, Solomon, coming to the throne.

**Four centuries of Israel's history: 1 & 2 Kings**

<i>The prosperous and peaceful reign of Solomon</i>	<i>1 Kings 1-11</i>
<i>Division and decline after the death of Solomon</i>	<i>1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 16</i>
<i>The northern kingdom (Israel: the unrighteous kingdom)</i>	
<i>Destruction of Samaria (northern kingdom) by Assyrians</i>	<i>2 Kings 17</i>
<i>The southern kingdom (Judah: the inconsistent kingdom)</i>	
<i>Destruction of Jerusalem (southern kingdom) by Babylonians</i>	<i>2 Kings 18-25</i>

**The prosperous and peaceful reign of Solomon** **1 Kings 1-11**

***Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 3)***

Solomon's reign began with great promise. He was fully aware of God's grace towards him and his people (1 Kings 3:6-8; cf. Genesis 15:5) Solomon is aware that he is enjoying the fulfilment of God's ancient promise to Abraham. Solomon's response to God's invitation to 'ask for whatever you want me to give you' (v. 5) is exemplary. He has responded rightly to the grace of God. His reign will be great and glorious, if only he will continue to walk in the ways of the Lord.

***Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6-8)***

In Solomon the promises of God were finding fulfilment (see 2 Samuel 7:13). During his reign Solomon embarked on a great building programme, including the building of a great temple, which lasted for nearly 400 years until its destruction by the Babylonians. The building of the temple brought to a climax the great work of redemption that began centuries earlier in Egypt (1 Kings 6:1). The building of the temple was the occasion for a word from God (1 Kings 6:11-13).

Here the promise of God was reaffirmed. Obedience is not a condition for receiving God's promised blessing but the required response to the grace received. When the Ark of Covenant was brought into the temple (1 Kings 8:1-9), this was accompanied by an appearance of the 'glory of the Lord'. God demonstrated his presence as he had done at Mount Sinai and in the desert (cf. 1 Kings 8:10-11 and Exodus 40:34-38). Solomon's prayer, which follows, provides an explanation of *the significance of the temple* (1 Kings 8:14-53), in which the temple is seen to be *the fulfilment of God's promises* (vv. 15-21, 23-24), *a symbol of God's promised presence* (v. 27) and *the place where God's presence is made known* (vv. 28-30). The presence of God can only be known by the people of Israel if *God will forgive their sins* (vv. 31-40, 44-53). From the temple *knowledge of God is to spread* to 'all the peoples of the earth' (vv. 41-43). Here is a reminder of the worldwide scope of God's purposes, which we can trace back to Genesis 12:3.

### ***Solomon's glory (1 Kings 10)***

The magnificence of Solomon's kingdom is seen when the Queen of Sheba came to see it for herself (1 Kings 10:6-9, 14-25, esp. 22-25).

### ***Solomon's folly (1 Kings 11)***

Solomon's great wisdom, however, proved to be matched in the end by great folly. At first Solomon ruled righteously with wisdom but then he forgot the fear of the Lord, married foreign princesses, and went after foreign gods. Solomon drifts spiritually and civil war results.

## **Division and decline after the death of Solomon**

## **1 Kings 12 – 2 Kings 16**

### ***The division of the kingdom (1 Kings 12:1-24)***

When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, came to the throne his mishandling of the northern tribes left him (v. 8) as king only over the tribe of Judah (v. 20). The rest of Israel made Jeroboam king over them. Nevertheless, the hand of God was in the situation (v. 24). The rest of 1 & 2 Kings tells the stories of the two kingdoms, Israel (in the north) and Judah (in the south).

## **The northern kingdom (Israel: the unrighteous kingdom)**

### ***The sin of Jeroboam***

The history of the northern kingdom is dominated by a theme introduced in 1 Kings 12:25-33. In the civil war that split the kingdom, Jeroboam was commander of Israel. He was an unrighteous king, and every other of the nineteen kings who succeeded him in the next 250 years was also unrighteous. Israel became rich and powerful and politically more important than the southern kingdom of Judah. The capital of Israel was Samaria (from Omri onwards). Aware that his people were likely to keep up their practice of visiting the temple at Jerusalem, Jeroboam provided them with alternatives. He set up idols (two golden calves) in Bethel and Dan, and said to the people,

'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods,  
O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt' (v.28).

In this way Jeroboam caused the people to sin (v. 30). It was a breach of the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6), and it was also a failure to recognise God's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 13:33-34). Each successive king in Israel persisted in Jeroboam's sin, and led the people down a path that had to end in disaster (1 Kings 15:26, 34; 16:26, 31).

### ***The prophets to Israel***

Prophets are not necessarily people who predict the future. Rather they are called by God to proclaim (forth-tell) his word, which determines the history of the people. The prophets proclaim that God is sovereign in history and it is necessary to be right with him. Individuals and nations are therefore called to live in obedience to God's standards. The message is of judgment and hope. God will save his people but judge those who disobey him. The Messiah's Kingdom will come.

### ***Elijah and Elisha***

A rather full account is given of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1-2 Kings 2:12) and Elisha (1 Kings 19:16-2 Kings 13:21). These prophets, like Moses before them, were instruments through whom the word of God came, and it is that word of God which provides the final explanation of the course of historical events. The basic role of the prophets is indicated in 2 Kings 17:13. By them the Lord warns his people and calls the nation back to himself, back to the path of obedience to his commandments, which is the only way of blessing. Elijah is portrayed as the 'troubler of Israel'. When King Ahab married Jezebel, a Phœnician princess, and built a temple for her god, Baal, in Samaria, Elijah, who saw that Ahab's idolatry was leading the nation away from God, denounced this. The confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel was critical if the faith of Israel was to survive (1 Kings 18).

### ***Amos and Hosea***

The prophet Amos (a southerner from Tekoa, near Jerusalem) lived at a time when although the nation was affluent beneath the surface it was morally rotten. Amos denounced the exploitation of the poor, bribery and corruption, the extravagant luxury of the rich and syncretism (the mixing of different religions). The privileges of Israel carried with them responsibilities. Amos says that when the day of the Lord comes it will be a day of judgment not vindication for Israel (Amos 2:6-16). Self-sufficiency and pride are the causes of Israel's downfall. Israel's only hope is to seek the Lord and live (Amos 5:4) but the time will come when God will spare them no longer (Amos 8:2).

Hosea's message is learned through the unfaithfulness of his own wife whom he loves. God loves Israel with steadfast-love despite Israel's unfaithfulness in idolatry. Hosea spoke movingly of the love of God which had been spurned by the people of Israel (Hosea 11:1-4). Because his love was spurned judgment was sure to follow (Hosea 11:5-7). And yet that will not be the end of God's dealing with his people (Hosea 11:8-12).

### ***Destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians***

### ***2 Kings 17***

The Assyrian empire dominated the middle east in the eighth century B.C. and in 722 B.C. the Assyrian army invaded Israel, took the capital Samaria, and carried off Israelite captives in large numbers (2 Kings 17:5-6). This catastrophe is explained in 2 Kings 17:7-23. Judgment came

because of the people's breach of the first and second commandments and refusal to listen to the prophets only added to their guilt. When Israel is defeated its peoples are scattered to the four winds and the kingdom is never restored. Of the original nation of Israel only Judah was now left (2 Kings 17:18)

### **The southern kingdom (Judah: the inconsistent kingdom)**

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was commander of Judah and unrighteous. However, in time the Kingdom of Judah has twenty kings of whom eight are righteous, so Judah fares rather better than Israel. Having the Temple at Jerusalem, the capital, helped the religious life of Judah. God's promises to David were not to be forgotten: God had affirmed that even as he announced judgment to Solomon (1 Kings 11:12-13, see also 1 Kings 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). The extent of the breach between the north and south is evidenced by the alliance between Syria and Judah against Israel. The long reign of Uzziah brought some stability to the kingdom and kings such as Hezekiah and Josiah are great reforming kings. On the other hand, Manasseh is the supreme example of the unrighteous kings.

#### ***Hezekiah (2 Kings 18-20)***

From his weak and unprincipled father Ahaz, Hezekiah inherited not only a disorganised realm but also a grievous burden of Assyrian dominance and tribute. Hezekiah generally listened to the prophet Isaiah. His great reforms, cleansing the temple and purifying worship are documented in 2 Chronicles (2 Chronicles 29-31)

#### ***Manasseh (2 Kings 21:1-18)***

Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, Manasseh, who reigned for longer than any other king of Judah. Manasseh's sinfulness surpassed that of all his predecessors. He persecuted the prophets and reintroduced idolatrous worship. An image of Asherah stood in the temple and in the valley of Hinnom there was a statute of Molech, to whom parents offered up their children as burnt sacrifices. Manasseh was worse than the pagan Amorites (2 Kings 21:11). Judah will therefore fall as Israel had fallen (vv. 12-15).

#### ***Josiah (2 Kings 22:1-23:30)***

Manasseh's grandson, Josiah, was the most godly of all Judah's kings (2 Kings 23:25). He executed reform in Judah, purging it of idolatry, and cleansed and repaired the temple. The most important event in his reign was the discovery of the 'Book of the Law' (possibly Deuteronomy, cf. Deuteronomy 17:18-20) in the temple (2 Kings 22:8). This book might have been hidden in Manasseh's reign. The demands of the Law find an immediate response in Josiah (2 Kings 22:11-13) and Josiah led a thorough reform (2 Kings 23:1-25). Nevertheless, Josiah's righteousness could not remove the guilt of Manasseh (2 Kings 23:26-27) and Judah would still be judged.

### ***The prophets to Judah***

#### ***Isaiah***

From the city of Jerusalem, Isaiah proclaims that God is real, sovereign, holy and forgiving. Taken as a whole, the book denounces the corruption of Judah and warns the nations of God's

judgment. Yet this is in the context of God's unfailing love and care. The servant of God will bring about the redemption of his people.

### ***Micah***

In the countryside, Isaiah's contemporary Micah, though from the south, not only denounces the sins of Judah (Jerusalem) but also those of the north (Samaria). Dishonesty and violence will be punished. God requires right conduct rather than right ritual (Micah 6:8). During the Assyrian siege, Micah speaks of the deliverer, a King from Bethlehem, the Messiah.

### ***Other prophets to Judah***

Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Jeremiah.

### ***Destruction of Jerusalem (southern kingdom) by Babylonians 2 Kings 18-25***

After 400 years Judah's sins catch up with her and divine judgment is brought upon the inconsistent kingdom through the nation of Babylon. Babylon had already conquered Assyria. In sixth century B.C. the dominant power was Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar. Between 597-587 B.C. the countryside of Judah and eventually the city of Jerusalem was devastated by the Babylonian army. Great numbers of people, leaders, artisans, musicians, and promising children were taken off to exile in Babylonia.

### ***Summary***

The story of Israel has in a sense been the story of Adam and Eve. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden and promised them his blessing but they chose to rebel against him and were removed from the garden. God placed Israel in the Promised Land and again promised his blessing. Yet, the Israelites rejected the Lord in so many different ways and, ultimately, were driven from the land as Adam and Eve had been expelled from the garden. What will become of God's purpose, not only to bless Israel, but also, all the nations of the earth?

### ***Acknowledgments***

These notes make extensive use of the book published by Moore Theological College, Australia: *Old Testament Introduction*.

My own overview of the Old Testament is available at:

<http://www.ridgewaymethodist.org.uk/BirdsEye.pdf>

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