



SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY

Discipleship Plan

Year Six
Israel's United Kingdom
(Part 3)

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Israel's United Kingdom

Lesson Nine: Siblings, Shame and Dissension	Page 3
Lesson Ten: The Comeback King	Page 4
Article: God Made a Promise by Michael S. Horton	Page 5
Lesson Eleven: A King's Crown, Shepherd's Soul and Poet's Passion	Page 9
Lesson Twelve: Strife and Success: Solomon's Succession	Page 10
Lesson Thirteen: Wisdom in Action: Solomon and the Temple	Page 11
Lesson Fourteen: Sheba and the Splendor of the Sovereign	Page 12
Lesson Fifteen: Whatever Happened to Jedidiah?	Page 13
Article: Thine is the Kingdom and Glory Forever by Michael S. Horton	Page 14

Lesson 9: Siblings, Shame and Dissension

Primary Verses: “And Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long robe that she wore. And she laid her hand on her head and went away, crying aloud as she went. And her brother Absalom said to her, ‘Has Amnon your brother been with you? No hold your peace, my sister. He is your brother; do not take this to heart. So, Tamar lived, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom’s house. When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad, for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had violated his sister Tamar. 2 Samuel 13:19-23 (ESV)

Teaching Text: 2 Samuel 13-15

Supporting Text: 2 Samuel 11-12

Known for possessing the faith to conquer giants and the heart of a worshipper, David is also known for his devious plot to use his crown for seduction and even the sword of the enemy to cover up his adulterous scheme. Through patient trust in God, David overcame Saul’s vendetta and won the heart of Israel. But then he was overcome by lust and the dehumanizing drive to hide the destruction unbridled passions bring with them—even murder. The story of David’s double sin is well known, but the detailed aftermath of his transgressions is rarely examined beyond the death of his first child with Bathsheba. Through New Testament eyes, we understand a broader meaning behind the prohibition to adultery. Jesus clarified this sin doesn’t happen only when a married person enters intimacy with one outside of the marital covenant, but is widely applied to include any lingering on lustful thoughts. By this standard, David had committed adultery even before Bathsheba was in his immediate presence. As bad as David’s sin was, however, it did not include the perversion of Amnon’s lewd lechery toward his sister! Amnon was like his father in that he schemed to take a woman who was lawfully off-limits to him. But David, at his *lowest*, did not rape Bathsheba. Nor did he cast her aside so carelessly as Amnon would do to Tamar.

David committed murder against Uriah, a faithful soldier who honored the armies of Israel to the extent he would not take pleasure in marital comforts at home while fellow soldiers, on the field, endured the rigors of war. Without a doubt, David killed Uriah in a manner so treacherous it would be hard to duplicate. Absalom, however, could out-do his father’s murder by way of fratricide – the killing one’s own sibling. Though Amnon was no “Abel,” Absalom proved to bear similarity to Cain in that he killed his brother and was exiled, even if he would return later.

Questions to Consider: How did David’s polygamy create his downfall? How did Nathan’s prophecy in 2 Samuel 12:12 unfold? Is there a parallel between David and Eli the priest from 1 Samuel? Is Absalom justified in avenging his sister? How is the wise woman of Tekoa and Nathan similar/different? What mistakes were made in David’s relationship with Absalom after his return which led to the rebellion?

Challenging the Class: God, by His grace, has shielded many from the full results of their sin, but He is not obliged to do so forever. We cannot predict how sin’s fruit will poison us after we have sown the seed of it. Today’s sin is both intensified and multiplied tomorrow. Make war against it today!

Lesson 10: The Comeback King

Primary Verses: “Just then the Cushite came, and the Cushite said, ‘There is good news, my lord the king! For the LORD has avenged you this day of all those who rose against you.’ And the king said to the Cushite, ‘Is the young man Absalom safe?’ So, the Cushite answered, ‘May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise against you to do harm be like that young man!’ Then the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said thus, ‘O my son Absalom—my son, my son Absalom—if only I had died in your place! O Absalom my son, my son!’”
2 Samuel 18:31-33 (NKJV)

Teaching Text: 2 Samuel 18-19

Supporting Text: 2 Samuel 15-17

Hushai: Amazingly, the battle beyond the battlefield was a conflict concerning a counselor and a counter-intelligence officer. Though he was a known “friend” (advisor) to King David, Hushai could successfully infiltrate Absalom’s ranks. In a manner, reminiscent of the way a pair of spies and Rahab dealt with officials in Jericho during the days of Joshua, Hushai engaged the rogue monarch. 2 Samuel 17:14, however, explains that God’s sovereignty is the actual reason why Hushai’s exploits were successful and his advice heeded.

Humility: If nothing else, Absalom’s rebellious coup d’état showed that David’s ability to deal with his enemies graciously had remained intact. One would imagine David, as a king, would deal with betrayal differently than he did when King Saul basically betrayed him and sought to kill him. And yet, almost everything David did was a reverting back to a humble start. Rather than put Jerusalem at the center of a war, he left Jerusalem. Instead of using the Ark of the Covenant for his own purposes, he sent it back to be the object of worship so no one would confuse his throne for God’s heavenly throne. He endured the curses of Shimei, received help from common citizens, listened to the counsel of his military leaders, and lived as a fugitive—all while still hoping for Absalom’s safety.

Hanging (Hair?): We are told in the battle between David’s troops and Absalom’s forces, “the woods devoured more people that day than the sword devoured” (2 Samuel 18:8). Strangely enough, Absalom might have escaped if he had not been devoured by a group of branches so tangled that they were strong enough to “capture” him while his mule moved on without him. What a picture! If he was caught by his hair, it may be inferred his pride got the best of him. Whatever the case, it is hard to ignore this event as a literal example of a man under the curse of God (see Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

Questions to Consider: How do we reconcile apparent untruths from Hushai considering David’s prayer in 2 Samuel 15:31? How does David’s desire for news of this battle compare/contrast with waiting for news of the battle in 2 Samuel 11? What is the importance of David’s forgiveness towards Shimei and Amasa?

Challenging the Class: David’s extension of grace to Shimei and Amasa approximates God’s grace to us despite our part in Christ’s death. How do you show grace to enemies when you are in position to punish?

God Made a Promise

Thursday, 31 Dec 2015

Michael S. Horton

Promises are powerful. God made a promise, a worldwide, game-changing promise, and every story in the Bible finds its way back to this promise of hope. Yet, when we consider the Old Testament, it can be confusing to dip into one part of it, especially without knowing much about the other parts. The thread that ties it all together is a single promise, repeated in various ways and with slightly different emphases, from Genesis to Revelation. These sidebar articles trace the history of this promise in the Old Testament.

In sharp contrast to their pagan neighbors, Israel's relationship with God was covenantal. To be related to God covenantally means that he is the Lord and his people are his servants; and when God sought to establish this sort of relationship with Israel, he chose a political arrangement that was familiar throughout the region and beyond: treaties.

When a lesser kingdom or city was invaded by enemies, a greater king might come to the rescue. In view of the rescuer's mercy, the lesser kingdom would acknowledge the rescuer as their lord. In many cases, the lord would create a treaty (covenant) and seal it in a public ceremony by making the lesser king pass through the pieces of severed animals. In doing this, the servant was assuming the same fate as the animals if he should fail to keep the terms of the covenant. The treaty or covenant itself typically followed a set pattern. It began by identifying the lord who was imposing the covenant and giving the reasons why he should be obeyed as lord. This was followed by various commands, after which came sanctions that listed blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. Finally, a copy of the treaty was deposited in the shrine of both parties. Henceforth, the lesser kingdom could live in security, but only as long as it was a loyal member of the empire.

God set up a covenant at creation, and when he did, he issued only one stipulation to Adam: Not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. There were also sanctions: Life for obedience and death for disobedience. Adam and Eve violated the terms of the covenant. But even after the Lord arraigned them for their transgression, he promised that the seed of the woman one day would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). That began the war of the "seed of the woman" and the serpent, who is assisted by his retinue of fallen angels and earthly emissaries.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Much later, God called Abraham out of a moon-worshipping family and made a covenant with him (Gen. 15). In this covenant, God promised to give Abraham an inheritance: an innumerable multitude of physical descendants in their own land and nation and an innumerable multitude of spiritual descendants for a spiritual kingdom taken from all the nations of the earth. Abraham believed the promise and was justified through faith. Then, with Abraham asleep, God himself passed between the animal pieces. He alone swore the oath and assumed the sanctions. God did indeed provide a son, Isaac, to the nearly century-old couple. But then he tested the patriarch's loyalty by commanding him to sacrifice Isaac. Just as Abraham was about to plunge the knife into his son, God stopped him. In Isaac's place, God provided a ram for the sacrifice.

In a similar episode, in Genesis 28, God reaffirmed his oath to Isaac's son Jacob. While asleep, Jacob had a vision of a stairway to heaven with angels ascending and descending on it. Actually, it was a stairway from heaven to earth. God then reaffirmed his pledge to Abraham. Genesis 37-47 tells the story of Joseph, the eleventh of Jacob's twelve sons. Jealous of Joseph, his brothers sold him into

slavery, and Joseph ended up in Egypt under Potiphar, captain of Pharaoh's guard. Through a series of intriguing twists and turns, Joseph was brought before Pharaoh to interpret his dreams of coming disaster. Pharaoh accepted Joseph's interpretation and advice and made Joseph prime minister of Egypt.

Through a dramatic series of events, Joseph was reunited with his family, and they all came to Egypt, where Jacob's descendants multiplied rapidly and grew wealthy. Joseph assured his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20).

After Joseph's death, Israel's fortunes turned. "Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8). For the next four centuries, the Hebrews were slaves.

The Sinai Covenant

Moses led the people to Mount Sinai, where God delivered the law to Moses as the mediator of this covenant. Besides the Ten Commandments, God delivered detailed commands governing every aspect of Israel's life in the land that he was giving them.

The Holy Spirit led the people on their route toward the Promised Land, but they longed for Egypt where at least they'd had water and food rations. They forgot the Lord's mighty acts of liberation from Egypt. Ultimately, their quarrel with Moses was an attack on God's leadership and plan, and his goodness and power. Yet God remained faithful.

True to his word, the Lord did not let this faithless generation enter Canaan to possess the Promised Land. Moses died having viewed it only from the mountain. Joshua, Moses' lieutenant, led the people into the land that God had promised in Genesis 15 to Abraham's descendants.

After the conquered land had been divided among the twelve tribes, Joshua reminded the people of the covenant that God had made with Abraham: "Not one word has failed of all the good things that the Lord your God promised concerning you. All have come to pass for you, not one of them has failed" (Josh. 23:14). This was an important announcement. Joshua emphasized the complete fulfillment of the land-promise. Yet, according to the covenant made with Moses at Sinai, God was under no obligation to let them remain in the land. In fact, Joshua added, "The Lord will bring upon you all the evil things, until he has destroyed you from off this good land that the Lord your God has given you, if you transgress the covenant of the Lord your God" (Josh. 23:15-16).

The people quickly renewed their allegiance to the covenant, "but Joshua said to them, 'You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins'" (Josh. 24:19). This was not exactly an inspirational pep talk! There is nothing in the Sinai covenant itself that obligated the Lord. The commands were to be fulfilled by Israel, and the sanctions of blessing or curse depended on the nation's obedience. It was a precarious covenant, based on the loyalty of sinners hence Joshua's warning.

The book of Judges picks up the story. As soon as Joshua died, Israel turned away from the Lord "and served the Baals. They abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. . . . Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they did not listen to their judges, for they whored after other gods and bowed down to them" (Judg. 2:11-16).

Later God raised up Samuel who called Israel to return to God as king. If they would renew their loyalty to the God of Sinai, then God would deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. They did so. In his old age, Samuel made his sons judges over Israel. But they were corrupt, taking bribes and perverting justice (1 Sam. 8:3). Then Israel wanted "a king like all the nations" (v. 5)'a king they could see. Samuel was dismayed with this plea, but God told him to allow it, "For they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (v.7). Isn't it amazing that God mercifully allowed this demand and continued to work graciously among his rebellious people?

The Davidic Covenant

Saul was chosen to be king, but he offered an unlawful sacrifice, and his heart turned from the Lord. Finally, the Lord rejected him, and David was anointed king of Israel (1 Sam. 13-16).

Years later when David wanted to build a temple, God replied, "Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling" (2 Sam. 7:4-6). Instead God said, "The Lord will make you a house" (v. 11).

Eventually, David indulged his sinful heart, and his reign was strewn with episodes of violence. Although David's whole house was a mess, God once again was gracious. Like the promise he had made to Abraham, the oath he had made to David was unbreakable. The spotlight was now on the office of the king, the representative head of the Lord's people. The house of David would have an everlasting throne. David's last words extol the Lord's promise: "He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure" (2 Sam. 23:5).

The reign of David's son Solomon began well, but his heart turned from the Lord, mainly through his many foreign wives. He even welcomed idolatrous shrines and festivals. Yet God continued to keep his promise to David. Under Solomon's foolish and oppressive son Rehoboam, the nation divided. "There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only" (1 Kings 12:20). So there was now Israel in the north and Judah in the south. As the story unfolds, we meet no king again quite like David. In most cases, the record shows no loyalty to the Lord. In others, it is mixed. Only in a few instances do we find kings with a heart for the Lord. Yet it is God's promise that keeps the story moving forward, with a Davidic heir on the throne. Even with the best of kings, there was always a "nevertheless." The recurring question is this: When will there be a righteous king to reunite Israel and Judah and reign as God's own emissary?

Covenant Curses and Future Blessings

Eventually, Israel and Judah were sent into exile. The part of the Bible called "the Prophets" spans the period from just before the exile to just after the exiled people were released to return to Israel and rebuild the temple.

These prophets were God's covenant attorneys, bringing his lawsuit against Israel and Judah on the basis of the Sinai covenant. Yet on the basis of the Abrahamic covenant, there was the promise of a future beyond their wildest dreams.

We saw in the trial of Adam and Eve that the sentence was followed by a surprising and glorious announcement of the gospel: a Redeemer who would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). Later, too, after God arraigned his people and issued his sentence, he promised "a new covenant" that would be

"not like the covenant that I made with their fathers" at Mount Sinai, "my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord'" (Jer. 31:31-32). The new covenant would not be like the Sinai covenant. Like the promise that God made to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and Sarah, and to David, this pledge transcended the infidelity of the people. Its fulfillment depended not on the people, but on God.

Israel's promise-breaking brought history to a standstill. Yet God's promise-keeping pushed history forward, toward its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. In its darkest days of exile, Israel heard God vow, "You shall be my people, and I will be your God" (Jer. 30:22).

The prophets continually returned to this promise of one who would rule on David's throne forever in righteousness, blessing, and peace (Isa. 9:7-10). He would be the prophet greater than Moses the greater Joshua who would cleanse the whole earth and give his people rest on every side. He would be the good shepherd who gathers his holy nation from a remnant of Israel and the nations (Jer. 3:15-17; John 10:11). He would be the Son of Man a clearly divine as well as human figure in the book of Daniel. Israel would be expanded beyond their wildest dreams, and the Lord would remove the deathshroud that lay over the world (Isa. 25:8). There was to be feasting with God forever.

Something lay ahead that was far greater than the Exodus from Egypt and the glorious days of the conquest of the Promised Land. It was far greater than a renewal of the Sinai covenant with its geopolitical theocracy. It would be a far greater covenant, with greater promises and a greater mediator. So while Adam and Israel all of us have failed to keep our promise, God's promise remains.

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Lesson 11: A King's Crown, Shepherd's Soul, and Poet's Passion

Primary Verses: "And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters; He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me." 2 Samuel 22:16-20 (KJV)

Teaching Text: 2 Samuel 22-23:7

Supporting Text: 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Psalm 18

"He was a notable type of our Savior. God gave him the exalted character of his servant... he was the chosen one of God who sprang from Bethlehem, a man after his own heart who fulfilled all his counsels. How notable his faithfulness, meekness, and humility, and his love for God, his zeal for His honor, and his devout intimacy with Him...with what resignation, courage, and a steady eye to his Father's glory, and a sure hope of a good end, he endured the whole!"

Brown's Dictionary of Bible Characters, p. 228

We have examined several of the highlights from King David's life which seem to be the chief concern of 1 and 2 Samuel. Of course, the life of Israel's greatest political monarch cannot be fully told nor appreciated outside the context of Samuel's life, ministry and the years of King Saul's reign. The history of Israel, however, cannot be understood without a clear picture of God's call and destiny for David. For the purposes of our Sunday School curriculum, we are at the end of our look at the historical episodes of his life. However, we will return to examine the literary and musical work of David, as the chief psalmist and great worship leader of Israel, when we arrive at the books of poetry.

In conclusion, King David's shoes were so big ultimately only Jesus of Nazareth could fill them. As a servant of God, it is difficult to say anyone after David worked for God more zealously. As a warrior, there would never again be a king, until Christ, who fought enemies more valiantly. As a man of prayer, he is only surpassed by our Savior. In worship, Jesus offers perfect purity and single-minded devotion to God. While in every respect, we can see how Jesus resembles his royal ancestor, it was also right of Him to ask His contemporaries, "David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?" (see Luke 20:41-44)

Questions to Consider: How does David's song of praise compare or relate to Hannah's song from 1 Samuel 2? Are there any themes that are repeated between the two songs? Is it helpful to consider these poetic expressions as virtual book ends for the two books as a unit? It has been noted that 2 Samuel 22 is very close in content with Psalm 18. List the ways they are similar. How are they different?

Challenging the Class: While the scriptures warn us against "vain repetition" in prayer, we can observe the simple fact that God is not wearied by our sincere praises even when we praise Him for the same things (His providence, provision, protection, etc.). Since He isn't wearied, we shouldn't be either!

Lesson 12: Strife and Success: Solomon's Succession

Primary Verses: "He [King David] said to them: "Take your lord's servant with you and set Solomon my son on my own mule and take him down to Gihon. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah." Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, "Amen! May the LORD, the God of my lord the king so declare it. As the LORD was with my lord the king, so may He be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!" 1 King 1:33-37 (NIV)

Teaching Text: 1 King 1-2

Supporting Text: 1 Chronicles 22

We find King David old and weak with what appears to be circulatory issues which keep him in a state where he is rarely warm. Despite being preoccupied by health challenges, David, we would find later, when engaged, is still a very skilled leader, a shrewd politician, and even somewhat conniving; a character trait Solomon seems to possess also.

Adonijah—The NIV says he "put himself forward." The KJV and ESV state he "exalted himself." Other translations include "kept boasting of himself" and "promoted himself." Any way we slice it, it is evident Adonijah's understanding he would succeed his father's throne was bubbled up and birthed in his own brain. We discover even when extended mercy by Solomon, he would later reveal his unfounded hopes to be his undoing.

Adversaries—After reading the opening verses of 1 King 2, one might call King David "passive-aggressive." Whatever attempts to psychoanalyze him, two things are clear: 1) David is dedicated to Solomon's succession to king; and 2) his age has not dimmed his memory. He may have judged himself too old/weak to deal with men like Shimei and the formidable Joab. At best, he knew that these men would present a problem to an inexperienced king so he put Solomon on guard against them. At worst, David harbored a grudge against these men and entrusted his son to do his dirty work.

Aftermath—Adonijah, though originally permitted to live, is put to death for making a request Solomon interpreted as a scheme to win the throne underhandedly. Abiathar the priest was a descendant of Eli who found himself removed from office fulfilling 1 Samuel 2:29-36. Joab and Shimei, two men David warned Solomon about, were disposed of by legally exact measures.

Questions to Consider: What do we know of David and his sons which *may* explain why he didn't show a more forceful hand in the beginning? Consider the characters who David commissions to crown Solomon king—what value does each one bring to the coronation? Why did David see Joab as a potential threat to Solomon? Was Solomon's initial command to Shimei a set up? Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: There is no government except what God has established (John 19:11a, Romans 13:1-2). We trust His invisible hand even when we don't like the human face of government we can see.

Lesson 13: Wisdom in Action: Solomon and the Temple

Primary Verses: “Now it was the heart of my father David to build a house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. But the LORD said to my father David, ‘Because it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless, you shall not build the house but your son who will be born to you, he shall build the house for My name. Now the LORD has fulfilled His word which He spoke; for I have risen in the place of my father David and sit on the throne of Israel, as the LORD promised, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, the God of Israel. There I have set the ark in which is the covenant of the LORD, which He made with the sons of Israel.” 2 Chronicles 6:7-11 (NASB)

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 5-7

Supporting Text: 1 King 3

This is That... Much like his father David, one of the high points of his governance over Israel is closely tied to the worship of the covenant God of Israel, YHWH (Yahweh). There is a struggle for modern Bible readers to truly grasp the complexities involved in both the union of biblical worship and faith on one hand and both earthly rule and military might which are all invested in a theocratic government. But King Solomon had a crystal-clear concept of how all this came together. In essence, he said to the assembly of Israel gathered at the dedication of the temple, “This which you see is that which was spoken” (this is that!).” Just as Peter would explain to thousands their experience was the fulfillment of prophecy and not something he himself was cooking up, so too, Solomon explained both his kingship and the marvel of the temple in this way: God’s hands have fulfilled the sayings of God’s mouth (see 1 Chronicles 6:4-11).

This Ain’t Me... Solomon is at the zenith of power as a politician. But, in his prayer, he proves himself a mere peasant—his words exemplify the mentality of one who is truly “poor in spirit.” He acknowledges he is a spiritual beggar before God and entirely dependent upon Him as is the nation he rules. The Temple, often called “Solomon’s Temple,” would have represented the grandest building project of all time in Israel’s history, up to that point (and arguably afterward). But Solomon doesn’t use the opportunity to aggrandize himself. Instead, he humbly appeals to God regarding issues outside his authority to accomplish.

This is God... The only thing more awesome than a heart in sincere prayer and worship towards God is God Himself. The details behind the building of the temple are well documented in chapters 2 and 3 of 1 Chronicles. The spectacle of sacrifice in chapter 7 can hardly be over-dramatized: the music, the feasting, the fire, the offering, etc. all defy description. God’s grace, however, is seen in He not only commands such things as a response from His people to Him, but He also responds to His people.

Questions to Consider: Consider the structure of Solomon’s prayer. How much, if any, is based on conditional clauses? How many “if-then” statements or implications can you find in the prayer? Do these “if-then” statements or implications shed light on God’s response at the end of chapter 7?

Challenging the Class: Biblical wisdom isn’t static but active in *doing* what is timely and pleasing to God. Solomon’s wisdom is seen accomplishing God’s purpose for Him in His day. May the same be said of us!

Lesson 14: Sheba and the Splendor of the Sovereign

Primary Verses: “The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true. But I did not believe what they said until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half of the greatness of your wisdom was told me; you have far exceeded the report I heard... Praise be to the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and placed you on the throne as king to rule for the LORD your God.” 2 Chronicles 9:5-8a (NIV)

Teaching Text: 2 Chronicles 8-9

Supporting Text: 1 King 10, Luke 11:29-32

What They Say... Lore and legend linger around the mysterious Queen of Sheba. Not satisfied with the spices she carried to Solomon in scripture, many seek to “spice up” the account of her visit to Jerusalem with salacious and scandalous details completely unwarranted by the reading of the text. Some suggest Solomon’s weakness for foreign women is sufficient to infer sexual intimacy, which is sinful apart from a marriage. So, we should ask why the scriptures are silent in this case when it has not been in others? Also, this same method of reading scripture would not only implicate Solomon in sexual immorality, but destroy Ruth’s late night encounter with Boaz, and the legendary loyal love between David and Jonathan. Holding to the Word as written, however, will preserve us from such errors.

What She Said... The words of this Queen match her royal standing. She was a woman of wisdom in her own right, for she sought to discover a thing before believing it. Her desire to see the wisdom of God at work is good and her visit was worthwhile. Some have said she was more like “Doubting Thomas,” who refused to believe until she could see. But there is equal warrant to compare her to Peter after the Caesarean Confession (Matthew 16:13-17). In both cases, humans are given understanding from God to discern His hand at work in the chosen servant before them. The Queen saw Solomon’s wisdom was not his, but God’s. Additionally, she understood God’s wisdom at work in Israel’s king was not merely his to enjoy, but for the sake of God’s covenant love to His people.

What Jesus Said... While teaching ever-increasing crowds of Jews, Jesus commended this gentile Queen of the South. Moreover, He explained her commitment to discovering the truth of God would condemn the generation of those who gathered to hear Him but refused to see the truth of God in Him. Jesus compared her with the inhabitants of Nineveh who escaped divine wrath by trusting in God’s messenger. Whatever else one may believe about the Queen of Sheba, it should be clear, she placed her trust in the God of Israel.

Questions to Consider: Was Israel at its height under David or under Solomon? In what ways is David’s reign better than Solomon’s and how does Solomon’s reign eclipse his father’s? Should we desire the world come to examine the wisdom of God, in the church, like gentiles came to inquire of Solomon’s wisdom? Why or why not?

Challenging the Class: Evangelism is primarily a “go and tell” action, and not a “come and see” posture.

Lesson 15: Whatever Happened to Jedidiah?

Primary Verses: “Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.” 1 King 11:6-10 (NKJV)

Teaching Text: 1 Kings 11

Supporting Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-25

In so many ways, Solomon’s story is a tragic one. For all the wisdom God granted him, the advantages David labored to secure for him, and all the success achieved in his life, his chapter closes in disgrace with, apparently, frequent bouts with disillusionment. How sad for one who began his life with a special message from God’s prophet - for it is written, “And the LORD loved him and sent a message by Nathan the prophet. So, he called his name Jedidiah [meaning, “beloved of the LORD”], because of the LORD.” 2 Samuel 12:25. So, whatever happened to Jedidiah?

As is often the case, the bitter fruits eaten at the end of one’s life were present only as a seed near the beginning. After having heeded the counsel from his father on dealing with potential threats to secure his kingdom, we are told Solomon loved God and lived as his father David did “only” that, he made offerings at high places. Nelson’s Student Bible Dictionary defines high places as “elevated or hilltop sites dedicated to worship of pagan gods.” 1 King 3:4 explains the lavish level of sacrifice Solomon offered at Gibeon. Ironically, this is the same place God first appeared to Solomon.

Some have theorized Solomon’s worship at high places may have been for political purposes. To “cover the bases,” the theory proposes since many Israelites were involved in some form of syncretism (the mixture and blending of religion and worship), Solomon sought to ensure the less devout they had a king like themselves; or at least in show. But biblically, we know, whatever other motivations for false worship he had, Solomon was mainly led astray by his love for Canaanite women. Therefore, for their sakes, he worshipped detestable false gods among the heathen.

Questions to Consider: How would you characterize Solomon’s downfall? Was it immediate or gradual? What evidence from scripture support your conclusion? Should Solomon be remembered for his folly more than for his wisdom? Why did Solomon seek to kill Jeroboam? What does this murderous desire say about the extent of Solomon’s folly?

Challenging the Class: Whoever casually gives themselves to so-called “small” sins will find the vortex of greater and multiplied sins nearly impossible to escape. Therefore, in the wise words of John Owen, every Christian must “be killing sin or sin will kill you,” for sapling is uprooted easier than the mature tree.

Thine Is the Kingdom and Glory Forever

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- Michael S. Horton

We must recognize that the source of every good gift is God; the ground of every good gift is the righteousness of Christ; and the goal of every good gift is the glory of God and advancement of his kingdom in this world.

"Prayer is not some battering ram by which we gain entrance to God's treasury," wrote H. Hobbs, in his Matthew commentary. "It is a receptacle by which we receive that which He already longs to give us." So far, our Lord, in such simple profundity, has given us a systematic theology of prayer. We have access to the one true God, creator of heaven and earth, because, through the saving sacrifice and mediation of Christ, we have been made sons of God and co-heirs of Christ. Paul put it this way: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in him," heading the list with election, adoption, redemption, faith, and sealing, with the Holy Spirit given as "a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:3-14).

Therefore, we can call God "Father." "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15). Nevertheless, he is our Father in heaven and this spans the gulf between God and us, the Creator and the creature. Beyond the matter of our sinfulness, our mere creatureliness puts a distance between God and us, just as even the greatest masterpiece of Rembrandt is still not Rembrandt. As we raise our eyes toward heaven, where the anchor of our hope still holds, where Christ the Advocate intercedes for us and where we ourselves are seated with him, all earthly hopes, relationships, and inheritances obtain their proper, sane appraisal and perspective.

Like the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer begins with petitions concerning things heavenly and directly concerned with our relationship to God. Petitions that his name would be held in honor and sacred esteem; that his kingdom would grow, like the mustard seed, until it became a tree providing shade to the nations, and that his will would be realized in earthly, concrete terms. Then the prayer turns to petitions for oneself: For daily providence in material needs, for forgiveness of sins, and for deliverance from temptation and evil.

Thus, in this one prayer, our Lord has given us a theology of prayer, anchored in adoption, the holiness of God and his name, eschatology (the unfolding purposes of God and his kingdom), providence, redemption, and sanctification. While there is a category in the prayer for petitions concerning earthly needs ("Give us this day our daily bread"), notice how rich and broad a thing prayer really is, as it concerns first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and then descends from heaven to earth, from God to us, from spiritual blessings in heavenly places to earthly concerns. What an easy thing it is to even fail to raise our eyes toward heaven to be earth-bound even in our prayers! This is why we must be taught how to pray. Like a wild vine needing a trellis, our hearts and minds must be guided from viewing things according to our own imaginations and orientations. Prayer is not merely useful as a means of getting things from God, but is a means of worship and training as our hearts and minds learn to become concerned with those matters which most concern our Heavenly Father.

The doxology, "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen," appears in later manuscripts and may well not have been a part of the original prayer. Regardless, it summarizes the prayer and we have no reason to judge it contrary to Scripture even if there is a chance that it is not, in fact, such.

Although God with-held from King David the privilege of building the temple, David was able to get the ball rolling for his son, Solomon, to whom this privileged task was given. After the officers and leaders of the families volunteered their labor and consecrated themselves to the task, David offered the following doxology (1 Chron. 29:10-13), which closely parallels the Lord's Prayer:

*Praise be to you, O LORD,
God of our father Israel,
from everlasting to everlasting.
Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and
the power and the glory and the majesty
and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*

*Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom;
you are exalted as head over all.*

*Wealth and honor come from you;
you are the ruler of all things.*

*In your hands are strength and
power to exalt and give strength to all.*

*Now, our God, we give you thanks,
and praise your glorious name.*

Even by petitioning God for "our daily bread," we are acknowledging that "everything in heaven and earth" is the Lord's. By confessing our sins to God we are acknowledging that which is wrong is judged so for no other reason than that it is declared to be so by God. By petitioning him for forgiveness, we acknowledge that he alone is the judge and the justifier of the ungodly, and by asking him to keep us from evil, we are acknowledging that he alone is our Sanctifier and Defense against the creature who has made it his sole objective to undermine the glory of God and the faith of the elect. In short, prayer should always be a "declaration of dependence," as much in things earthly as in things heavenly. When we come to the doxology (from *doxa*, "to glorify or praise"), we are, so to speak, wrapping up our box of petitions in suitable paper, recognizing that the source of every good gift is God; the ground of every good gift is the righteousness of Christ; the instrument or means of obtaining every good gift is faith in the Gospel, and the goal of every good gift is the glory of God and advancement of his kingdom in this world. The doxology alone should measure our prayers, to determine whether they are fit for a heavenly audience.

Thine is the Kingdom

David learned the hard way that the kingdom of God is just that God's kingdom. When it came time to give Solomon the charge to build the temple, David confessed, "My son, I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the LORD my God. But this word of the LORD came to me: 'You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace and

rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side...He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever" (1 Chron. 22:6-10).

Israel was, like Eden, the union of church and state, a "theocracy" through which God himself directly spoke, judged, and acted out the unfolding purposes of redemptive history on the stage of Israel. The kingdom of God was Israel, not merely as a spiritual people (i.e., believers in the promise), but as a nation. Nevertheless, in the new covenant, the kingdom is not associated with Israel or any other earthly nation, but takes on an entirely spiritual character, where the Jews and Gentiles are brought together through the peace of Christ's sacrifice. "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you. So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith" (Gal. 3:7-9). "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring" (Rom. 9:8). The designation of Israel as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6) is now applied to the New Testament church, composed of all Abraham's children, Jew and Gentile (1 Pet. 2:9). In fact, Paul tells the Galatian church, composed of Jews and Gentiles both, that they are "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16).

Therefore, the kingdom of God is specifically defined as the reign of Christ as prophet, priest and king and it is advanced through the preaching of the Word, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and by the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. It is not a kingdom that derives its source from human authority, nor does it depend on any worldly factor for its success. It is the kingdom of God that creates the people of God, not vice versa. The kingdom comes upon us as a fog, or as the wind (John 3:8), and sweeps us into it. Or to use the analogy Jesus uses in this passage in John 3:3, it is to be born a second time, to die to one identity ("in Adam") only to be raised to a new one ("in Christ"). Thus, as the Spirit blows, with his Word going before him through his Spirit-filled messengers (all believers), a new community is created; heaven comes to earth and the kingdom of God spreads its shade across the nations.

While the kingdom of God is not identified with any nation in the new covenant, God's sovereign rule through providence is implied here. For instance, not only did David learn that God owned Israel; the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar learned that God owned Persia, too! While he was boasting about the kingdom he had built as a testimony to his glory and splendor, God made Nebuchadnezzar insane. The king shared meals with the animals, was drenched with dew each morning, his nails grew like claws and his hair like feathers. This picture Daniel gives is very close to the biography of Howard Hughes and it is not at all far-fetched to see how self-intoxication can so upset one's balance and perspective that insanity is inevitable. As Paul said of those who exchange the glory of God for the "glory" of created things, "Seeking to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:22).

Nevertheless, Nebuchadnezzar learned that his kingdom really belonged to someone else:

At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'

...Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify them King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble (Dan. 4:34-37).

One wonders if the church today needs to learn this lesson again: That the kingdom is created by, sustained by, and exists for God and his glory. To the extent that we shift the focus of the kingdom from God to man, to that extent it will simply become a social institution. To the extent that we believe that the source of the kingdom is power (i.e., economic or political crusades), or marketing (i.e., principles of business success), it is to that extent that our message and methods will be concerned not with "our Father in heaven," but with "our Audience on earth." And for those who think that the nature of the kingdom is temporal and earthly, their activity will be more concerned with imposing their own will on society in pursuit of the "Christian Nation" idea of the kingdom. The new apostles will be the founding fathers, regardless of the fact that many of them were open critics of orthodox Christianity. The new gospel will be salvation of the chosen nation by moral clean-up and social legislation.

Or, for those who agree with the temporal nature of the kingdom but think more in the vein of the church growth movement, the Spirit-empowered preaching of the transcendent Word will be replaced with "down-to-earth," practical pep talks and the administration of the sacraments will be replaced with any number of new practices and designed to entertain and inspire. Evangelism will be edged out by self-oriented programs designed to make us a bit more comfortable with this world and to reinforce this, the congregation at worship will become the audience at play. The music will be happy and as "down-to-earth" as shampoo jingles, and they will focus on me and my personal experience rather than on God and his work in Christ.

Whose kingdom are we building? Have we become so "down-to-earth" that we have snapped our chord connecting us to the heavenly realities? And is the goal of this kingdom we are building God's glory? Whatever goals we might consider worthwhile (providing a sense of community and fellowship, assisting families in building good, solid homes, improving the moral and spiritual climate of the country, meeting "felt needs," or even building big churches) are, as a distraction, in competition with God himself. And, like David and Nebuchadnezzar, anyone can be humbled. Yes, even Americans. We are in desperate need of recovering our eternal perspective raising our eyes toward heaven, so that our sanity may be restored and God's kingdom, power, and glory might once again occupy the attention of the church and the culture.

God's kingdom, power, and glory are advanced chiefly through the Gospel, in which the brilliant rays of his wisdom, mercy, justice, holiness, and power are captured all at once. Through this Gospel, the holy God is able to establish a just relationship with unholy creatures. It establishes his kingdom on righteousness, as he is the just and the justifier of all who believe; it shows his power, "...for it [the Gospel] is the power of God unto salvation..." (Rom. 1:16), and it exalts his glory because salvation "does not depend on man's decision or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Nowhere is the sinner justified in taking any glory to himself. "He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:27-30). There is not one shred of holiness, no sparkle of righteousness, no ray of glory in the believer or in the church that comes from us; it is all the kingdom, power, and glory of God in his Word and sacraments.

All of this might run counter to a church which is so worldly that believers become "lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud..., lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:1-5). We even have high priests of the new gospel, who, like the medieval champions of the kingdom, power, and glory of man resist any notion that robs man of his pretended glory. Robert Schuller, for instance, declares that "The Reformation erred in its insistence that theology be God-

centered rather than man-centered" and said that its notion of sin is "insulting to the human being" (*Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, p. 65). The glory has left the church because the Gospel has left the church or has been dismissed. It is not because God has been "ejected" from the public schools, but because his name, his kingdom, his power, and his glory, have been replaced with our own agendas, priorities, goals, and self-glorifying interests.

My greatest prayer for the church today, indeed, for myself is that we would raise our eyes to heaven, to look to the hills, from which our salvation comes, and to spend ourselves in good works (in our calling, in our relationships, in our families) to the glory of God. Only then when we are heavenly minded, will we be any earthly good. Only then will the kingdom advance in the power and glory of God. Remember, it was Bach who signed his compositions, *Soli Deo Gloria* (the Reformation slogan, "To God Alone Be Glory"), and it was this slogan that even still graces the old buildings in the great cities of northern Europe. One might say that at the Reformation, the kingdom, power and glory of Rome met the kingdom, power, and glory of God and we can only expect a similar confrontation within the church in our own time. May God give us the grace to make the correct alliance.

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